

Cultural Heritage as a Resource for Regional Sustainable Development: the Example of the Valtellina Cultural District in Italy

D. Foppoli

Foppoli Moretta e Associati, Tirano, Italy

ABSTRACT: The Cultural Districts project was developed over the 2005-2010 period by the Cariplo Foundation to support the enhancement of cultural heritage as a flywheel for economic growth and social promotion of territories through the promotion of the integrated development process of cultural heritage. Following the guidelines issued by Cariplo Foundation, a number of specific communities in Lombardy worked to build a Cultural District in their territory. The project of Valtellina Cultural District was deemed worthy of being funded and so the District was established in 2010. The aims of the project involve cultural landscape, heritage, awareness of local community, strategical development forecast and creation of tangible or intangible networks. To pursue these goals, the district has developed specific work packages aimed at restoring heritage buildings, Preventive Planned Conservation, skills/capacity enhancement, community involvement and valorisation. The case history is discussed through the analysis of the partnership and of the methods with which the partners have agreed upon the idea that cultural heritage is a resource for sustainable development of their territory. For this purpose examples of relevant activities are presented, such as “The Route of Terraces”, that is one of the District's most suitable work packages for creating networks and stimulating the link between local population and cultural landscape. The awareness of the extent of the resources of the territory generated by the Cultural District led to the evolution of the project in an EU cross-border cooperation process that takes advantage of the historical connections (both cultural and administrative) between Valtellina and Canton Graubünden in Switzerland. This also allowed for the extension of the partnership through the involvement of new partners coming from the nearby Swiss territory. The analysis is aimed at underlining strengths and opportunities provided to the territory and weaknesses and threats inherent to the development process, but also to point out the outcomes of the project.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Cultural Districts Project*

Fondazione Cariplo (Cariplo Foundation) is an Italian private grant making foundation with a banking origin. It was established in 1991 and it is one of the world's main philanthropic organizations. It aims at operating on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity, foreseeing needs and acting to help social and civil organizations to better serve their community. For this purpose, it implements its own projects, bringing partners together and catalyzing resources. The Cultural Districts project was developed to promote economic growth in Lombardy valorising the local cultural heritage. The term ‘Cultural District’ denotes an area rich in cultural and environmental assets, industrial and service businesses that operate in a synergical manner (Barbetta et al., 2013).

The project is set out in four steps.

1st step (2005-2006): a general pre-feasibility study was conducted to enable Cariplo Foundation to identify areas with similar features that could potentially become Cultural Districts. It was carried out by Milan Politecnico university on the entire territory of Lombardy (with its neighbouring areas) and was aimed at setting up the basic operational criteria. This led to the identification of 34 homogeneous areas in which the districts might find suitable conditions to be developed.

2nd step (2007-2008): a call for proposals was launched and, as a result, 11 potential cultural districts were identified. Their institutional framework and economic sustainability were analyzed in-depth to determine their viability as cultural districts.

3rd step (2008-2010): local teams in the 11 selected areas worked on the development of operative feasibility studies to create a cultural district with the support of the foundation that provided them with guidelines and the supervision of a panel of experts. Cariplo Foundation reviewed the outcomes of these

studies and selected 6 areas suitable for the development of a Cultural District. It funded each of these areas with up to € 3.8 million and matching funds were provided by other local sources.

4th step (2009-2010) start-up of the activities of the Cultural Districts in Lombardy which were established in the following areas: Camonica Valley, Mantua Po River Area, Gonzaga Palaces Area, Monza & Brianza Province, Cremona Province and Valtellina.

In the following article, the case history of the Valtellina Cultural District will be presented and discussed.

2 VALTELLINA CULTURAL DISTRICT

2.1 *Previous experiences in Valtellina*

The awareness of the feasibility of a Cultural District in Valtellina was based on the experience of managing complex processes concerning cultural heritage that was gained by the territory over the last twenty years.

The first organic approach to conservation activities of cultural heritage in this area dates back to a catastrophic event: the 1987 flood. Following this event, the reconstruction was funded under a special law (L. 102/90 then called “Legge Valtellina”) which also provided resources for the restoration works of more than 70 heritage buildings. A total amount of € 35 million, financed with 25% own resources, was necessary to carry out these works. Although the results were positive, the outcomes of the operations were not subjected to a good approach with methods of Preventive Planned Conservation (also PPC): consequently, in spite of the relevant investments, the accomplished work has not provided effective economical and social growth for the territory.

Over the years following 2002, in some cases even with the support of Cariplo Foundation, many long-term projects have been developed with an improved approach to PPC methodologies.

The first reference is to the call “Promoting of Cultural Heritage through the Integrated Management of Assets”, that funded the project “Antica Pieve di Mazzo” (2006-2009) for a total amount of € 1,991,000; this was funded for 41% by own resources (Foppoli D. et al. 2008). Then the call “Innovative Technologies for Preventive Conservation of heritage Buildings” that funded the project “Palazzi Besta” (2009-2010) for a total amount of € 345,000, funded for 44% by own resources (Armanasco & Foppoli, 2014).

It is of interest to underline the fact that the co-financing by own resources has increased over the years from 25% for the project funded in 1997 to 41-44% for the project funded in 2006-2010 to 56-57%

for the last projects that were funded in 2011-2015, that will be presented in the next chapters.

This is the result of the current economic crisis affecting the Italian public administration, but it is also a signal of the increasing involvement of the territories in the projects.

2.2 *Cultural District Project*

The activity of Distretto Culturale della Valtellina (also DCV - Valtellina Cultural District) started in 2009 when the local team was promoted by the provincial administration and the operative feasibility study was developed. The local team was the result of a good integration of experts of several disciplines including economic, statistic, historical, architectural, landscape, legal and administrative aspects. A number of specific questions were placed at the beginning of the study, starting from the most suitable extension of the district: initially it was proposed a further division of the territory at the boundary of the four Mountain Councils (Morbegno, Sondrio, Tirano and Alta Valtellina) which already exist as administrative units. Further studies underlined that only by considering the whole Adda Valley was it possible to best exploit the enormous potential for tourism in the Alta Valtellina. On the other hand, the cohesion carried to the territory from the terraces that characterise the landscape of the valley proved to be a catalyst for the creation of the partnership of the Cultural District.

The overall surface of the district is 2.760 km², the population is 155.000 (it is necessary to underline that this is a mountain area with a non-homogeneous distribution of the population over the territory): it includes 4 mountain councils and 65 municipalities. The operative feasibility study was developed paying attention both to content and to economic resources, with a particular regard to activate specific tangible interventions with the characteristics of economic feasibility, representativeness and capacity to create tangible and intangible networks over the territory.

The “Valtellina Cultural District” Project (2011-2015) has a total funding of € 8,290,000 and was funded partly by Cariplo Foundation and for 57% by own resources coming from the territory.

2.3 *Partnership*

The partnership of the DCV was promoted by Sondrio provincial administration, municipalities (Morbegno, Sondrio, Tirano, Valdidentro), mountain councils (Morbegno, Sondrio, Tirano, Alta Valtellina) and others boards, associations and foundations involved in the development of local economy, tourism and culture. The project also involves funders such as Sondrio Chamber of Commerce, local banks, an electric power production company and some local administrations of the nearby Swiss territories. The project leadership was assigned to Fondazione

di Sviluppo Locale (also FSL - Local Development Foundation), which is partnered by all the partners and funders of the project.

The Valtellina Cultural District was finally established in 2010. In agreement with the purposes of Cariplo Foundation, it aims to support the opportunity to enhance cultural heritage as a flywheel for economic growth and social promotion of Valtellina and to promote integrated development process of cultural heritage, of an economic nature too.

The project develops specific work packages (also WP) aimed at restoration works, Preventive Planned Conservation, maintenance activities, skills/capacity enhancement, community involvement and valorisation.

2.4 Strategies for partner involvement

A crucial factor is to evaluate how the partners have agreed about the fact that cultural heritage is a resource for sustainable development.

To this purpose, it was necessary to create networks and develop complex activities that however were transversal to the interests and objectives of each of the partners. In this respect, tangible activities aimed at preserving cultural heritage and landscape have been a powerful tool as they seek analysis and reflections and generate externalities that are able to stimulate multiple and converging interests.

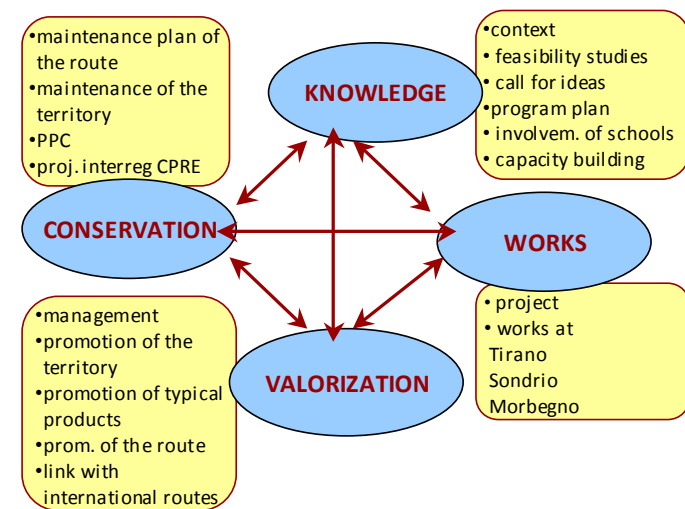


Figure 1. Operating scheme of the activities of the Route of Terraces Work Package.

Figure 1 shows the operating scheme of one of these activities, which highlights the objective of the project and the tools that allowed the involvement of such a great number of partners.

In this case the experience demonstrates that through significant collective efforts it is possible to draw attention to the territory and to sustain its recognition as a cultural landscape. Therefore, the awareness of the historical and economic significance of the landscape supports the acknowledgement of the key role played by conservation and maintenance in actively

protecting the territory from environmental and geological damage.

3 EXAMPLES OF WORK PACKAGE DEVELOPED

3.1 The Route of Terraces

The main WP carried out by the DCV involved the creation of a route aimed at enhancing the terraced landscape on the slopes of the Rhaetian Alps. In Valtellina, the vineyards were obtained by terracing the steep, rocky mountain slopes using dry stone walls (Figure 2): this terraced district is the largest wine-growing mountain terraced area in Italy, extending over 850 ha, representing 37% of the total Italian terraced vineyard surface.

La Via dei Terrazzamenti (The Route of Terraces) which has been designed foresaw the linking up and use of several already existing routes placed along the mountain slopes, thus creating a trail that boasts cultural sites, with constant reference to local production activities. Thereby, over the long term, fostering the recovery and valorisation of major and minor cultural heritage sites, creating an authentic tourist attraction within the overall cultural, tourist, excursion and recreational network offer (Di Capita & Foppoli 2016).

The initiative was entrusted to FSL and supported, funded and implemented by a variety of bodies representing many of the public and private stakeholders operating in Valtellina. In order to create effective synergy, all the subjects identified as stakeholders were involved in designing and planning the route.

The way of developing the activities provides an example of the method and, especially during the programming and planning phase, fostered the maximum degree of involvement of professionals with specific expertise who are present in the territory. The explicit aim was to overcome conflicts of interest and to adopt a collaborative approach, which is the best way to really pursue synergy.

Furthermore, particular attention was paid to educational activities, with multi-purpose objectives (landscape - cultural heritage - Planned Preventive Conservation), targets (professionals - teachers - students) and approaches (courses - workshops - competitions).

Another aspect to be emphasized is the great importance of management: each one of the stakeholders agreed that The Route of Terraces should be “managed” not only by the involved territorial authorities, but also and above all by that part of the local community that profits from the territorial development. These subjects, who were involved through their specific trade associations, fully approved the initiative and showed keen interest and appreciation for

the project. They readily disseminated information on the project among members of the associations, fully recognizing that a joint strategy could be not only extremely effective, but also advantageous for all the parties involved. The action that was implemented was aimed at leveraging the sense of belonging and identification with the culture and landscape of the area. The goal is to promote the quality, the management and maintenance of the Route through effective choices in terms of contributions (not only of an economic nature, but also with practical maintenance activities) by the economic operators.

Due to the position of the Valtellina - on the border between Italy and Switzerland - particular attention was paid, within the framework of promotional activities, to create a link with the experiences developed in nearby Switzerland. From the start of the project, "The Route of Terraces" project was submitted to "Via Storia", the association that promotes Swiss historical routes, which decided to include it as an extension of the existing Via Valtellina (a route whereby Valtellina wine was historically exported to the Northern territories of Europe), which pass through the Canton Graubünden (in Switzerland), reaching Voralberg Region (in Austria).



Figure 2. "La Gatta" monastery and farm at Bianzone (SO), example of heritage building placed among the terraces.

Therefore, it was possible to track a route that is closely linked to the culture of production and commerce of the Valtellina wine, linking Italy, Switzerland and Austria, which in the future could connect Bodensee with Como Lake, becoming a relevant tourist and cultural attraction for the involved territories.

3.2 Conservation projects

Conservation projects developed under the DCV concerned both the restoration of some buildings of particular relevance and the large scale assessment of the state of conservation of cultural heritage buildings restored with the funding of L 102/90 as mentioned above.

For most of these buildings, at the time of the restoration, a proper inspection and maintenance plan has not been implemented; the intervention carried out by DCV was aimed at both assessing the effectiveness of the restoration techniques applied during the works and evaluating the effects of non-maintenance over time.

For each of the involved buildings, a detailed inspection report was drawn up and also the assessment of the seismic vulnerability was carried out at the preliminary level (LV1). This activity, indeed, had not been carried out at the time of the interventions because it had not yet been introduced in Italian structural code.

With regard to seismic assessment, it has to be noted that the buildings analyzed presented a generally reassuring status, especially with reference to the low seismicity of the area, but highlighted some criticalities too, especially related to the geometric discontinuities between the nave of the churches and the bell-towers.

The correct approach to conservation issues has also been carefully pursued by DCV in the interventions on cultural heritage buildings, which have been made within the specific WPs. They concerned Sant Antonio Cloister at Morbegno, Masegra Castle at Sondrio and Tirano Railway Station; the last building was selected because it is included within the buffer zone of the UNESCO site "Rhaetian Railway in the Landscape of Albula - Bernina".

The proper approach to the interventions required for these buildings included:

- a preliminary selection based on the possibility of creating tangible or intangible framework on the territory;
- the predisposition of a management plans from the beginning of the feasibility studies;
- the carrying out of accurate preliminary diagnostic analysis to gain the significant cognitive apparatus necessary to have full knowledge of the building;
- the execution of the carefully planned works, monitored by the DCV actuators (municipalities and FSL);
- the definition of conservation plans (Bossi et al. 2016) to support the future maintenance and valorisation processes.

Since the interventions carried out by the DCV concerned very large buildings, in every case they could not involve whole complexes; they were anyway very significant because they helped to draw up a road map (and above all an operating model). In the cases of Castel Masegra and Tirano Railway Station, this has subsequently led to further stages of intervention and valorisation.

3.3 EU Cross-border cooperation project

The aforementioned high-profile analysis and research projects developed within the Valtellina Cultural District in the field of conservation and valori-

sation of cultural assets have enabled positive exchanges with neighbouring Swiss territory. They have led to the elaboration of the project "Preventive Planned Conservation in the Rhaetian Common Space - CPRE Project", which was an immediate outcome and development of DCV project. It became operational through the funding of the EU cross-border Italy-Switzerland inter-regional cooperation program (Foppoli et al. 2014)

The aim of this project was to enhance the close links between Valtellina and the Graubünden Canton (in Switzerland) in order to coordinate the conservation of the architectural and landscape heritage of Valtellina and Valposchiavo, sharing projects, knowledge and methodologies. The total cost of the project (developed over the years 2013-2015) is € 1,570,000, funded for 56% by own resources.

The goals of the project can be summarized in four macro-themes: knowledge, conservation, training, valorisation.

The knowledge involves history, materials, constructive techniques, but also, and above all, the context in which cultural heritage is placed and the correlation between elements of different meaning / function. The conservation has been developed on the basis of a systemic approach and long-term vision, which seeks to interact positively on the UNESCO heritage site, receiving stimulus and providing operational proposals.

Special attention has then been paid to the integration with DCV projects on the theme of capacity building, developed with the involvement both of technicians (architects, engineers, restorers) and operators (craftsmen and workers). These projects have common goals and an integrated and multidisciplinary approach with the aim of providing both sides of the border with shared competences that can be invested in their respective territories.

The training of technicians involved courses for the definition of specific professional profiles, both on the theme of Preventive Planned Conservation and of the analysis of the cultural landscape. The training of the craftsmen was aimed at the activation of modular courses that provide a certificate of professional recognition with validity both in Italian and in Swiss territories. It should be noted in this regard that, in this area, the number of cross-border, annual or seasonal workers operating in the construction sector is high and with these courses they can thus obtain well-qualified certifications that can be useful both in Italy and in Switzerland.

Surely, the development of the inter-regional project in synergy with the DCV has enabled a successful exchange of experiences to create a centre of competence enhancing the two adjacent territories and allowing them to gain a cultural centrality in the Alpine geographical region.

4 RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

4.1 *Helpful and harmful elements highlighted by the experience*

The positive outcomes of the DCV experience are based on the opportunities provided by the territory in which the District was located (Figure 3). In Valtellina, there is a strong and clear integration between cultural heritage and landscape and the territory is coherent: the people recognize their identity, although sometimes in a not entirely defined manner. The territory has proved to be ready to process complex development projects mainly thanks to the experience gained from previous projects.

Local and regional authorities are available to work together, although mostly on tangible assets; furthermore, the project was developed with a strong proactive involvement of supervisory boards: Italian Superintendence of Architectural and Cultural Heritage and also Swiss Denkmalpflege. These are some of the most relevant key elements of the success of the developed projects.

	HELPFUL	HARMFUL
INTERNAL ORIGIN	Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear methodological guidelines provided by Cariplo Foundation • tangible goals are powerful tool for partners aggregation • partnership tried to be as inclusive as possible • project involved widely shared training activities 	Weakness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • territory has struggled to recognize the endogenous quality of this project • tangible assets has sometimes overshadowed intangible assets • difficulty involvement of partners in a long-term planning no resources for the start up
EXTERNAL ORIGIN	Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • experience gained from other previous projects • strong and clear integration between heritage and landscape • people recognizes their identity • authorities and supervisory boards are available to cooperate 	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the actual touristic model is nowadays outdated because based on skiing and holiday homes • lack of effective political representativeness • administrative upheavals of recent years

Figure 3. SWOT diagram of Valtellina Cultural District project.

On the other hand, in Valtellina there is a touristic model based on skiing and on holiday homes that nowadays is obviously outdated. This consideration is shared, but large scale capital is yet to be invested in this direction, rather than in other innovative and sustainable sectors and this constitutes a significant obstacle to the projects developed in culture activities such as heritage valorisation.

This was the reason the territory proved not to be entirely homogeneous: the powerful tourist attraction provided by Alta Valtellina produces social and economic dynamics on which it is difficult to operate. Indeed, it must be acknowledged, that the involvement of the Bormio Mountain Council area in the project was inappropriate. On the other side major but not yet fully consolidated touristic potential,

such as those provided by UNESCO in the territory of the Tirano Mountain Council, could be well integrated into the DCV project. Furthermore, this was the lever, from which the involvement of Swiss territories in the district's projects began.

It was helpful for the development of the project that it was based on very clear methodological guidelines provided by the Cariplo Foundation, suitable to pursuing a wide and adaptable grid of goals that were defined by local teams. Experience has shown that the territory initially struggled to recognize the endogenous quality of this project, especially because of opposition in the local cultural sector. This problem was overcome with wide ranging presentation and sharing of the project and with the right operations to enlarge the partnership trying to be as inclusive as possible. It was also important to increase the reputation of the project through building capacity activities that have been well shared among stakeholders.

Tangible goals proved to be a powerful means of aggregation of local interests around the project, but the importance of investment on tangible assets has sometimes overshadowed the need to operate in a robust manner on intangible assets as well.

A relevant weakness of the project was the local and general political situation. Firstly, there was lack of effective representation from the people institutionally representing the territory: this makes it difficult to recognise the true needs and the available resources to properly implement the project. Also, it was difficult to involve local political representatives in broad and long-term planning. Moreover, substantial difficulty was experienced due to the administrative upheaval that has occurred in Italy over recent years, such as the proposed abolition of the provincial administrations that has caused the gradual disappearance of the territorial authorities of reference that initially sustained the start up of the District Project. Finally, it was possible to foresee and overcome this problem by the settlement of the Local Development Foundation, that is an independent entity appointed as project leader.

Another weakness in project planning, pointed out by comparison with the projects of the other districts, was the lack of capacity to involve young people in creativity and entrepreneurship. This aspect, which had not really been foreseen, was not implemented in the DCV thus proving limiting in terms of vision of future assets.

A relevant difficulty for the project was finally due to the fact that the Cariplo Foundation has invested huge resources, but it has not provided additional resources to ensure the effective start up of the valorisation projects after the initial three years

4.2 Outcomes of Cultural Districts Project

Regarding merely economic terms, the Cultural District projects have been a powerful lever for the eco-

nomic growth of Lombardy: over 5 years, the Cariplo Foundation granted € 19 million to produce a global investment, for the 6 districts, of more than € 58 million with the involvement (in the production and management of culture related projects) of more than 3,000 suppliers. This was a useful and powerful element in this period of general economic depression in Italy.

DCV was a part of this effort and allowed an overall investment on the territory of Valtellina of more than € 8 million that led to the creation of a 70 km touristic route, to the restoration of 3 heritage buildings, to the carrying out of courses and conferences on heritage and landscape with more than 3,000 participants. A relevant number of additional conservation/valorisation and touristic projects were also activated.

The most important result has been the creation of figures able to activate further projects on the territory: over the last years, after the completion of the initial phase, a number of further projects linked to key-words of DCV operational activity were proposed.



Figure 4. Maintenance activities carried on by recently unemployed workers under the project "+++ More Positive Signs".

In 2014, under the Cariplo Foundation call "Welfare in Action", the project "+++ More Positive Signs" was set up. It was a three-year project planned by a network of both public entities and social cooperatives and focused on the "maintenance" of paths, terraces and landscape. The project came from the idea that it is possible to bring together two important weaknesses of mountain territories (both social and hydro-geological weaknesses - Figure 4) to produce a relevant strength (opportunity of work in maintenance).

Another key-word that has been retrieved over recent years is "valorisation": Tirano Mountain Council, in partnership with all the municipalities of the territory, has planned the project "Conservation and Valorisation of the Cultural Landscape of Mid-Valtellina". This is a project of broad scope, presented to the Cariplo Foundation for a grant, that will fully implement the Route of the Terraces

through the proposal of high profile conservation and valorisation projects for the terraced areas. The last project, currently under preparation, is "Cultural Heritage and Cultural Landscape of Valtellina and Valposchiavo in the UNESCO Context", that Tirano municipality is sharing with FSL to continue and develop the CPRE project under the grant of the current EU Cross-border cooperation (2014-2020).

5 CONCLUSIONS

Following the idea promoted by the Cariplo Foundation a Cultural District was settled in Valtellina to sustain cultural development and economic growth of the territory through projects of valorisation and the creation of networks.

Valtellina proved to be a community with a strong identity, a territory with a good integration between cultural landscape and heritage buildings and with significant previous experience of networking activities in this field.

This is why it was possible to develop the Valtellina Cultural District project through the creation of a coherent partnership. This set out the definition of clear, sustainable and shared goals and the development of specific work packages aimed at exploiting tangible and intangible assets.

The project reached its objectives and produced interesting outcomes; there were, however, some difficulties due to administrative upheaval and especially to the long start up time that is required for such a complex project, that proved to be longer than that initially foreseen by the Cariplo Foundation.

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