Layman's Report

Comune di Riomaggiore | Comune di Vernazza | Comune di Monterosso | APT Cinque Terre Golfo dei Poeti La Spezia | Coop 5 Terre

Summary of project scope and objectives

To counter the abandonment of the terraces, the PROSIT project initiated a set of actions to experiment a method of safeguarding and recovering the coastal rural territory. This method was based on mechanisms that are environmentally and economically compatible and adopted a strongly participative approach vis-à-vis the local population and visitors. The project had three phases: preparatory, planning and implementation. To promote awareness among the local population, the Park organised some "Forums" in which all actors involved in the project as well as other interested parties took part. During the planning phase, the mapping of coastal rural areas on the basis of levels of vulnerability, danger and possibility for recovery, set out implementing instruments for the recovery of terraced areas and defined operational aspects for the implementation of the pilot project, was carried out. The implementation phase, which relates to the pilot, demonstration project, was put in place in five areas of the park where vines were replanted and basil, lemons and oil were cultivated organically.

All targets were reached successfully. These were the maintenance of the historical quality of the landscape, safeguarding villages from hydro-geological risk; the involvement of population and interested actors at different levels; and the experimentation of a model of recovery of coastal terraced landscape.

In line with the highly participative approach in all phases of the project, the Cinque Terre National Park implemented the project with the collaboration of institutional partners (Municipalities of Riomaggiore, Vernazza and Monterosso) and the representatives of the main sectors affected by the terraced landscape, agriculture and tourism (Coop Cinque Terre and APT Cinque Terre). The project had an overall cost of 542.940 Euro, of which 271.470 comes from the European Union, and it covered the period from September 2001 to August 2004.

Description of the techniques/methodology implemented and the results achieved

PROSIT aimed to set in motion a series of initiatives to generate awareness of the local population as well as visitors vis-à-vis the aim of the project to last the whole period of the project. In fact, leaflets were prepared, signs were posted, periodical articles on the Park magazine *La Voce del Parco*, internet postings updated periodically as well as frequently updated audiovisual material transmitted on cable TV. Feedback from these actions consisted in numerous telephone calls, emails and written requests for further information: approximately 4,500 people expressed interest in the initiative.

The PROSIT project was characterised by widespread participation of stakeholders. Stakeholders were involved actively in the project mainly through the forum. Eleven meetings were organised during the project on different themes. Themes of the meetings were decided with the Technical Direction of the Forum and varied from viticulture to management of wild boar in the area, from the road network to organic farming and from olive growing to aromatic herbs and the overall aim was to encourage the active participation of citizens. In this a degree of success can be claimed given the steady and active participation levels: on average 20 people were present at these meetings. During these meetings, local actors were able to voice their opinions and request information. Moreover, updates on the project were provided on the internet and cable television as well as on the local park periodical. Schools were also involved through visits during which the project was discussed and also through visits to the pilot sites which were chosen in strategically visible locations. Such a scale of participation is extremely innovative for this kind of project implementation.

Fig 1. Report on the LIFE Forum

The dissemination of results constitutes the third pillar of awareness generation vis-à-vis residents and visitors and it took place in the last year of the project (between September 2003 and August 2004). First, some guided visits to the pilot sites were organised while they were being recovered and then while they were being cultivated. Mainly local students participated and were accompanied by the project guide who also visited the local schools to further discuss and illustrate the project as well as to respond to any queries. Students were very interested in the whole idea of land recovery and the PROSIT project and they even proposed personally managing some plots of land near the schools. The international conference is the second element of the dissemination action and the video of the project undertaken by the tourism promotion body in English and Italian is the third element in the dissemination activity: it has been broadcast in different locations in Italy and abroad. In the former, results were discussed and the proceedings were published and in the latter, a documentary of the project aims and results was produced.

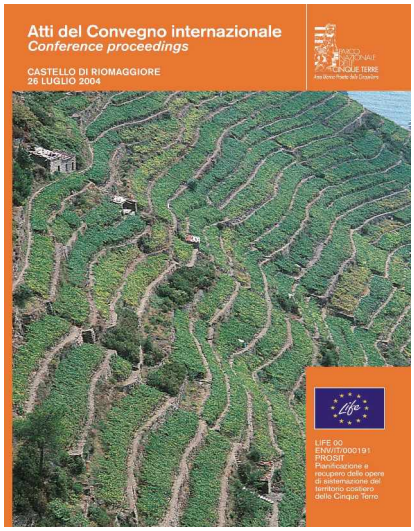

Fig 2: Conference proceedings

An important deliverable of the project is represented by the technical manual on the building rules for dry-stone walls as well as maintenance of terraces. It comes under the dissemination workpackage and was distributed locally to schools and private individuals, on the website and sent to those interested in the initiative. More important than its dissemination aspect is its bringing together of know-how acquired during the pilot phase of the project as well as from different research projects undertaken over the years on behalf of the park. Different steps preceded and were crucial to the production of this deliverable.

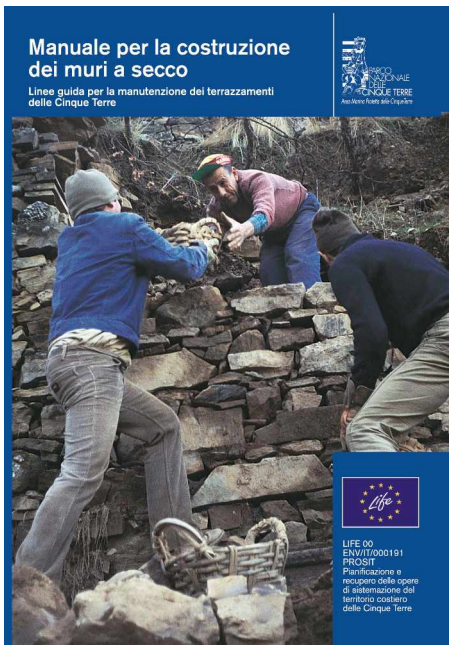

Fig 3: Manual for building dry-stone walls

The first objective reached was the mapping of rural areas undertaken in collaboration with the University of Genoa, which produced an alphanumerical and vectorial archive of mapped areas fundamental to territorial knowledge and facilitates necessary choices for a recovery policy, since technicians can now estimate the level of decline of areas, the degree to which they have been

overtaken by woods and the proximity to village centres as well as the need for immediate intervention in the light of resources at hand. In fact, on the basis of this archive the operational modes of definition of the pilot project were defined, the executive project was drawn up and the pilot project itself carried out.

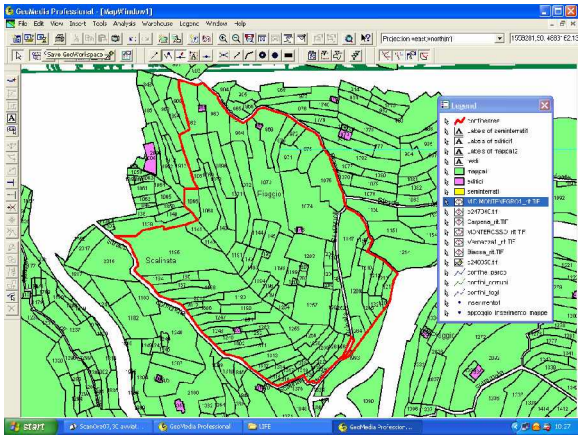

Fig. 4: “Geomedia Professional” Software

An integral part of the pilot phase was the entrusting of plots of land to the park and the subsequent carrying out of the recovery of terraces. Initially a single pilot area was planned to cultivate vines, but given the experimental nature of the project as well as the interest manifested at forums, more crops were added: olive trees, lemon trees and completely new for the area, basil. Moreover, more plots were planned for the same overall total of9,000 square metres in order to guarantee more widespread visibility and a wider coverage in the Park and in terms of activities. The Park was flanked in this phase by the Agricultural Co-operative and by the “Sentieri e Terrazze” co-operative. The latter built dry-stone walls, steps, drainage channels and mule tracks.

The pilot project implemented in the last phase of the project was characterised by three main elements of innovation: crop diversification, mechanisation of cultivation and organic farming. These innovative elements are functional to facilitating the life of a farmer in the Cinque Terre and therefore to making land maintenance an attractive option for younger generations. Maintenance of the landscape is crucial for the very survival of the Cinque Terre as the very stability of the landscape is dependent on terrace maintenance and therefore land cultivation.

In the pilot project, the introduction of new kinds of crops like basil was extremely innovative. The reasons for which this crop was not cultivated in the Cinque Terre before have to do with isolation and transport costs: due to a high degree of isolation, this kind of crop would deteriorate if transported over these long distances. Now, modern techniques preclude this kind of deterioration. Moreover the cultivation of basil fits into the Park strategy to promote high quality local products.

In fact, the famous pesto sauce is produced locally and therefore locally produced basil has a market.

Mechanisation of farming has always been hindered by the peculiar orography of the Cinque Terre. The division of land into terraces means that traditional mechanisation techniques could not be used. Vines have always been cultivated in a pergola system which makes harvesting and general maintenance physically gruelling. It also makes mechanisation virtually impossible as machines could not possibly be driven under the pergolas. In the pilot project a new system of planting vines in a row was experimented which enabled the experimentation of mechanisation between the rows.

Fig. 5-9: Different Types of Cultivation

The quality of products was enhanced by full espousal of the organic method which also facilitates access to nice markets. Obviously the organic method enhances the quality of the environment as chemical products are not employed. The Cinque Terre National Park has placed a clean environment as a precondition for a high quality of life at the centre of its programmatic strategy and LIFE PROSIT constituted a cornerstone of this strategy.


Fig. 10: Organic Farming

The pilot project is the basis for the extension of recovery methods to the rest of the Park. Obviously this is not an easy task and PROSIT enabled studying the possibility of implementing a Park wide project. In fact, different feasibility studies were carried out on administrative, economic and technical aspects of extension. Moreover, training courses for dry-stone wall builders have been planned and carried out, and the possibility of setting up a nursery for autochthonous vines has been studied. Where possible, Park personnel carried out these tasks.

Assessment of the environmental impact of the project, describing the environmental benefits (illustrated with quantified information)

LIFE PROSIT's main aim was the enhancement of the coastal environment of the Cinque Terre National Park. In fact, recovering terraced land is the cornerstone of the environmental conservation which is characterised by an agricultural use of land fundamental to maintaining hydro-geological balance. The environment and landscape are man-made in the Cinque Terre and the largest benefit is setting off a new innovative approach to agriculture thus rendering the life of the Cinque Terre farmer more feasible and sustainable as guardian of the agricultural environment. Publicising the pilot project has been beneficial as it demonstrated agriculture's possibilities and potential.

Cost-benefit discussion on the results (economic and environmental benefits)

LIFE PROSIT, through the pilot project, has had immediate positive environmental benefits on the hydro geological stability of the hill-sides and the quality of the agricultural landscape. Organic cultivation, moreover, along with the re-building of dry-stone walls has contributed to maintaining an ecological and landscape balance developed over centuries that has a high environmental and landscape value (in 1997 the Cinque Terre was declared a UNESCO world heritages site). The economic benefits of the project are chiefly derived from the demonstrating the feasibility of a farming life based on the cultivation of traditional and new crops in the Cinque Terre and thus containing decline rather than having to invest huge sums in re-creating this delicate hydro-geological balance once inevitable disaster strikes. Increased interest in local, organic products generally and increased tourist interest in the area and its products, has created new market opportunities for farmers as producers and caretakers of the landscape and environment which is facilitated by the promotional policies of the National Park.

The development of sustainable tourism and related activities appears to be the most suitable instrument for enabling a recovery of agricultural activities making them economically interesting and "dignified". Breaking the stereotype of agriculture-gruelling work-poverty with the introduction of a new reference model of adequately remunerated innovative-organic farming within an international market is fundamental to any strategy.

Transferability of project results

The results of this project are interesting for farming regions all over Europe but more especially coastal rural regions dependent on land cultivation for hydro-geological stability. In fact, it has immediate transfer within the National Park and the economic, technical and administrative extension of the pilot project has already been assessed. Nonetheless falling levels of cultivation is a common problem and consequent dangers also hold in other not so *sui generis* landscapes. The *Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 27 January 1999 - Directions towards sustainable agriculture* makes explicit reference to the fact that the abandonment of land use for agricultural purposes, mainly for economic reasons, also exerts pressure on the landscape and biodiversity and varied landscapes and the consequent biodiversity fostered by agriculture over centuries may be seriously jeopardised by a cessation of cultivation. Thus the steps taken by the PROSIT project to make farming more attractive and feasible could be replicated in different environments. The first step is recognising the importance of agriculture and farmers as guardians of landscape or biodiversity maintenance. This is in line with the aims of the reformed Common Agriculture Policy and has widespread applicability.

The Environmental Action Programme emphasises the importance of raising awareness of the importance of using land wisely in order to preserve natural habitats and landscapes, and minimise urban pollution. LIFE PROSIT has experimented different ways of involving the local population and other stakeholders in the project process in order to raise levels of awareness and keep information flowing. Moreover, a sustainable environment depends on individual citizens being personally committed, so involving them in decision-making on environmental protection is a priority. Public participation is a central element in the common procedures applying across the EU for assessing the environmental impact of public sector policies and programmes and of investment projects. Again the approach adopted in LIFE PROSIT can be replicated in other similar and dissimilar contexts. This is also the case for other aspects of the project such as mapping rural areas and drawing up a manual for best practice in building dry-stone walls.