ALPTER

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Interreg IIB Alpine Space
ALPTER Project
'Terraced landscapes of the alpine arc'

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News and events:

ForumAlpinum 2007
The Alpine Forum 2007 will be held from April 18, to 21, in Engelberg (Switzerland). The topic chosen for this edition is 'Landscape development in mountain regions': ALPTER project will be presented within a special event organized by the Alpine Space JTS.

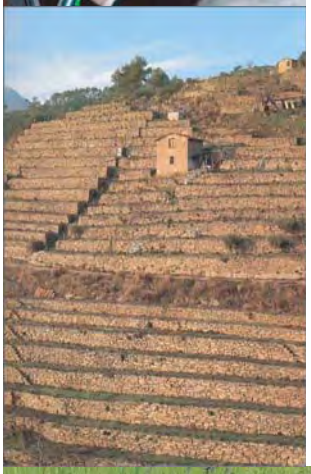
Next ALPTER meeting
Next projet partners meeting will take place on May, 10-11, nearby Nice (France).

Provincial conference on landscape, Verbania
A conference will be held by the end of April at the Verbania Landscape Museum: ALPTER coordinators have been invited to present project activities and results.

VENICE INTERNATIONAL ALPTER CONFERENCE

The second ALPTER International Conference, focusing on 'Terraced landscapes: comparison among cultures and experiences' was held in Venice from the 22nd to the 24th of February. The workshop was overall organized in four sessions: starting from the interpretation of terraced landscapes by adopting the perspectives of various scientific disciplines, after going through the analysis of a number of case-studies (mostly corresponding to the ALPTER pilot areas), tools and good practices in the recovery of terraced sites were finally presented. The congress closed with an excursion to the Venetian case study, the River Brenta Valley. The following pages contain abstracts of each session. Full-texts abstracts and presentations can be downloaded from the website www.alpter.net.

Many people attended the event, which hosted the interventions of several representatives from various organisations and research institutes, highly committed in studying and maintaining terraced landscapes. In accordance with the adopted interdisciplinary approach, interventions by anthropologists, botanists, geologists, landscape architects and historians followed one another, although geography represented the prevailing component, mainly thanks to its intrinsic transdisciplinary character. Beyond the multiplicity of thematic areas, also the heterogeneity in the geographical places of origin is worth mentioning: participants from Greece, Slovenia, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, France, Spain and Great Britain actually took part in the event.
As a matter of fact, we believe that the congress succeeded in pointing out the work so far done by the ALPTER project partners, on the one hand; yet, at the same time it also raised external contributions, not directly linked to project activities. We refer in particular to the strengthening of the co-operation with institutions such as the UNESCO and the Swiss Foundation for Landscape Conservation, as well as to the newly established links with research institutes such as the Universities of the Aegean and Siena, with public authorities such as the Council of Mallorca, with private organizations such as the International Society for the Study of Dry-stone and the Association Pierre Sèche en Vaucluse, with productive entities such as the Arnasco Olive Oil Co-operative, but also with single researchers, such as the geobotanist Cesare Lasen.
We deem it an element of mutual enrichment this fruitful exchange and we hope that this is not just a final, but a starting point.



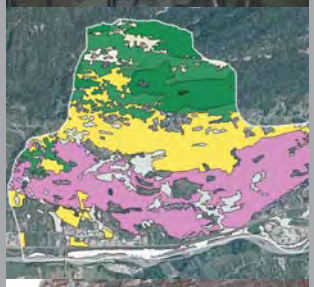
The approach of various disciplines towards terraced landscapes

The congress opened with the description of various disciplines' approaches towards terraced landscapes. Professor Scaramellini, from the University of Milan, formulated the geographical point of view by considering the material and immaterial local expressions of terracing, together with its belonging to a wider cultural, socioeconomic, demographic and technical context as well as the period terraces have been created. Though, just recently geography started to face the topic of terracing in a somehow systematic way.

The geological approach – presented by Guido Paliaga from the University of Genoa – first of all considers the hydrogeological structure of terraced sites and their role in ensuring slope stability. Indeed, terraces are anthropic structures, which deeply altered the natural pre-existent equilibrium and created a new one, whose maintenance needs a continuous flow of material and energetic inputs – nowadays hardly provided. In case of abandonment, wrong recovery interventions or over-urbanization processes, disruptions of different kinds are likely to occur.

The analysis of the biotic component represents one of the most important though neglected issues as regards the study of terraced areas, as pointed out by professor Lasen, geobotanist. Scientific studies focusing on terraces as noteworthy semi-natural habitats of high nature value are still quite scarce. Nevertheless, their maintenance does not represent "just" a contribution to landscape conservation and defence against hydrogeological hazards, but also to biodiversity protection. For this reason it is necessary to move towards a proactive conservation strategy, meant to maintain not only the physical structures, but the functions they were created for.

On this purpose, the interpretation of the origins of terraced landscapes and, more generally, of dry-stone structures as social phenomenon is essential. Ada Hameau, from the International Society for the Study of Dry-Stone, adopted an anthropological approach, by interpreting each building technique as an answer to a precise social need. Every building typology is thus read according to the purpose it was conceived for and the function it is called to satisfy: from drainage element to retaining wall, from border wall to shelter for men and animals.



Overview of case studies: from ALPTER pilot areas to the Aegean islands

Second session was meant to the presentation of several case studies. Along with ALPTER project partners, who described the main problems and recovery proposals characterizing their study areas spread throughout the Alpine arc, Anastasia Dalaka, researcher from the University of the Aegean, presented a detailed monitoring study of terraced sites in the Greek islands of Lesvos and Samos. The methodology she adopted, based on the analysis of aerial photos integrated by field surveys, is similar to the one followed in the Brenta River Valley in Veneto, where in addition to these analytical tools a comparison between the historical and the current cadastre was carried out. In both cases researchers used GIS software for cartographical representation and data elaboration. Similar is also the procedure implemented in the Ulrichsberg study area, in Upper Austria, where researchers from the BOKU University of Vienna made a comparison between the historical and the actual land use. Moreover, they also carried out a survey for evaluating the tourist appeal of the area, varying depending on the different possible landscape scenarios. According to this study, the presence of terraced sites in the landscape results as particularly appreciated by potential visitors.

Tourist development is a crucial aspect in Val Bregaglia (Switzerland) as well. Here the tourist promotion of the territory is necessarily associated with a process of reappropriation of traditional landscape and strengthening of the feeling of territorial identity by local communities. The topic of tourist value of terraced landscape is pivotal also in Liguria, with particular regard to the Cinque Terre National Park, visited by 2 million tourists every year. Here tourist industry represents an important opportunity and a threat to terraced conservation at the same time. Thus, in this area researchers propose to promote a productive recovery of terraced sites, with particular regard to farming activities development.

Agrarian issue is prevailing in other study areas as well, such as in Goriška Brda (Slovenia), where the recovery intervention is specifically aimed at extending vineyard cultivation, and in Valtellina (Lombardy, Italy), where vineyards on terraced slopes are candidate for the UNESCO's World Heritage List designation. On the other hand, agricultural withdrawal usually causes deep changes in terraced structures, as confirmed by the analyses carried out in some pilot areas in the Lower Aosta Valley, where researchers from the University of Turin found out a fast decay in retaining walls and drainage systems after abandonment, leading to a dramatic increase in slopes instability and soil losses.

Tools for supporting recovery interventions and the pivotal role of geography

The third session focused on the studies and tools able to promote revitalization of terraced landscapes, from the importance or raising awareness about their value to the development of strategies and tools for supporting recovery. On these bases the second day opened with two dissertations in memory of Eugenio Turri, a distinguished Italian geographer, presented by professor Vallerani and professor Moriani from the Ca' Foscari University of Venice. First of all they mentioned the approach by which Turri renewed landscape research: he actually considered the landscape not just as a natural element, but as a result of changes mainly determined by human activities. By so doing, he paved the path towards a stronger commitment in maintaining residual landscape features, anticipating the themes of the European Landscape Convention. Also his later works have been mentioned, when the geographer came to look at the pre-modern landscape as a sort of handbook for human beings, who can get important information about how to set sustainable territorial strategies by learning from landscape management.

The theme was then widened by Pietro Laureano, who presented an UNESCO worldwide initiative aimed at maintaining the huge heritage of traditional knowledge on land and water management. Pictures taken from all over the world showed the work done for rediscovering the great value these ancient techniques hold, in terms of sustainability,

Another way of supporting rural cultural landscape conservation is provided by European co-operation funds, as described by Anuška Štoka, representative from the INTERREG IIIB Alpine Space Joint Technical Secretariat. In particular, thanks to the purpose of acting more effectively on the territory, more importance will be given during the forthcoming programming period 2007-2013 to the promotion of regional products and the enhancement of the 'territorial capital' typical of the Alpine region.

Finally, closing a number of interventions whose *leit motiv* was represented by the pivotal role of geography, professor Greppi from the University of Siena presented his research studies focusing on Tuscan hills, able to document the medieval origins of terraced slopes as well as to warn against hazards caused by their abandonment.

Best practices in recovering terraced landscapes

In the last session recovery projects of terraced landscapes undertaken in four different European countries were presented. Raimund Rodewald, from the Swiss Foundation for Landscape Conservation, described some initiatives for studying and recovering Swiss terraced landscapes: among the former ones is PROTERRA Programme, aimed at monitoring the various typologies of terraced sites spread throughout Switzerland; among the latter ones is to be mentioned the restoration of terraced structures and the consequent cultivation of a re-wilded chestnut wood nearby Lostallo, in the Canton Grigioni. This case in particular points out once more the nonsense of taking into account just the technical and operational tools, without considering the socio-cultural related aspects, starring from the involvement of local communities.

Arnasco, nearby Savona, is a Ligurian settlement, whose economy has always been based on olive oil. In 1984 a local Olive Oil Co-operative was established, leading to a significant increase in agrarian activities, thus bringing positive spin-offs for the area, such as the resumption of production on 25 hectares of terraced olive grove, which used to be abandoned. The Co-operative, here represented by professor Lamberti, has been co-operating since many years with the local association '*Amici dell'Olivo*' (Olive's Friends) through several initiatives, such as the foundation and the management of an Olive Museum and a School on dry-stone buildings.

The creation of the first terraced sites in Provence (France) dates back to the 11th century. Nowadays the majority of them are abandoned and heavily damaged: retaining walls are collapsed, the water drainage system along the slopes is destroyed, erosional processes are on the move and spontaneous vegetation is progressively invading farmland. The only possible solution to counteract these phenomena is maintaining and recovering former terraced structures: this is actually the main aim of the initiatives promoted by the Association 'Pierre Sèche en Vaucluse', represented by Danièle Larcena.

Dry-stone buildings represent a very important architectural, cultural and landscape heritage in Mallorca (Spain). Their origin and the importance of their conservation are both related to the necessity of a water drainage system and soil defence The Council of Mallorca, represented by Antoni Reynés Trias, acts in several ways, e.g. by mapping the existing heritage, training local bricklayers, establishing landscape bonds, co-funding restoration projects and promoting public and private building heritage. Moreover, the Council of Mallorca is involved in several European projects on terraced sites.

EXCURSION TO THE ALPTER STUDY AREA IN VENETO

After the academic speeches, the theoretical observations and the critical hypotheses characterizing the first two days, congress participants moved to the fields, in order to face a concrete example of terraced site. What they found, the River Brenta Valley, is a harsh territory: it is the Venetian pilot area, studied by the Region of Veneto jointly with the Universities of Padua and Venice. Until the fifties, this area still looked like a whole terraced garden; yet, it nowadays appears as a place of ruins, vestiges of past civilizations that are hardly taken care of by local people. Most of terraced sites, which used to cover mountain slopes, are now abandoned, almost completely hidden by shrub and tree vegetation. The sightseeing tour went upstream along the Brenta river, to offer an overview of the terraced sites spread all over the valley: most of them are exceptionally large, up to 7 metres high. In particular, the group stopped in S. Gaetano, a small settlement located on an alluvional fan entirely covered by terraces.

ALPTER researchers acted as guides throughout the tour, presenting the main studies carried out during the past two years: among them, the examination of the Austro-Hungarian cadastre, the pedological analyses and a sociological survey among the local and immigrant population. All around, one could see the historical and geographical context of a place, which for thousands of years used to play the role of passage way along the route from Northern to Southern Europe, but since last century started to become a marginal area. Finally, participants visited the Valstagna's Ethnographical Museum, dedicated to the traditional tools and know how about terracing. Here representatives from local authorities welcomed all the participants, thus testifying the great and affectionate interest continuing to link residents with their past, in spite of the difficulties they encounter when trying to maintain the material and spiritual heritage they inherited.

After a short lunch, visitors returned to Venice, from where everybody started his/her way back, keeping in the eyes beauties and difficulties featuring a terraced landscape these days.

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- Regione Valle d'Aosta
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- Regione Bregaglia (CH)

Observer partner:

- U.N.E.S.C.O. - Regional Bureau for Science in Europe (ROSTE)

Other partners:

- Slow Food - Foundation for Biodiversity

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