

Historical assets and related landscape

Towards a new cultural heritage policy for rural areas of Europe

Cultural heritage is a unique part of our common identity. It contributes to the quality of life and the sense of belonging of Europe's citizens. Therefore comprehensive heritage policies are necessary to ensure the preservation of cultural heritage in urban and rural areas. While significant effort has been directed towards urban landscapes and historic city centres, now special attention has to be drawn to rural areas promoting a sustainable development in Europe's regions. **BY ALEXANDRA KULMER**



Figure 1: HISTCAPE Partnership. Source: Landentwicklung Steiermark

Cultural heritage as a driving force for social and economic development

Cultural heritage can work as a catalyst for positive economic development like job creation and sustainable smart growth. The historic character and heritage of

cultural assets and landscapes are important in their own right but also make a fundamental contribution to rural economies by attracting investment, underpinning tourism and creating skilled employment (EUROPA NOSTRA 2010). The contribution of cultu-

ral heritage to social life and economic growth is also increasingly acknowledged by the European Union. Cooperation in the field of culture became a recognised aim of the Union. The legal basis for EU action concerning the preservation and enhancement of cultural heritage has been provided with the Treaty of Maastricht in 1993¹. Thereby, the Union is considering both, the cultural and economic aspects of heritage (EUROPEAN UNION 2006). The European Commission encourages cultural heritage through policies and through financial support. Financial assistance for activities in the field of culture is provided via the Culture Programme 2007–2013 but also via other actions such as for example within the framework of regional policy (EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2010a). A considerable proportion of cohesion funding has been allocated to the protection and preservation of cultural heritage, development of cultural infrastructure, and support for cultural services. The European Commission also promotes the mainstreaming of the cultural dimension in other areas of Union

policy and in integrated regional development strategies (EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2010b).

Most of the European population is now concentrated in large urban areas but over 80 % of Europe's territory is of rural nature, characterised by small towns and villages surrounded by natural and agricultural landscapes. These territories and landscapes have developed over many centuries, and were the focal points of economic and social activity at one time. Today Europe's rural areas have to face several issues. Changes in economic activity and demographic shifts have led to a loss of population, facilities, services and investment. This is creating a downward spiral negatively affecting the preservation of historical assets and related landscapes. The goals of cultural heritage and landscape policies across Europe are to maintain and preserve these assets for future generations. In order to seriously and effectively safeguard the integrity and the authenticity of small towns and villages, public authorities must act at all levels. Responsible and sustainable protective policies have to be put into practice at European, national, regional, and local level (EUROPA NOSTRA 2009). The improvement of regional and local policies can be fostered by the identification of good practice from European regions and the transfer of these models to other regions. The Interregional Cooperation Programme INTERREG IVC supports European regions in working together, exchanging experience and developing innovative solutions for current challenges in the field of cultural heritage and landscape protection.

European co-operation as a key factor for success

The ability to take advantage of the wide range of good practice of European regions becomes more and more important as new strategies for the protection of cultural

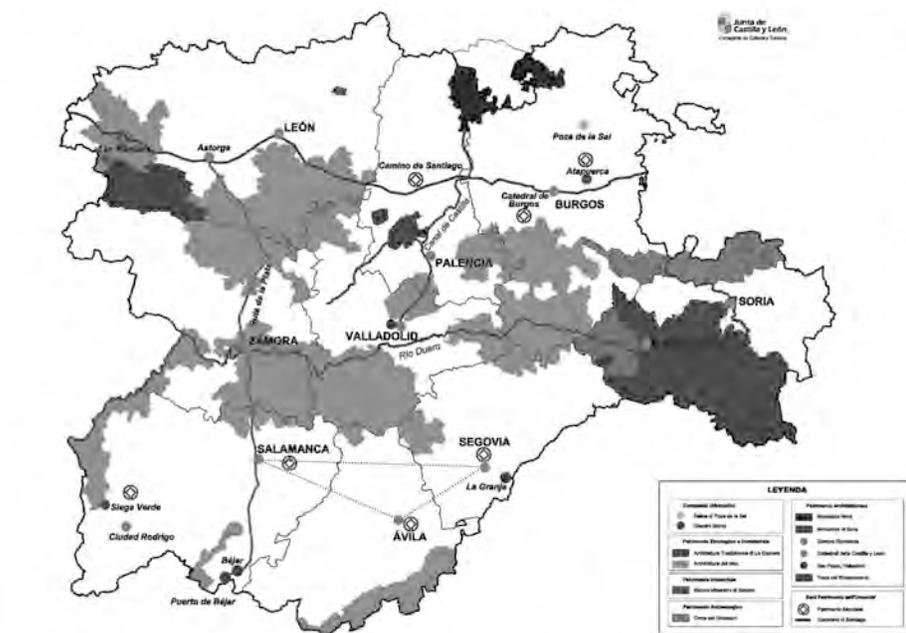


Figure 2: PAHIS Plan (Castilla and León, Spain). Source: Castilla and León Regional Authority

heritage assets in rural areas have to be found. The INTERREG IVC project HISTCAPE² aims to identify good practice and make strategic recommendations for preserving the economic vitality, way of life and cultural heritage of rural areas. The project HISTCAPE is designed to overcome the limitations of rural protective policies by developing specific valuation and protection instruments based on a much closer integration between cultural heritage and territorial development policies. These instruments should make use of infrastructural, organizational, and human resources, based on administrative support and broad community involvement. The HISTCAPE partnership is composed by 12 partners with decades of experience in both, managing cultural heritage and rural development (Figure 1: HISTCAPE Partnership). Through regional cooperation the HISTCAPE project will fill a strategic policy gap, improving the effectiveness of regional policies relating to cultural heritage in Europe's rural areas. It will ensure the transfer of good practice into regional action

plans that are a catalyst for further public and private sector investment alongside the empowerment of local communities.

The project activities follow a carefully defined methodology. First, good practice from the partner regions is identified, analysed and highlighted by partners. Stakeholders from the field of cultural heritage protection and rural development are invited to participate in these discussions. Interregional workshops and study visits are important instruments in this first phase. In the second stage, a common strategy as well as new policy instruments will be developed. The final stage is dedicated to the development of an implementation plan for each participating region and the training of partners to ensure that these plans are successfully carried out after the end of the project. The plans serve as ready-to-implement strategies for improving the efficiency and sustainability of rural cultural heritage management across Europe. To be successful, the project aims to involve as many stakeholders as possible in the exchange of experience process.



Figure 3: Restoration of historic windmills (Saaremaa Island, Estonia). Source: Tecnalia, Rand Eppich

create an added-value at European level.

Good practice in cultural heritage and landscape protection

Divers technical practices and protection instruments for cultural heritage assets have already been identified as good practice from different regions. These range from techniques for identifying and evaluating cultural heritage, cataloguing of rural heritage, innovative protection instruments and new models of financing and attracting investment. One interesting example promising successful transfer of knowledge is the

implementation of flexible protection areas or buffer-zones around sensitive sites in place in the region of Northern Portugal. These buffer-zones are intended to protect important views and limit urban and industrial expansion yet are flexible enough not to restrict economic growth. Another

interesting aspect of Northern Portugal's heritage policy is the identification of cultural heritage through community involvement. Each private person can fill out an application and initiate a classification procedure for heritage assets. The Northern Cultural Regional Direction (Portugal) as well as the General-Directorate of the Cultural Heritage Rhineland-Palatinate (Germany) provide free architectural advice for owners of protected cultural monuments. This should ensure that appropriate materials and techniques are used in the restoration works and the historic appearance of monuments is kept.

In Rhineland-Palatinate owners are compensated for additional burdens by direct subsidies. The equalization of burdens through the tax system is also an effective instrument used in Germany. Many cultural heritage authorities have adopted an integrated approach for cultural heritage protection. The Castilla and Leon Regional Authority (Spain) has developed a Strategic Plan for the integrated management of historical heritage in the territory taking into account the thematic relationships of cultural heritage assets and territorial actions in a multidisciplinary perspective (Figure 2: PAHIS Plan). A total of 24 "territorial systems of heritage management" have been created to carry out identification, protection, restoration and conservation activities linked to enhancement and sustainable territory development. Another example is the Regional Landscape Environmental Plan – PPAR of the Marche Region (Italy) is a sort of territorial plan referring to the entire Marche territory and not only to specific areas. The PPAR highlights the historical and cultural value of the regional territory as characterised by the human activities and by morphologic, ecologic, infrastructure and housing peculiarities.

HISTCAPE is not only focusing on technical practices and protection instruments for cultural assets, also innovative and added-value activities related to cultural heritage as well as community based models for territorial development are investigated. In many regions we can find successful revitalisation of cultural monuments for touristic or recreational purposes. The restoration of historic windmills at Saaremaa Island, Estonia (Figure 3: Restoration of historic windmills) and the renovation of historic manor houses in Vidzeme Planning Region, Latvia (Figure 4: Renovation of Oleri Manor) are only two examples. Also the Austrian rural development policy



Figure 4: Renovation of Oleri Manor (Vidzeme, Latvia) Source: Landentwicklung Steiermark, Andrea Tackner

Stakeholders are able to access all good practice identified during the project and are invited to take part in the practitioners' forum. The project gains from the experience of experts, and in turn practitioners and stakeholders will profit from the results delivered by the project. A guide on the preservation of rural heritage values is published at the end of the project and will put together all good practice identified, policy recommendations and general guidelines for successful implementation and

is supporting the valuation and enhancement of cultural heritage. Initiatives from local communities to respect and preserve local traditions of building in rural areas can be identified as a good example for community involvement in cultural heritage protection. These and other examples of good practice identified must be further explored, described in greater detail and investigated to see if they can be adapted to other regions in Europe.

Fresh perspectives for cultural heritage policy in rural areas

The idea of HISTCAPE is to create fresh perspectives geared towards the creation of new tools and policies adapted for the sustainable management, development and protection of landscapes and small historical centres. This in turn will slow down and even arrest the decline of historical assets in rural communities. ☉



Figure 5: Muhu Island, Estonia Source: Landentwicklung Steiermark, Andrea Tackner

- 1 Article 151 of the Treaty of Maastricht (Article 167 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union) stipulates that the Union must support and supplement action by the Member States in order to conserve and safeguard cultural heritage of European significance.
- 2 The project HISTCAPE - HISTORical assets and related landsCAPE has been approved in the 4th call of the INTERREG IVC Programme 2007-2013.

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content & keywords

Cultural heritage is a unique part of our European identity and a catalyst for economic growth. The HISTCAPE project is designed to overcome the limitations of rural protective policies by developing new instruments based on a closer integration between cultural heritage and territorial development policies. Good practice from different partner regions will be the basis for the creation of new policies adapted for the sustainable management of landscapes and small historical centres. **Cultural heritage protection, rural areas, interregional co-operation, exchange of experience, policy improvement**

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