

VITOUR – The European World Heritage Vineyards

VITOUR – Les vignobles européens du Patrimoine Mondial

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Abstract

UNESCO World Heritage as the link, Europe as the area covered. VITOUR network is born on this idea, on Loire Valley Mission and InterLoire's initiative. It gathers vineyards inscribed on UNESCO World Heritage List.

The economic, tourist, environmental and heritage issues form the bond for this particularly emblematic partnership of wine-producing professionals and managers of the listed sites. Supported by the European Union (INTERREG IIC), seven sites are working together on the sustainable development of their outstanding landscapes and promoting their discovery through innovative tourism actions.

These sites share many common features: proximity to a river, major component of vine; the "terroir" and know-how of the vine-growers helpful to make understand the reality of the cultural landscape; the need to involve local authorities, heritage managers and tourism organisations to promote these areas in the best possible way. All these UNESCO World Heritage sites share the commitment to develop policies based on the outstanding qualities of their superb landscapes.

Keywords : Pole of competitiveness, partnership of excellence, wine landscapes, oenotourism, heritage, culture

Cultural and vineyard cultural landscapes

*Cultural landscapes*¹

According to the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, cultural landscapes are cultural properties that represent the "combined works of nature and man" designated in Article I of the Convention. They are illustrative of the evolution of human society and settlement over time, under the influence of the physical constraints and/or opportunities presented by their natural environment and of successive social, economic, and cultural forces, both external and internal.

¹ Operational Guidelines for the World Heritage Convention, WHC 05/2, 2 February 2005, pp 24

Vineyard cultural landscapes²:

1. Vineyard cultures are the result of human work
2. the traditional vineyard landscapes are located in territories with a long human presence using the natural conditions such as relief, soil, (micro) climate etc.
3. they illustrate a considerable human invention with the construction of terraces and creation of other systems of transport and drainage
4. they show the human response to disaster management (e.g. phylloxera) and long-term research to obtain the best production results
5. they are linked to various tangible and intangible elements, linked to cultural traditions and rituals
6. wine production is subject to globalization, economic and global market development, and consumer demands

Background

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List as Cultural Landscapes, seven remarkable sites share a common commitment: restoring, protecting and sharing their exceptional landscape and cultural identities. Behind the names of the most prestigious European wines is always hidden a land and its people trying to preserve a specific know-how. But this cultural wealth is today threatened.

How to get away from the standardisation of tastes and development? How to combat against the competition from the New World? Reasserting the cultural and landscape uniqueness of these vineyards became essential to guarantee the long-term economic vitality required to maintain these exceptional landscapes.

The stake is to design, together, new tools for the sustainable development of these regions, and it is a challenge that needs to be faced up by involving both public-sector decision-makers and professionals in the wine and tourism fields.

To meet these challenges, an international charter, the "Fontevraud Charter", is gradually uniting European vineyards around four key commitments and a benchmark international network, known as VITOUR.

Objectives

The economic, tourist, environmental and heritage issues form the bond of this emblematic partnership of wine-producing professionals and managers of the listed sites.

Far from destroying the unique cultural characteristics of each of the partner sites, the project builds on the wealth of their diversity. These prestigious "old world" vineyards have joined together to help understand what makes each one unique. More than ever, "wine is a landscape to taste".

Supported by the European Union (INTERREG IIIC), the VITOUR project aims to create new standards for sustainable development of UNESCO World Heritage sites through improving their landscape management and a developing innovative tourist offers.

It involves:

- Identification of best practices and critical success factors,
- Involvement of decision-makers in implementing pilot projects,
- Dissemination of the conclusions to all involved players in these regions, as well as to the international community of winegrowing regions.

² Mechtild Rössler, in Acts of "World Heritage Expert Meeting on Vineyard Cultural Landscapes" (11-14 July 2001), Tokaj, Hungary, pp. 87-88

The final objective of the INTERREG project is to define an Action plan including

- **a common charter for sustainable development of the vine landscapes**
- **the engagement of the sites on projects of actions as regards external and internal communication as well as regards protection and valorisation of our landscapes through innovating oenotourism offers**

Partners

The VITOUR network is made up of seven partners from six European Union Member States:

1. Lead partner: the cross-regional organisation, the Val de Loire Mission, in partnership with the joint-trade organisation of Loire Valley Wines, InterLoire, France
2. The former Jurisdiction of Saint-Émilion, France
3. The Douro and Porto Wines Institute, Portugal
4. The World Heritage Association of Fertő-Neusiedler See, Austria
5. The Rheinland – Pfalz Region, Germany
6. The Cinque Terre National Park, Italy
7. The World Heritage Association of Tokaj, Hungary



1. Inscription: 2000



2. Inscription: 1999



3. Inscription: 2001



4. Inscription: 2001



5. Inscription: 2002



6. Inscription: 1997



7. Inscription: 2002

Process and expected results

The project runs on for 30 months, from July 2005 to December 2007. The total budget for the project is €639,000, 60% of which is supported by the European Union as part of the INTERREG III C programme, with the remaining 40% supported by the partners.

The main activities of the programme:

I Administrative and financial management of the project, provided by the Mission Val de Loire

II Development of common tools and strategic guidelines

- 1 **A platform for sharing information** based on pooling the knowledge acquired and actions taken at each site (heritage, landscape, cultural and tourist resources, and good practices in site management and promotion).
- 2 **An expertise** on adapting each site to meet the international demand for wine tourism
 - launched in January 2007 and concluded by a proposal for a VITOUR oenotourism strategy in September 2007
- 3 **A network's Action plan** based on a common charter for sustainable management of each site and the sites' commitments to pilot initiatives.

III Interregional seminars on landscape management and innovative tourist offers

- 1 **Two workshops on the sustainable management of vine landscapes**
 - March 2006, Boppard, Germany: identification the common threats of degradation of our landscapes as well as the tools developed on each site to answer these threats.

- June 2007, Saint-Émilion, France: identification of good practices to preserve cultural identity of these vineyards and to take part in the economic vitality essential to the maintain of these landscapes.

2 Two workshops on creating innovative tourist offers

- June 2006, Fontevraud, France and March 2007, Riomaggiore, Italy: Creation of the "collection of oenotourism circuits", an innovating offer combining the discovery of our vine landscapes, the learning of the know-how and a quality of reception, accommodation, catering services. A marketing adapted to each one of the partner sites is under study.

IV Dissemination of results

1 Common communication tools:

- a logo, a slogan, a graphic charter, a leaflet presenting the network and an exhibition in two versions, as well as an action plan for press and a Web portal was created

2 Dissemination strategy:

- To local stakeholders:
 - Each partner meeting was concluded by a public meeting and a press operation to introduce the project to the public bodies and the economic actors of each site.
- To international stakeholders:
 - Two specific conferences linked to international wine fairs (March 2006: ProWein – Düsseldorf + June 2007: Vinexpo - Bordeaux), by involving running projects working on similar topics (INTERREG and other regional projects) to reinforce our international recognition