

The Parco Artistico, Naturale e Culturale della Val d'Orcia

The Parco Artistico, Naturale e Culturale della Val d'Orcia represents a new idea of park in Italy as it encompasses the entirety of five neighboring municipalities (60 hectares) in the province of Siena and the region of Tuscany: Castiglione d'Orcia, Pienza, Radiconfani, San Quirico d'Orcia and Montalcino.

In the words of the visitor brochure: "To visit the Parco Artistico, Naturale e Culturale della Val d'Orcia means to immerse oneself in a territory which is not static, is not similar to a museum, but is, on the contrary, an entity strongly tied to daily life, a life inspired by a model that carries on a continuity with the local tradition."

The park has been defined "Artistico, Naturale e Culturale" because it is a landscape that is a unitary whole of historic urban centers and rural land shaped by human efforts.

The area of the park is characterized as a frontier in Italy. It was at the extreme limits of the ancient Ducato of Tuscany and before that of the Sienese Republic and was subject to strong collision between strategic interests. This is reflected in the fortified urban texture of Montalcino, the papal stronghold of Radiconfani, and fortress of the Salimbeni family at Tintinnano (Rocca d'Orcia). Areas

within the park are also strongly associated with the Francigena, or the pilgrims way from Canterbury to Rome.

From the many natural balconies of Val d'Orcia the countryside is revealed. One sees many domes and clay hills, sudden cliffs and gullies, that look sterile and barren where the hills become steeper and the clay harder. There is also the Val d'Orcia of the wheat fields changing colors with the seasons (gray to green to yellow) and, in the fertile alluvial soils of the valley bottom, the cultivation of grapes and olives. It is a natural landscape built by humans, the hidden and skilled work of generations of peasants laboring over a difficult land.

The idea of the park has two aims. On one hand, it is to preserve the present, almost perfect balance between natural landscape and human settlement. The other aim is to improve the social and economic development

based essentially on local natural and cultural resources. The park is viewed as an attempt to provide an alternative between unguided speculative development and museum-like guardianship of the environment.

Agriculture and cultural tourism are the main sectors for development and they are treated as interrelated. The park is an attempt to respond to what it calls "itinerary visits" where the tourist is attracted by sequences of historical themes and environmental qualities. It is a rediscovery of the traveler's tourism which from the 18th century onwards chose Italy as a land to discover historical features without refusing contact with local social and cultural realities. Visiting travelers had a unified interest in the artistic object, the monument, and ancient historical traces while savoring the taste and way of life that was rooted *in situ*.

Agriculture itself is viewed within the park as a primary element of the attraction. The agricultural focus is not on maximum production but rather on the sense of quality and particularity of the product. The park authorities want the visitor to comprehend and appreciate the strong bond between agriculture and environment, the result of which can only be a high quality of production not only of wine, cheese, and oil, but also honey, meat, typical charcuterie, cereals, and handicrafts. Biological (organic) cultivation is encouraged, as well as specialized production

such as the growing of hard corn, which has a niche market in Germany.

Small industries related to such local resources as brick kilns are also encouraged under the same principle of "quality as resource," both in intrinsic product quality but also in the nature of the process between humans and environment.

The park is a reality based on the action of the town councils of its five municipalities acting as an association, yet there is still work to be done on building the public awareness of belonging to the park and of the park as an effort to rediscover and revalue the territory of Val d'Orcia that is required for the achievement of a collective social and cultural identity.

There are currently three foci of attention: planning, the governing framework, and economic organization.

With regard to planning, action has been taken to protect biotopes. The park authority, or association of town councils, have applied the national and regional standards for protected areas to the Lucciola Bella for its geomorphologic peculiarity of "Crete senesi" (clay formations). Still pending is whether the park will be able to stretch the envelope and receive protected area status as a unitary whole.

Physical plans have been prepared to handle visitor use of this "park without gates." Primary roads enter-

ing the park have been identified as entry points with information and campsite facilities. There are also plans for a system of roadside turnoffs, signage, and trails for enjoyment of the park. A visitor facility has been opened in San Quirico d'Orcia.

So far the collaborative effort that is the park has been governed by an association made up of mayors of the five towns, but its legal constitution is still being worked out. To be decided is the status and relationship of the park organization in relation to the provincial and regional governments. A Comitato Scientifico di Consulenza della Val d'Orcia made up of scholars from various disciplines has been established to propose and assess cultural and environmental projects.

In the economic sphere, a company which will carry out that aspect

of the park has been created and is known as the Parco Val d'Orcia s.r.l. It is coordinating both public and private investments for tourist and economic development in the park. To market local products and safeguard high quality standards, the company has created the trademark "Val d'Orcia" to certify origin and quality of products.

The Parco Artistico, Naturale e Culturale della Val d'Orcia is a creative, dynamic, and ambitious collaborative effort of communities to protect and sustain their unique qualities of place. It incorporates all the traditional aspects associated with parks and adds the dimension of sustainable development. Many hurdles to its ultimate success remain, but so far the park has defined and followed its own path to success.

Vieri Quilici, Rome 3 University, via Tacchini 7, 00197 Rome, Italy

