Traditional terracing in Veneto, Italy

Year of issue

2025

Summary

The initiative is aimed at the recovering and maintenance of a cultural and historical heritage with the promotion of new agricultural activities (not necessarily for economic purposes). A large part of terraces are no longer used today, as landowners either emigrated or are too old to take care of them. As a consequence, these terraces are increasingly degraded. The Committee "Adotta un terrazzamento" (Adopt a Terrace) acts as a mediator among landowners and people interested in "adopting" a terrace": with a contribution of 10 euros, any private citizen can be assigned a terraced plot to establish a vegetable garden. In exchange, the private citizen commits to restore and take care of the terrace at his/her disposal. The recovery of the terraces permits the valorization of the local resources, combining social/economic aims with the need to safeguard infrastructures that prevent hydro-geological instability.

Photo Gallery



Location

45.520801, 11.394828

Project

NWRM

National ID

Italy_04

Sector

Agriculture

Installation Date

2010

Implementation status

Ongoing

Contact

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Overview

Location of the project

The case study is located in the Val Verta area of the Brenta Valley, in the municipality of Valstagna (now part of Valbrenta), Veneto region, Italy. The terraces are mainly on the slopes above the Brenta River, accessible from the SS47 “Valsugana” state road.

Country

Italy

NUTS2 Code

Veneto

Sponge measures implemented in the case study

Traditional terracing

Objectives

Recover and maintain abandoned traditional terraces (masiere) in the Val Verta area of the Brenta Valley, preserving their cultural, historical, and landscape value.
Prevent hydro-geological instability by restoring dry-stone walls and cultivated plots.
Promote new (not necessarily commercial) agricultural activities, often as vegetable gardens, by engaging citizens through the “adopt a terrace” scheme.
Create a mediation platform between absentee/elderly landowners and volunteers willing to restore and cultivate plots.
Encourage community involvement, environmental education, and intergenerational transmission of dry-stone walling skills.

Involved partners

Authority type	Authority name	Authority role	Comments	Authority responsibility

NGO	Committee "Adotta un Terrazzamento"	Implementation	The Committee is responsible for mediating between landowners and private citizens interested in "adopting" a terraces plot. Thus the Committee manages the project and assigns the plot to users	—
Local water authority	Municipality of Valstagna	Implementation	Municipality	Responsible
Research institute / University	University of Padua	Implementation	Initial project partner Concept development, technical advice during early stages, involvement in heritage and environmental studies.	Responsible
NGO	Italian Alpine Club - "Highlands" Research Group	Implementation	No-profit association	—
Local water authority	Solagna, Campolongo, S. Nazario, Cismon del Grappa municipalities	Other	Municipalities. Institutional support, local coordination, promotion, and facilitation of agreements with landowners.	Supporting
Other	Veneto Region	Financing	Regional administration	Supporting

Site Information

Climate Zone

Cool temperate moist

Precipitation

1400.00 mm

Temperature (°C)

9.00 °C

Elevation range

139

Slope range

5-10% Terraces are located on steep valley slopes

Vegetation class

Terraces host a mix of cultivated plots (vegetable gardens, saffron, berries, tobacco) and areas with spontaneous vegetation typical of abandoned terraces, including grasses and herbaceous plants.

WFD Ecological status

Moderate

WFD Chemical status

Failing to achieve good

Design and Implementation

Project scale

Micro

Project scale specifications

The initiative is implemented on specific terraced slopes in the Val Verta area of the Brenta Valley (municipality of Valbrenta, Veneto, Italy). It focuses on the restoration and maintenance of individual terrace plots and their dry-stone walls, involving local volunteers and adopters. The actions are localised, targeting discrete sites rather than the entire valley or catchment.
Between 2010 and 2017, more than 1,000 terraces covering about 5 ha were recovered.

Project area

5 ha

Basis of design

annual precipitations

Constraints

Information not available

Favourable preconditions

Information not available

Financing

Total cost information

No information on costs is available; however, costs are likely to be purely administrative and linked to the activities of the Committee, due to the particular nature of the initiative. the initiative is aimed at the recovering and maintenance of a cultural and historical heritage with the promotion of new agricultural activities (not necessarily for economic purposes). A large part of terraces are no longer used today, as landowners either emigrated or are too old to take care of them. As a consequences, these terraces are increasingly degraded. The Committee "Adotta un terrazzamento" act as a mediator among landowners and people interested in "adopting a terrace": with a contribution of 10 euros, any private citizen can be assigned a terraced plot to establish a vegetable garden. In exchange, the private citizen committs to restore and take care of the terrace at his/her disposal.

Financing authorities

Authority name	Type of funding	Comments
Adotta un terrazzamento	Private funds	The Committee "Adotta un terrazzamento" act as a mediator among landowners and people interested in "adopting a terrace": with a contribution of 10 euros, any private citizen can be assigned a terraced plot to establish a vegetable garden. In exchange, the private citizen committs to restore and take care of the terrace at his/her disposal.

Policy and Governance

Policy description

The restoring of traditional terraces (built around the XVII century) is aimed at the maintenance of the terraces, the prevention of landslides and the provision of cultivable land.

Land ownership

The terraces are privately owned, often by families whose members have emigrated or are elderly and no longer able to maintain the land.

Policy targets

Oher Societal Benefits

Erosion Control

Increase Water Storage

Part of a wider plan

Yes

Wider plan

Name
AlpTer Project, EU programme Interreg Alpine Space

Public consultation

No

Has contractual arrangements

Yes

Contractual arrangements

Name	Comments
Free "loan of use" contracts	he initiative is aimed at the recovering and maintenance of a cultural and historical heritage with the promotion of new agricultural activities (not necessarily for economic purposes). A large part of terraces are no longer used today, as landowners either emigrated or are too old to take care of them. As a consequences, these terraces are increasingly degraded. The Committee "Adotta un terrazzamento" act as a mediator among landowners and people interested in "adopting" a terrace": with a contribution of 10 euros, any private citizen can be assigned a terraced plot to establish a vegetable garden. In exchange, the private citizen committs to restore and take care of the terrace at his/her disposal.

Impacts and Monitoring

Monitoring System

Monitoring requirements

No formal environmental monitoring; only informal visual checks by the association.

Monitoring parameters

Monitoring is limited to qualitative, non-instrumental observations. Parameters include the stability and integrity of dry-stone walls, the presence of vegetation that may damage structures, signs of erosion or collapse, and the general state of cultivated plots. No data are available on hydrological parameters such as runoff, infiltration, soil moisture, or water quality. Monitoring is primarily aimed at ensuring the safety and usability of the terraces rather than collecting environmental metrics.

Maintenance

Maintenance requirements

Dry-stone walls and cultivated plots are maintained by volunteers and terrace adopters through regular upkeep and restoration activities.

Impact Assessment Methodology

Performance impact assessment method

Edge of Field/Plot

Performance impact estimation information

The terraced slopes were compared with non terraced areas of a neighboring area. The evaluation was done through soil evaluation (under phisic and chemical aspects) and Thornthwaite-Mather model for the rendering of the potential/effective evapotraspiration compared to the annual precipitation. the results of the evaluations testify that in terraced areas the soil has better agronomic potential and a greater water retention capacity.

Socio-economic Impacts

Direct benefits

The project has reactivated agricultural use of abandoned terraces, enabling small-scale production of saffron, tobacco, berries, honey, and vegetables. Some local producers (e.g. Il Nostrano del Brenta, I Barchi, Lapisterra) now operate on restored terraces, creating niche products with potential added value for the local economy.
Organisation of cultural events (concerts, exhibitions, Land Art trail Coltiva l’Arte), guided walks, and documentary screenings attracts visitors and promotes the Brenta Valley as a heritage landscape.
Strengthens community identity and visibility of the area’s cultural landscape.
The “adopt a terrace” scheme fosters long-term relationships between local landowners, adopters from outside the valley, and volunteers.
Encourages intergenerational and intercultural exchanges through joint maintenance activities and events.

Biophysical impacts: Hydrology

Increased water storage

50.00

Increased water storage unit

% Percent

Biophysical impacts: Biodiversity

Improved biodiversity

Yes

Information on improved biodiversity

Restoration has allowed the reintroduction or continuation of small-scale, diverse cropping systems (vegetables, saffron, berries, tobacco), maintaining a mosaic landscape. Areas of spontaneous vegetation on unused terraces provide habitat for grassland and ruderal species, although no systematic biodiversity survey is reported.

Biophysical impacts: Water & Soil Quality

Water quality overall improvements

N/A info

Soil quality overall improvements

Positive impact-SQ improvement

Information on soil quality overall improvements

Increase of depth available for root development, greater water retention and reduction of the stone portion.

Biophysical impacts: Others

Ecosystem impact climate regulation

No information available

Lessons Learned

Key lessons

The initiative is aimed at the recovery and maintenance of a cultural and historical heritage, alongside the promotion of new agricultural activities not necessarily for economic purposes. A large part of the terraces are no longer used today, as landowners have either emigrated or are too old to maintain them, leading to progressive degradation. The Committee Adotta un Terrazzamento acts as a mediator between landowners and people interested in “adopting” a terrace: with a symbolic contribution of 10 euros, any private citizen can be assigned a terraced plot to establish a vegetable garden, in exchange for the commitment to restore and maintain it. The recovery of the terraces allows the valorisation of local resources, combining social and economic aims with the need to safeguard infrastructures that prevent hydro-geological instability.

Experience from this project shows that strong community involvement, built on direct connections between landowners and adopters, is key to sustaining restoration over time. Symbolic, low-cost participation can be effective when it fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility. Combining conservation with cultural and educational activities—such as dry-stone walling workshops, art trails, and guided walks—helps maintain long-term public interest and integrates heritage into everyday life. Finally, while qualitative benefits for erosion control and landscape stability are evident, the absence of formal environmental monitoring highlights the importance of integrating scientific assessment into similar initiatives from the outset.

Barriers

Barrier type	Barrier role	Comments
Expected maintenance needs	Secondary barrier	Lack of formal environmental monitoring limiting the ability to quantify hydrological and ecological benefits.
Other	Secondary barrier	Steep, difficult terrain increasing the labour intensity and cost of restoration and maintenance.
Lacking financing sources	Main barrier	Limited financial resources relying mainly on small participation fees and occasional grants.

Drivers

Driver type	Driver role	Comments
Other	Main driver	The initiative is aimed at the recovering and maintenance of a cultural and historical heritage with the promotion of new agricultural activities (not necessarily for economic purposes). A large part of terraces are no longer used today, as landowners either emigrated or are too old to take care of them. As a consequences, these terraces are increasingly degraded

Success factors

Success factor type	Success factor role	Comments
Attitude of relevant stakeholders	Main factor	Strong community engagement through the “adopt a terrace” scheme involving locals, absentee landowners, and volunteers.
Financing possibilities	Main factor	Simple, symbolic participation model (€10/year) fostering responsibility and accessibility.
Public participation	Secondary factor	Integration of cultural and educational activities that keep the project visible and engaging.
Existing staff and consultant knowledge	Secondary factor	Skills preservation and transfer via dry-stone walling training and traditional land management.

Sources

Sources

www.adottaunterrazzamento.org

I suoli dei versanti terrazzati di Valstagna

Adotta un Terrazzamento in Canale di Brenta APS

L’acqua passa, le pietre restano

Terrazzamenti di Valstagna

“Terrazzamenti” – Osservatorio del Paesaggio del Canale di Brenta