



EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION
LANDSCAPE AWARD OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

7th Session – 2020-2021

APPLICATION FORM

I. STATE CONCERNED AND APPLICANT

1. State

Italy

Represented by

Ms Federica Galloni, Director General

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2. Applicant

*Name of the local,
regional authority(ies)
or NGO(s)*

Fondazione della Misericordia Maggiore of Bergamo
(Fondazione MIA)

Represented by

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Italia

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II. PRESENTATION OF THE PROJCT

3. Name of the Project

Biodiversity in the city. Bergamo, the Astino Valley

4. Location of the Project

Val d'Astino, Bergamo (BG)

5. Summary of the Project (10-12 lines)

The project consists in the recovery and planning, via public-private partnerships, of the landscape of the Astino Valley, a valuable area of almost 60 hectares just outside Bergamo. Rich in history and biodiversity, in recent decades this area had fallen into a state of decay and abandonment, despite the development restrictions introduced.

In response to the local community's desire to safeguard and enhance this place, in 2007 the Fondazione Misericordia Maggiore of Bergamo acquired the Astino Monastery, along with the adjacent land, in order to restore the complex and regenerate its landscape in a sustainable way. An intense dialogue and collaboration with public authorities, environmentalist associations, professional groups, agricultural enterprises, and civil society, culminated in the underwriting of a Plan Agreement in 2017. The project has thus called for the restoration of the monastery and surrounding farmhouses, castle, and paths, the creation of educational itineraries in the Allegrezza wood, the reintroduction of traditional crops based on organic farming methods and of the irrigation network, and the establishment of a local branch of the Bergamo Botanical Gardens. At the same time, a series of cultural, educational, and training events have been organised, and specific steps have been taken for the integration of disadvantaged people. By re-establishing the strong identity-defining and social significance of these sites, the project has thus fully restored Astino and its valley for the benefit of the inhabitants of Bergamo.

6. **Photo representing the Project** (*high definition – JPEG 350 dpi*) and *name of the author of the photo please*



Astino Valley Botanical garden, ph. G. Rinaldi

7. **Website of the Project** (*if exists*)

www.fondazionemia.it/it/astino/premio-del-paesaggio

III. CONTENT OF THE PROJECT

8. **Start of the Project** month year
The project must have been completed at least three years previously

9. **Partners**

Regione Lombardia
Provincia di Bergamo
Comune di Bergamo
Parco dei Colli di Bergamo
Valle d’Astino S.r.l. (the company that owns the entire complex of the former Abbey of Astino, and which is a fully-owned subsidiary of the Fondazione della Misericordia Maggiore of Bergamo)
Orto Botanico di Bergamo "Lorenzo Rota"
Centro Studi sul Territorio, Università degli Studi di Bergamo

Agricultural entrepreneurs:
Azienda Agricola Arrigoni Beatrice
Azienda Agricola OIKOS Cooperativa Sociale
Azienda Agricola i Ragì di Prandi Ivan
Castel Cerreto Soc. Cooperativa
Soc. Agricola ELAV
Soc. Agricola S. Laura di E. Antignati &C.
Società Agricola Terre Lombarde s.s.

Managing companies:
Accademia di Astino srl
Orizzonti d’Astino Consorzio
Le Orbe di Astino S.r.l.
Gruppo La Marianna
Da Mimmo S.r.l.
Birrificio indipendente ELAV S.r.l.
S-link S.r.l.
Astino 2018 S.r.l.
Treverde S.r.l.

Associations:
A.P.A.B. (Associazione Produttori Agricoli Biologici della Valle d’Astino)
Associazione Culturale Arketipos
Associazione Il Cavaliere giallo
Associazione Vivere Longuelo

Associations involved in the various activities carried out in the Astino complex:

Seminario permanente Luigi Veronelli
SLOW FOOD Bergamo
Ass. SLOWCOOKING
CAI Bergamo
Progetto FORME
ONAF (Organizzazione Nazionale assaggiatore formaggi)
Istituto Superiore di Studi Musicali “G. Donizetti”
Associazione Bergamo Festival – Fare la Pace
Associazione Ab Harmoniae
Associazione Estudiantina
Associazione Bande Musicali di Bergamo
ACLI – Molte fedi sotto lo stesso cielo
Sezione Aurea compagnia teatrale e Arts Associazione culturale - SUMMER SCHOOL
Comunità Botteghe di Città Alta
Guide Turistiche di Città Alta
Gruppo Archeologico Bergamasco
Spia Game, organizzatore di Orobie Ultra Trail
Osservatorio Astronomico “LA TORRE DEL SOLE”

10. Financing bodies

Main sources of funding since 2007:

Restoration of the former Santo Sepolcro Abbey of Astino:

Implementing party: Valle d’Astino S.r.l. Overall works: € 5,953,921.84 (expenses already incurred)
Contribution from Regione Lombardia € 400,000.00
Contribution from Ubi Banca € 350,000.00
Contribution from Sorelle Pesenti (private contributor): € 150,000.00

Restoration of the Santo Sepolcro Church:

Implementing party: Valle d’Astino S.r.l. Overall works: € 4,430,407.11 (expenses already incurred)
Contribution from Curia di Bergamo € 1,000,000.00
Contribution from Regione Lombardia € 1,000,000.00
Contribution from Ubi Banca € 1,250,000.00

Restoration of Cascina Mulino:

Implementing party: Valle d’Astino S.r.l. Overall works: € 164,582.94 (expenses already incurred)

Restoration of Cascina Convento:

Implementing party: Valle d'Astino S.r.l. Overall works:
€ 4,649,600.00

Structural reinforcement and roofing work: € 725,342.25
(expenses already incurred)

Allegrezza Castle:

Implementing party: Valle d'Astino S.r.l. Overall works:
€ 770,000.00

Ripa Pasqualina:

Implementing party: Valle d'Astino S.r.l. Overall works:
€ 960,000.00 (expenses already incurred)

Orto Botanico di Bergamo "Lorenzo Rota":

Implementing party: Comune di Bergamo.

FASE 1) Overall works: € 450,000.00 (expenses already
incurred € 350,000)

Contribution from Regione Lombardia € 150,000.00

Contribution from Ministero Politiche Agricole (Ministry
of Agriculture) € 50,000.00

FASE 2) Overall works: € 180,000

Contribution from Regione Lombardia € 40,000.00

Creation of a sewage tunnel:

Implementing party: Valle d'Astino S.r.l. Overall works:
€ 210,000.00 (expenses already incurred)

Cycle/pedestrian paths:

Implementing party: Valle d'Astino S.r.l. Overall works:
€ 700,000.00

Works already completed for a total of € 360,000

Agricultural work:

Implementing parties

Valle d'Astino S.r.l. for environmental
mitigation/compensation: € 90,000.00

Creation of a well and irrigation system for the plots of
land: € 144,800 (expenses already incurred)

Individual farmers for self-funded agricultural activities

11. Central aims of the Project

Identification and assessment

The project centres on the sustainable regeneration of the landscape of the Astino Valley (*Valle d'Astino*) and its monastery. Located just outside Bergamo, this strategic area of considerable historical and environmental value has been identified as a landscape that has long defined the identity of the city and its community. Founded in the 12th century through the support and contributions of the inhabitants of Bergamo, the Vallombrosian monastery of Astino has shaped the landscape of the area, which up until then consisted entirely of woodland, by turning it into a haven for biodiversity, creating irrigation channels, and promoting cultivation. For centuries, the monastery has stood as the cornerstone of a complex ecosystem at the gates of the city, boasting a high degree of biodiversity that derives primarily from the interaction between man and nature. The valley and the abbey thus represent a centuries-old cultural and natural heritage that informs the identity of the city of Bergamo. As the local inhabitants were already well aware of the importance of this landscape, both State and local authorities, starting in the immediate aftermath of World War II, took a series of pioneering measures to protect it, issuing building restrictions as early as 1951. These policies were reinforced in 1977, when the regional government established the *Parco dei Colli di Bergamo* (Park of the Bergamo Hills). These restrictions generally prevented unchecked development, yet not the progressive social and environmental deterioration of the area, which witnessed the spread of corn monoculture and risked being closed to public access.

Landscape quality objectives

Since the beginning of the project, three landscape quality objectives, connected to planning, awareness raising, and training and education, have been identified. More specifically, the planning objective, given its complexity, has been subdivided into individual sub-objectives/planned interventions.

1) *Implementation and planning*: the sustainable regeneration of Astino as a linchpin for the structuring of the landscape by means of public-private partnerships.

In 2007, with the launching of the project, a transition was made from restrictive policies to the planning and enhancement of the Astino landscape. Through the extensive involvement of government and private actors, as well as of local inhabitants, the project – sprung from the acquisition of the complex and the surrounding land by the MIA in 2007 – pursues the safeguarding, regeneration, and sustainable planning of the Astino Valley. The project began in earnest with the refurbishment of the monastery, which was brought to new life as both a site open to the local community and a means to manage the ecosystem. This intervention was thus designed to affect at once the environmental and the cultural-historical aspect of the area. The whole landscape of this urban area, located only a short distance away from the Bergamo city centre and surrounded by industrialised urban areas, thus needed to be redefined on the basis of historical vestiges, so as to restore the dense web of settlement traces (monastic buildings, farmhouses, dry-stone wall networks, and even the remains of a castle in the woods, for which archaeological investigations have been planned). At the same time, the project sought to reintroduce traditional cultivations associated with the complex, and to regenerate natural and forest areas which in the same period had become first Sites of Community Importance (*S.I.C. dell'Astino e dell'Allegrezza*) and then Special Areas of Conservation (S.A.C.).

The chief aim of the project, however, has been to regenerate the whole Astino area, through the involvement of actors appreciating its identity-defining, historical, cultural, social, and

landscape importance. The innovative conception of restoring the key role of the monastery as an agricultural complex, so as to mark a new phase in its history, is the outcome of institutional collaboration between the MIA Foundation, the *Parco dei Colli*, the Botanical Gardens, the Provincial Government, and Slow Food. This dialogue has led to the drafting of an Ethical Commitment Statement (*Carta Etica*), viewed as a necessary step to strike a balance between the requirements and interests of the various stakeholders (landowners, farmers, public institutions, local inhabitants, citizens, and the urban community as a whole) through the Regulations laid out in the *Progetto di Valorizzazione Agro-Ambientale* (Agricultural and Environmental Enhancement Plan). This “assigned” stakeholders different tasks related to the enhancement and management of the area owned by *Società Valle d’Astino srl*. This ambitious project has been structured into concrete objectives through the 2017 Plan Agreement. The complex interventions planned are described within the masterplan (see poster 2). More specifically, in the light of environmental sustainability requirements, the project has been articulated into critical aspects to be addressed, general objects, and specific actions.

Among the many planning interventions we may recall:

1.a. The regeneration of the historic landscape and protection of the valley’s biodiversity, not least through the involvement of agricultural businesses and local cooperatives cultivating traditional crops based on organic methods, and the social employment of disadvantaged actors, as well as the creation of a cultural promotion office, “Valle della Biodiversità”, as the Astino branch of the Bergamo Botanical Gardens. This is a civic institution recognised by the Region of Lombardy and promoting concepts such as the relationship between plants and human beings, agricultural biodiversity, and sustainability. In the areas of naturalistic interest of the Astino Valley, a plan has been laid out for the management of ailanthus, a particularly invasive exotic tree species.

One crucial step for the regeneration of the historic landscape has been the maintenance of the dry-stone wall and terracing system, which has been made possible by a form of agricultural management based on the involvement of a small number of organic farmers contractually bound to refrain from any cement construction work and to keep to traditional building techniques. This has been a crucial step to improve rainwater management.

The protection of biodiversity has also involved wildlife protection. More specifically, the Astino and Allegrezza woods include forty bird species. Among the wild species listed in Annex I of Directive 2009/147/EC is the *Pernis apivorus*, or European honey buzzard, while we find twelve animal species of Community Importance listed in Annexes II-IV of Habitat Dir. 92/43/CEE.

1.b. Social aspects. The project has devoted considerable attention to social aspects, seeking to combine the regeneration of the landscape with a marked social impact.

1.c. Restoration of buildings and archaeological remains. In order to restore the historic value of this landscape, it has been implemented the restoration of the monastery, as well as of farms buildings and archaeological vestiges in the area, by restoring dilapidated structures that had been abandoned or even, in certain cases, had collapsed roofs. Remarkable artistic and architectural traces have come to light, particularly in the *Santo Sepolcro* Church.

1.d. Soft mobility. The project has sought to redefine mobility in the area, by promoting soft mobility and discouraging motor traffic, as part of a broader effort to manage the growing anthropic pressure.

2) Awareness raising

One crucial objective has been to raise awareness of the site among members of civil society and to foster the involvement of local inhabitants: for this purpose, the planning and implementation actions have been developed in parallel to the creation of a cultural centre at

Astino offering cultural and educational activities.

3) Training and education

An effort has been made to promote the Astino complex as an advanced education centre fostering a cultural appreciation of the landscape and of agricultural food production. To this end, an advanced cooking and hospitality training school has been planned, in addition to educational activities at a university level.

12. Outcome

From a general perspective, the Astino complex has been restored to the condition of a “lived space” centred on the sustainable relationship between human beings and the environment. Although the project is still ongoing, with the implementation of the 2017 Plan Agreement, the following objectives, as a whole, have been met:

Results for objective 1.a. The regeneration of the historic landscape and protection of the valley’s biodiversity:

- Transition from a monotonous landscape, dominated by corn monoculture, to a varied, rich, colourful, and pleasant landscape through the agricultural diversity introduced by implementing the *Progetto di Valorizzazione Agro-Ambientale*: the valley’s biodiversity has been increased through the introduction of a range of different cultivations – some of which already attested in the valley in the Middle Ages, such as grapes, herbs, fruit and vegetables, flax, hemp, and hops (all organically grown) – within a natural setting that includes extensive woodland dominated by chestnuts.
- Management of forested areas through the protection of native species and the eradication of invasive exotic ones, such as ailanthus, as well as the increase of hedges and bramble bushes, to create ecological corridors and refuge areas for wildlife.
- Routine maintenance and restoration of dry-stone walls damaged by industrial farming; an end was also put to concrete construction work. This has ensured a better management of excess rainwater, which has traditionally been one of the main problems in the Astino Valley.
- Creation, during the 2015 EXPO, of a separate branch of the Bergamo Botanical Gardens, the “Valle della Biodiversità”, featuring over 300 different crops with 1,000-1,200 fruit and vegetable varieties. This project combines tradition and innovation, culture and education focusing on the relationship between agriculture and biodiversity. The agricultural data is monitored through technologically advanced systems such as soil and agrometeorological sensors, based on online data transmission, which enables a better understanding of the potential of the species and soil, even at a distance. In the near future, such data will be made available to anyone interested, starting from local farmers.
- Creation of a set of rules for the planning and protection of the landscape, based on the issuing of leases to farmers that include the restrictions listed in the *Progetto di Valorizzazione Agro-Ambientale della Valle d’Astino*, and especially in the *Carta Etica* and *Regolamento per la Gestione e Valorizzazione Agro-Ambientale*. These documents, which were brought together in the 2017 Plan Agreement, are an integral part of the leases drawn up between agricultural entrepreneurs and Società Valle d’Astino srl, the owner of the land. The principles laid out in the leases – and which farmers must subscribe to – have become contractual obligations: failure to abide by them constitutes sufficient grounds for termination of a contract. By signing the leases, agricultural

entrepreneurs commit themselves to cultivating the land assigned to them according to an exclusively organic method, and to respecting the division of crops established in order to ensure the greatest possible agricultural variety. They also commit themselves to managing any marginal areas of their plots in an environmentally sustainable way and to making the agricultural areas assigned to them accessible to visitors, even if this may limit their ordinary farming practices. The implementation of the *Progetto di Valorizzazione Agro-Ambientale della Valle d’Astino* has thus markedly increased the quality of the Astino Valley landscape in the eyes of visitors.

- In 2016 the agricultural entrepreneurs of the Astino Valley founded the *Associazione Produttori Agricoli Biologici della Valle d’Astino* (APAB), a non-profit association with the *Cascina Mulino* building, in Astino Valley, as its headquarters. The APAB’s aim is to promote the organic produce of Astino Valley farmers, who have signed the *Carta Etica* of the *Progetto Astino* and the *Regolamento per la Gestione e Valorizzazione Agroambientale della Valle d’Astino*. In 2017 a label was created to identify organic food products from Astino Valley growers who are APAB members, and have subscribed to the *Progetto di Valorizzazione Agroambientale della Valle d’Astino*, sharing the cultural and environmental ideas and values laid out in the *Carta Etica del Progetto Astino, il Monastero e il suo contesto*.
- The protection and increase of spontaneous vegetation between plots of land and along the main ditches and pathways has *de facto* created a web of ecological corridors (managed by the Botanical Gardens), which fall within the R.E.R - *Rete Ecologica Regionale* (Regional Ecological Network).

Results for objective 1.b. Social aspects:

- The involvement of organic farmers has proven essential to have a social impact.
- Cooperatives of young people and disadvantaged actors (e.g. Oikos, Ortinsema) have been involved.
- Through the numerous events organised (e.g. guided tours of Astino and educational children’s workshops, in addition to exhibitions and concerts), families from Bergamo and nearby areas have started visiting the valley quite regularly.

Results for objective 1.c. Restoration of buildings and archaeological remains:

- The recovery of the monastic complex of Astino is underway; its restoration has begun, with special attention to the conservation of its historical-artistic heritage. In particular, the restoration of the Santo Sepolcro Church has already occurred, as well as of the exterior and roofing of the complex, its ground floor (the premises overlooking the cloister) and of the cloister itself, now destined for public use.
- Promoted and financed by the MIA, archaeological excavations of the entire area have taken place, under the direction of the Archaeological Superintendency; these have allowed the recovery of extraordinary archaeological finds for the Lombard area dating from as early as the prehistoric era. In this way, it has also been possible to retrace the building's historical development, from the prehistoric evidence of human presence in the area up to the network of channels that enabled water management in medieval times (for further details, see the MIA website).
- The restoration of the *Cascina Mulino* has been carried out. The *Cascina Mulino* is now used for educational laboratories, courses, and open days for schools. The recovery of the *Cascina Convento* is also underway; this will be dedicated to the advanced cooking and hospitality training school.

Results for objective 1.d. Soft mobility:

- The creation and recovery of a network of trails and pedestrian and cycling paths, both within the area and connecting with the town.
- The implementation of reception and catering facilities inside the valley.

- Car access has been limited to residents only, while a parking area has been created at the entrance of the area, to allow even people with reduced mobility to access and enjoy the landscape.
- The increasing anthropic pressure, which was progressively concentrated on the weekend following the modern trend to rediscover green areas near one's home, was thus regulated. This was done so that, even in the presence of a consistent flow of people (accentuated by the proximity of the area to the city centre), sustainability was maintained and the exploitation of the landscape for tourist purposes was averted (along with things like unauthorised parking, excess motor traffic, etc.).

Results for objective 2) Awareness raising:

- Astino has become a cultural axis. Since 2015, an intense programme of cultural and educational initiatives has been underway, connected mainly to the themes of the landscape, historical-artistic heritage and agriculture (for details, see http://parcocollibergamo.it/File/AlboPretorio/Allegati/1248/allegato_01_delibera_37.pdf). In the building complex, thanks – among other things – to the activity of the local branch of the Botanical Gardens, activities for schools of every age-group and level have been organised, along with courses, educational workshops, science cafés, conferences, and exhibitions. It is estimated that between 2015 and 2019 the activities and events at Astino drew roughly 40,000 people a year, and that the number of visitors in the area is double that figure.

Results for objective 3) Training and education:

- The establishment of an advanced cooking and hospitality training school is presently underway.
- The *Université d'été* (Summer University) has been realised, for the promotion of the values of the European Landscape Convention.
- A master course in Landscape Studies is being planned with the Universities of Weihenstepahn, Florence, and Bergamo, and the Milan Polytechnic.
- The global G7 agriculture meeting was held at Astino on 14-15 October 2017.

A project in progress: future scenarios

In short, the character of the Astino Valley, which is near the city but which, in contrast to other basins in the Bergamo hills, has not undergone significant urban development, makes this site a landscape of outstanding value for the city and for its cultural events. This is an area increasingly integrated with the planning of soft connections between Astino and the cultural framework of the city and of the landscapes of the Bergamo hills. The forest and the surrounding countryside have thus entered into the city, becoming a harmonic and fully integrated part thereof, in an equilibrium between past and present.

Starting from these results which have already been attained, the project has already outlined a concrete prospect for further development. Plans have been made to further extend the historic crops, by encouraging small landowners who do not yet adhere to the APAB and to the Ethical Commitment Statement to adopt the Astino model. The project intends to pursue the recovery of the area's rural context, starting from the *Castello dell'Allegrezza*; plans for this are moving apace with the university archaeological activities (which will provide also professional training for disadvantaged actors – for instance, training for stratigraphic experts). The synergy between university research and landscape formation will be reinforced. The agricultural businesses operating in the area are to be made more competitive and better integrated with city's supply chain. Most importantly, Astino will strengthen its commitments to projects that put landscape quality above all. The very decision to take part in the competition has aided it in this respect, by making it possible for Astino's management to adhere ever more to the values expressed in the European Landscape Convention.

IV. RESPECT OF THE CRITERIA OF THE ATTRIBUTION OF THE AWARD

13. Sustainable territorial development

Is the project part of a sustainable development policy?

Does it contribute to the enhancement of environmental, social, economic, cultural or aesthetic values of the landscape? How?

Has it successfully countered or posed a remedy to any pre-existing environmental damage or urban blight? How?

1) Sustainable development

This project is part of a policy of sustainable development based on a “balanced and harmonious relationship between social needs, economic activity and the environment” (European Landscape Convention).

Social needs

The project began from the social needs of Bergamo's population, from the relationship between Astino and the city: through the regeneration of Astino, the city gained access to a large orchard and garden within the city limits, accessible by foot or by means of soft mobility. The local inhabitants have gained access to a regenerated landscape and new economic opportunities, thanks to the activities undertaken by various agricultural companies. Particular attention has been paid to the needs of young and disadvantaged people: stable activities have been undertaken which could well prove to be a territorial arrangement capable of enduring over time and of permanently modifying civic and social relations, as well as the use of the landscape.

The social needs of the population have also been fulfilled from the cultural point of view, which has been developed harmoniously with Astino's environmental side. Astino's landscape stems from the centuries-old interaction between man and nature: by recovering the monastery complex as a cultural axis, the project brings the monastery back to life in the heart of the valley thanks to educational and cultural activities connected to the landscape. In addition, the project has been entrusted to the Fondazione della Misericordia Maggiore, founded in 1265 as a philanthropic confraternity for the assistance of Bergamo's sick, prisoners and poor. The Fondazione has since become an identity-defining institution for the citizens of Bergamo (today, the private-law foundation is governed by a Board of Directors whose advisers are nominated by the *pro tempore* mayor of the Bergamo City Council). The contribution of the Fondazione della Misericordia Maggiore has strengthened the bond with the place's spirituality.

Environment

Concerning its method, the project began with a Strategic Environmental Assessment (see the MIA website for the complete text), which dedicates part of its analysis and evaluation to “sustainable development” (p. 53 of the Strategic Environmental Assessment), and which identifies the “criteria of environmental sustainability” (p. 186): the aim was to ensure that “the choices made through the Plan Agreement are sustainable in all the environmental components that characterise the territory” (p. 5); the evaluation of sustainability has therefore been undertaken since the very beginning of the planning. This has entailed the definition of specific objectives in terms of environmental sustainability, which are periodically monitored (protection of soil quality, minimisation of land consumption, efficiency improvement in the consumption and production of energy, limitation of waste

production, protection and enhancement of naturalistic areas, protection and development of urban and extra-urban ecological corridors, increase of the water quality and reduction of its consumption, protection and enhancement of historical and architectural assets, protection of the landscape, limitation of atmospheric emissions, limitation of acoustic pollution, limitation of exposure to electromagnetic fields, recovery of the equilibrium between buildings and open spaces, protection of the health and well-being of citizens, promotion of communication and public participation).

The landscape of the Astino Valley is part of an ecological network in the *Parco dei Colli* (Park of the Bergamo Hills), and it is fully integrated with it. Thus, ecological corridors have been planned for the preservation of biocenosis. Overall, by augmenting biodiversity, promoting organic crops and excluding industrial agriculture, and preserving the valley's biocenosis through, among other things, the presence of SIC areas, the project increases the area's resilience and its capacity for regeneration.

In addition, the anthropic pressure has been the subject of much reflection. The project does not intend to exclude all human presence but, on the contrary, seeks to promote it in a non-invasive way. For this reason, cars are allowed in the valley only up to an indicated parking and reception area, located some few hundred meters from the monastery; this has been planned according to environmental mitigation standards and in a location that will not interfere with the visual enjoyment of the landscape. Traffic has been restricted in order to promote forms of soft mobility.

The Environmental Strategic Assessment has therefore assessed environmental sustainability in detail, ensuring that internal factors (anthropic and agricultural pressures) do not affect the regenerative capacity of the ecological network.

The choice to implement exclusively organic farming, in pursuance to the guidelines of the environmental assessment plan, thus constitutes a fundamental point for reinforcing the environmental value of the landscape.

Economic activity

These measures stem from reflection on the project's economic sustainability. First of all, the public-private model permits optimisation in locating and using the funds necessary for the realisation of the project. The realisation of catering and reception points contributes to guaranteeing the sustainability of the initiative in the long run. The durability of the project is, however, guaranteed above all by the agricultural development of the area, in such a way that the enhancement of the environmental and landscape features of the area is connected to economical productivity. In particular, the development of organic agriculture, undertaken by farmers who adhere to ethical principles in their activities (thanks to the Ethical Commitment Statement), has had a decisive impact on the short supply chain.

The agricultural project of Astino primarily entails the identification of ways to promote the valley's agricultural products and to enhance the short chain. The use of a collective label to identify the organic food from the *Val d'Astino*, the identification of spaces in the valley for setting up display/sales points for the farming products themselves, and the synergy between the agricultural producers and the catering services offered in Astino, are all actions that go in this direction.

In this way, a "strong" form of sustainability is aimed at, one that satisfies the needs both of current generations and of future ones (therefore, a sustainability planned to endure in time), which is also capable of increasing and improving environmental resources.

2) The project as a remedy to environmental and urban degradation.

It should be noted that, despite the millennial tradition of Astino, the area was in a state of advanced degradation prior to the beginning of the project. In the 1970s, the buildings

appeared dilapidated: the roofs of the monastery and of the Allegrezza tower had collapsed and the structures in the complex were in a state of abandonment and ruin. The local agriculture was not planned with the identity-defining and aesthetic value of the landscapes in mind, and corn was still prevalent as a monoculture in the 1990s. The corn monoculture diminished the mosaic of crops and grape terraces that had characterised the historical landscape. The forest areas, too, enjoyed no protection before the constitution of the *Parco dei Colli*, and the network of trails that crosses them was in state of abandonment. The population of Bergamo no longer visited this area; it was used as a simple road axis for quickly reaching the city. The small population that still lived there was no longer able to enjoy the environmental context. In addition, there was the threat of a planned golf course, which would certainly have closed off the area to the public. Moreover, since the 1970s, before the establishment of the *Parco dei Colli* and of special urban planning restrictions, urban expansion was a foreseeable outcome that would have definitively compromised the area's landscape. The protest raised by the population against these projects initiated the first phase of recovery. The new project has saved this area from degradation – an area with a fundamental relationship with the city, cemented over the centuries. Astino, which stands as the true green heart of the city, had been threatened with urbanisation schemes and a withdrawal from private use; it has now been restored to communal use and protected, along with the richness and complexity of its landscape.

With the conservation and restoration of the complex, which has been returned to its original splendour, and with the recovery of the grid of cultivations that characterised the valley, the high aesthetic value of the landscape, which was menaced by degradation and the advancement of commercial monoculture, has also been protected. In particular, the monotony of the corn monoculture has been broken by introducing a variety of colourful and aesthetically valuable crops (such as flax, grape vines, olives and horticultural plants and fruits). Aesthetic results have also been achieved through the restoration of the traditional geometries created by the system of dry-stone walls and terraces, which had been eroded by industrial agriculture, and to the recovery of the dilapidated structures (the monastic complex and farmhouses).

14. Exemplary value

Can the project be considered of exemplary value? Why?

Which are the good practices that it implemented?

The Astino Project could be considered exemplary for many different reasons:

1) The system of public-private partnership governance and the socio-economic development of the landscape.

Astino is a good example on account of its construction of a complex governance, founded on the involvement of multiple public institutions, together with collaborators capable of guaranteeing broad public participation, such as associations, museums, and parks (MIA, *Parco dei Colli*, *Associazione produttori agricoli biologici della Valle d’Astino* [Association of Organic Farmers, APAB], Botanical Gardens: cf. § 15).

The MIA Foundation has succeeded in creating a broad network of public figures, who participate in the project in a lasting rather than episodic manner. Among these is the University, which guarantees continual scientific support for the project. This involvement confirms that the existence of a common aim – the creation of a valley of biodiversity – can bring about the formation of tight-knit groups, able to overcome the natural tendency towards solitary action. In particular, three legal steps completed this governance: first the

Memorandum of 2007, then the Plan Agreement of 2017, and finally contracts with farmers through the Ethical Commitment Statement.

This kind of governance has had a strong impact on various sectors. A decisive step came with the involvement of the APAB. The valley's farmers, a fundamental resource for the vitality of the valley's landscape, have been involved through contracts with special clauses aimed at the general goals of respecting the environmental, social, economic, cultural and aesthetic values of the landscape. The drafting of the Ethical Commitment Statement has thus been crucial. Essentially, the strategy of the MIA has been to consider the agricultural landscape of Astino as a sort of commons, to be protected through the institution of a coherent system of rules and controls (on the basis of the economic model for the commons proposed by Elinor Ostrom, Nobel Laureate in Economy in 2009).

2) From the periphery to the green heart of the city.

The Astino Project offers an important opportunity for reflection on the regeneration of city outskirts and green belts, by building an environmental stronghold in the heart of the city. Indeed, through a series of ambitious actions which integrate the landscape into regional and town planning policies and cultural, environmental, agricultural, social and economic policies, the Astino Project intends to put this green area at the heart of the urban system, by explicitly reflecting (in particular in the 2017 Plan Agreement) on the “connection with the historic city centre”. Astino is thus transformed (or becomes once again) the centre of the urban ecosystem, on account not only of its conservation of biodiversity, but also of the presence of citizens and the recovery of the identity-defining dimension of this landscape for the city. To this end, soft mobility is being promoted, based on the realisation of best practices such as the recovery of trail networks and pedestrian and cycling paths up to the city centre, and the creation of traffic-free zones.

3) Biodiversity, between history and innovation, and the agricultural development of the landscape.

Integrated action has been taken to preserve and promote biodiversity, through conservation actions in forest areas, the promotion of food-biodiversity, and the promotion of organic farming methods and traditional crop varieties. From this point of view, the exemplary nature of the Astino Project resides in its protection of biodiversity not in a static-conservative way, or in a neo-ruralistic one, but rather by integrating tradition and innovation in close connection to the city. The organic cultivation of species that characterised the historic countryside is being developed with careful attention to technological innovation. Fundamental to this is the above-mentioned creation of a local branch of the Botanical Gardens as a centre of research and agricultural innovation, where 1000-1200 traditional food varieties are cultivated. Moreover, the MIA Foundation has encouraged programmes of agricultural research and experimentation directed towards the development of particular traditional crops. This has been done based on specific agreements, such as the Memorandum of understanding stipulated with *Linificio* and *Canapificio Nazionale s.r.l.* The project “Lino ad Astino: tradizione cultura e innovazione” (Flax at Astino: Tradition, Culture, and Innovation”) has, for example, allowed for the reintroduction of the cultivation of linseed and hemp in the valley.

Much attention has been devoted to commercialisation through the short supply chain, thanks to the creation of a label for local growers: in this case, too, the reconstruction of the organic relationship with the city becomes a positive factor of fundamental importance. In short, cultivation methods rise to meet the challenge of contemporary agriculture, promoting agricultural biodiversity and implementing crops of great biological and cultural value, which might enter a short supply chain connected to the catering services provided in the restored

building complex as well as in the city. Astino thus enhances the agricultural aspect of the landscape, which is further reinforced by large-scale initiatives like the G7 meeting on agriculture: as a result, while the strategy to develop the agricultural dimension of the landscape is fully integrated into the framework of contemporary society, this dimension also represents the recovery of a fundamental characteristic of the historic landscape, including that of Astino, which in past centuries was regarded above all as a food resource.

4) The integration of man and nature.

The conservative restoration of the monastic complex has been approached in relation to the rural context that the monastery itself has shaped: the abbey has not been viewed as a historical container, fit for any use, but as a significant historical landmark, to be re-inserted into the landscape that Astino itself has produced. Astino in this way becomes once again the linchpin for the protection of the area's biodiversity. The Astino Project has not only guaranteed the conservation of an area of extremely high environmental value just outside the city, but has also guaranteed the recovery of a millennial ecosystemic equilibrium, in which the landscape is the outcome of the historical interaction between man and nature. Astino once again takes up its role as the driving force for biodiversity within the valley, not least thanks to the cultural transmission ensured by the various members of the project.

Ultimately, Astino may serve as an example and model for recovery measures in the suburban landscape or in urbanised areas, where the environmental dimension has for centuries harmoniously coexisted with the human shaping of the landscape.

15. Public participation

Does the project actively encourage the public's participation in the decision-making process? How?

Is the project in line with the wider policies implemented by national, regional or local authorities?

1) Astino and the population of Bergamo.

Even during its phase of abandonment, in the course of the 1900s, the local community was always aware of the identity-defining value of Astino's landscape. As the local inhabitants were already well aware of the importance of this landscape, both State and local authorities, starting in the immediate aftermath of World War II, took a series of pioneering measures to protect it, issuing building restrictions as early as 1951. These policies were reinforced in 1977, when the regional government established the *Parco dei Colli di Bergamo* (Park of the Bergamo Hills). These restrictions generally prevented unchecked development, yet not the progressive social and environmental deterioration of the area, which on the one hand risked being closed to public access and, on the other, witnessed the spread of corn monoculture. The inhabitants, through a number of associations (*WWF*, *Italia Nostra*, the *Longuelo* neighbourhood association) mobilised to safeguard their landscape at the most critical moments, as for example in the 1985 protests against the construction of a golf course in the area.

2) The project's public governance.

The project emerges from the desire to restore the public use of this landscape, which was in a state of decay and which risked being put to private use. This restoration has occurred through the construction of a system of public governance, beginning in 2007, with the

deployment of a public-private partnership through the agreements between the city and the MIA Foundation, and then with the Plan Agreement, underwritten in 2017, which involved, apart from the City (which participated with its Botanical Gardens) and the Foundation, *Società Val d'Astino* (whose sole shareholder is the MIA Foundation), the Regional Government, the Provincial Government, and the *Parco dei Colli* in a broad system of coordination of public and private actors. This agreement stipulated public involvement and participation as its indispensable condition. In 2016 the APAB association was founded, which brings together organic farmers who make use of traditional cultivation methods in the area.

3) The involvement of associations and citizens in the project's decision-making process.

The decision-making process has broadly involved both the local and regional authorities responsible for conservation, but also the socio-cultural associations that since the 1980s have urged for the recovery and development of the Astino Valley. In particular, starting in 2007, the project has incorporated certain proposals and statements of the associations, as in the case of the contributions proposed by *Italia Nostra* in its letter to the city of 7 October 2007.

In the formulation of the decision-making process envisaged by the Plan Agreement of 2017, the public, which would be affected by the environmental actions, has been engaged. In particular, the following interested subjects were first of all identified: the principal agricultural associations present on the Park territory; those environmental associations recognised at the national level (*WWF*, *Legambiente*, *Italia Nostra*, *Lipu*); the *Consorzio di bonifica per la media pianura bergamasca* (the Consortium for the Reclamation of the Bergamo Central Plain); the professional associations of the province of Bergamo (architects, engineers, surveyors, agronomists); the CCIAA of Bergamo; and the Bergamo Diocese. Other actions communication and advertising actions have been planned, to promote active participation on the part of the citizenry and to encourage anyone interested to collaborate in the project, by submitting suggestions and proposals.

4) From protection to planning.

The project coherently found its place within the early decisive policy of protecting the area, in a period in which sensitivity towards the value of the landscape in Lombardy was still largely lacking. Such action was guaranteed by the constitution, in 1977, of the *Parco dei Colli*, which in 1984 prescribed the conservation of the area in its *Piano Territoriale di Coordinamento* (Territorial Coordination Plan). Also in the same period the city enacted the first laws to prevent uncontrolled development within the Astino territory, with particular attention being paid to the building complex and the valley in the detailed plan of 1981. Starting in 2002-2003, thanks to the studies carried out by the University of Bergamo, a request for the official recognition of the environmental value of the Astino and Allegrezza woods was made. These were finally acknowledged as Sites of Community Importance (SCI) in 2006, at the very dawn of the project (they were then recognised as Special Areas of Conservation in 2017). This system of restrictions and plans was however insufficient to prevent the degradation of the area. The project, launched in 2007, finally permitted the realisation of the detailed planning necessary to pass from restrictions to the recovery, enhancement and development of this landscape.

5) Respect for and assessment of regional, national, and European environmental goals.

The project has entailed a close interaction between local and regional authorities, based on the 2017 Plan Agreement. Moreover, the project falls within the framework of national policies, and not just on account of the presence of an SCI and to the conservationist

recovery work carried out in agreement with the *Soprintendenza Archeologia Belle Arti e Paesaggio* (Superintendency of Archaeology, Fine Arts and Landscape). It has also been subjected to a Strategic Environmental Assessment, as is shown by the report written to this effect in 2017, aimed at “safeguarding, protecting and improving the quality of the environment; protecting human health; and using natural resources in a prudent and rational way”, and to an Impact Assessment focusing on the already existing SCI. In other words, the project has undergone assessment by national and regional environmental authorities, and has been shown to respect the regional, national and European objectives in this area.

16. Awareness-raising

Is the project effectively increasing public awareness of the importance of landscape in terms of human development, consolidation of European identity, or individual and collective well-being? How?

1) Astino as a centre for the promotion and enforcement of the values of the landscape and of European identity.

The overall aim is to make Astino a point of reference as far as landscape is concerned, on the local, regional and European levels.

Not least through the presence of the Botanical Gardens, a plan for cultural activities for schools of every age-group and level has been realised, along with a calendar of events for families and the broader public that includes courses, educational workshops, science cafés, conferences, exhibitions, and specific displays. Among these, an exhibition dedicated to viticulture across the centuries is now being completed, through the recovery of five terraces. Particular attention has been paid to intergenerational dialogue, as in the case of the event “Nonni vi presento Astino” (“Grandparents, Let Me Introduce You to Astino”, 2 October 2019), in which primary and secondary school children recounted to their grandparents some of the curious events that have happened over the past centuries at Astino.

This rich offering of educational and cultural events has made Astino a privileged destination, at both a local and regional level, above all on weekends. Moreover, the multidisciplinary higher education initiatives and related seminars contribute to promoting the values of the European Landscape Convention, as well as training for specialists in landscape appraisal and operations. In particular, among various other events, *l’Université d’été* is held annually. This seminar has now reached its seventeenth edition, and aims to promote the values of the European Landscape Convention.

Certain initiatives of global relevance, like the hosting at Astino the of the G7 meeting on agriculture, have reinforced the role of the site in the promotion of biodiversity.

Finally, a master’s course in Landscape Studies is being planned with the Universities of Weihenstephan, Florence and Bergamo, and the Milan Polytechnic.

2) The aspects connected to individual and collective well-being and social development: the area's inhabitants, citizens, the local community, and disadvantaged groups.

Individual well-being has also been pursued on various levels. In the first place, the inhabitants of the valley, who have newly laid claim to a space which had fallen into a state of marginality and disuse, now find themselves living in a high-quality landscape, not only from an aesthetic point of view, but also from the point of view of health. The community as a whole has benefited from this. Citizens have seen this area, which lies within their municipality, become newly connected to the city; no longer, however, through car routes

cutting through it at great speed, but thanks to a network of trails and cycle and walking paths conceived according to the soft mobility model. Astino has been included in the initiatives connected to the Smart City project of Bergamo, and these have brought Wi-Fi coverage. The integration of tourist, recreational, cultural and educational services, available in the valley through its agricultural production and the development of its agro-food products, allows its “users” to enjoy the landscape, by “immersing themselves” in the culture of the place: in this way, the consumer experience is transformed into an opportunity for cultural and social enrichment. Finally, individual well-being has been promoted, not only by making Astino into a treasure-trove of nature, culture and biodiversity open to collective enjoyment, but also through pathways into the labour market for disadvantaged persons – who thanks to the cooperative have been involved in various agricultural activities – and through targeted initiatives to give the families and the children of the city access to vegetable gardens. Moreover, the spaces that have been recovered are available for use as meeting points for various associations (*Teatro dei bambini* [Children's Theatre], Summer school, oratories, Scout meetings etc.). Finally, on-site sales are organised for the agricultural products of the valley, with the possibility for customers of directly harvesting produce.