



INTERREG IVC PROJECT PERIURBAN PARKS

Component 4: Methodology Testing and Regional Action Plans

Final Report Template

Pilot Area	Prato municipal Periurban countryside area
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Part 1: Contact Details

1. Pilot Area

Name of person responsible for Pilot Action	Maria Clelia Mele (Regione Toscana) Luca Radicati (Regione Toscana) David Fanfani (University of Florence)
Telephone	Tel. 055/4383954 - fax 055/4383116 Tel. 055.438.4280 -- fax 055.438.3116 -- Cell. 339.2922368 +39 0574 6552299 (Phone/fax) +39 3476631494 (mob)
Email	mariaclelia.mele@regione.toscana.it luca.radicati@regione.toscana.it David.fanfani@unifi.it

2. Peer Review Groups

Partner	Consejería de Agricultura, Pesca y Medio Ambiente, Junta de Andalucía
Name of person responsible for Peer Review	José Ramón Pardo de Donlebún Quijano
Telephone	0034 954 78 72 08
Email	jramon.pardo@juntadeandalucia.es

Partner	Lille Metropole Space
Name of person responsible for Peer Review	Jérôme Pohu
Telephone	0033 3 59 00 31 34 Cell : 0033 6 82 73 23 78
Email	jpohu@enm-lille.fr

Partner	Regione Lombardia
Name of person responsible for Peer Review	Maria Pia Sparla, Parco Agricolo Sud
Telephone	+39 02-7740 3461
Email	mp.sparla@provincia.milano.it

Part 2: Information on Project Activities

The current template is a tool for elaborating the final report of the pilot partner and peer review activities. It therefore compiles the partners' contributions formulated in the work plan and peer review templates according to the fields below.

1. Overview of Pilot Area

Provide a brief description of the chosen pilot area, including key characteristics (abstract of relevant aspects mentioned on Work Plan: size, typology of park, level of development of park, main functions, main strengths and weaknesses):

The pilot area is placed in the west sector of the Parco della Piana mainly in the countryside area of Prato Local Council but, at the same time, the position of the area is very important as it connects the rural area of Prato Local Council with that of the local councils of Campi Bisenzio and Signa and, in this way, with the rest of the Parco della Piana area. The area encompasses around 900 hectares of arable land and shows remarkable continuity in terms of agricultural exploitation and farms presence, landscape and environmental values to protect and recovery. Furthermore the area offers a possibility to connect the Etruscan archaeological area of Gonfienti – situated in the north-east of Prato local council - with the Medicean Historical Farm of Cascine di Tavola, in the south of Prato territory.

2. Methodology

According to the Methodology Sections you had selected under field 3.2.a of your Work Plan, please shortly describe the Methodologies implemented in your contribution to component 4:

Management/relation to surrounding area

- The pilot project guidelines were shared with the Local Council of Prato, the surrounding councils and the Provinces of Florence and Prato. The main project features and goals were especially defined and debated with the officers of the councils of the Parco della Piana Area. Dedicated design sessions and visits on the field were organised with the local administration and peer partners in the context of a specific design meeting carried on with the participative charrette method.
- A participative design approach was applied and integrated even for the involvement and shared design process with local stakeholders, especially in the prospect of project implementation (Farmers Association and singles farmers, environment and cultural association, public utilities delivering agencies, public technicians).

Policy/regulatory aspects

- Policy aspects refer especially to the need for integration between the various public sectors appointed to pursue specific actions in their own specific field of activities. The periurban project calls for integrating public policies and projects in order to achieve better effectiveness in results and to preserve periurban environmental and agricultural values (i.e. integrating infrastructure, environmental protection and rural development actions). For that reason the participative design meetings were organised with the presence of many public sector office responsible and operating staff members;
- At the same time, the governance setting favourable to the best policies implementation was pursued, with the involvement of concerned stakeholders in the design process

Environmental/rural aspects

- The pilot project's main features concern the ecological and landscape regeneration of the area especially pointing out to the role of new nature based agricultural exploitation methods. The farmers were asked about their availability, interest and willingness to change their current farming methods and assets towards more qualitative and multifunctional forms, accordingly with the aim to achieve a more attractive, and healthy rural environment, fitting with new activities related to tourism, quality food delivering and leisure activities;
- This first main point of the project, related to a new, sustainable agriculture, was carried on along with the request to the public administration and offices to pay particular attention to water system management, starting from storm rain control up to the civil and industrial sewage system. This was in order to pursue the basic requisite of enhancing the water quality and quantity of the "blue network" of the pilot area.

Economic aspects

- The pilot project aims to pursue an overall improvement of the countryside environment and landscape as requisite but even as a tool to develop new economies related to rural hospitality and tourism, food quality production and direct selling, creation of short food supply chains related to the proximity urban market.

The economic viability of the project is a founding feature of the project itself that is aimed to pursue and demonstrate the economic self-sufficiency and viability of periurban parks policies. Two pilot farms were tested in order to define new multifunctional exploitation features fitting with the prospect of multifunctional and periurban agriculture.

Infrastructure aspects

- The connection between the fringe areas of east side of Prato with the Medicean Farm of Cascine di Tavola, obtained with the creation of cycle and pedestrian tracks, yet planned in the public documents of Prato municipality, is the physical prerequisite of the pilot project. Such a track support, as a sort of backbone, the connection of the area with the surrounding Parco della piana slow track systems, with the cycle tracks of Prato Municipality – closing the missing link of the actual ring – as well as the accessibility both to the rural area and to the existing farms. Furthermore, starting from these features, the project foresees the creation of new

Park gates for park services in the neighbourhood of Prato, close to the village of St. Giorgio a Colonica, and in the historical public park of Cascine di Tavola, using one or more of existing historical rural buildings to be restored and refurbished.

3. Obstacles

How were the aforementioned Methodologies used in order to face the Weaknesses and Obstacles described under section 3.2.b addressed by the aforementioned methodologies selected?

The main and initial obstacles and weaknesses addressed by the project in the pilot areas were mainly related to:

- The difficulty in achieving a common concept and/or vision of the park area between public bodies, stakeholders, and residents;
- The weak role which farmers play in defining the aims and goals in countryside preservation and financial support for farming in public policies;
- The farmers weak awareness about the business opportunities stemming from the closeness of urban market for their productions;

The integration of various public and private actors and stakeholder in the charrette design session, organised both with the peer partners and with local subjects, allowed to best deal with such problems.

Thanks to the participative design approach quoted above, fed with some survey activities and reports, the lack of awareness on behalf of public administrations concerning the role and importance of periurban agricultural areas, both in terms of environmental and economical aspects related to agricultural and tourism as well, was addressed. Stakeholders were shown the opportunities and values of the periurban areas.

From this point of view, the methodological economic approach that stresses the relevance of multi-functionality in maintaining and developing periurban agriculture, increased the awareness of the economic role for farmers and their self confidence, and their feeling to be finally listened.

The multidisciplinary and multi-sector approach proposed in the methodology was helpfully applied in coping with the need to integrate policies carried on by different sectors such as environment/agriculture, spatial planning/rural development, urban development/environment regeneration, etc;

At the same time the collaborative atmosphere and the skills developed during the design session could be an important step forward in posing the condition for the testing and development of a solid agreement and management structure in order to implement and manage different areas of the park (e.g. public/private partnership, park agency, multi-actor coordination procedure, etc.).

Finally, the slow accessibility multifunctional network proposed by the guidelines of the pilot project was of interest in addressing the current lack of farmland accessibility by visitors. That was especially worthwhile in order to deal with the related difficulty to achieve awareness, on behalf of the urban citizens and visitors, about the possibility of spending there their free time and, at the same time on behalf of the farmers, about the income increasing stemming from the matching of the park visitors demand with food production and rural tourism services activities.

4. Actions

Please provide a description to what degree the Actions selected under Part 4 of your Work Plan were appropriately designed and duly carried out in order to implement the Methodologies selected as well as to face the Weaknesses / Obstacles mentioned above.

- Survey activities, related to deepening knowledge about the environmental quality and problems of the area and on historical and cultural values, properly fed into the shared design process with stakeholder and public technicians and public councilors;
- The Charrette shared design session allowed for a better contribution on behalf of the peer partners – starting from their various and rich experiences- about ways to deal better with some of the main problems in regenerating the periurban pilot area;
- Afterwards the public design meeting, held with local stakeholders, technicians and public administrators of the local councils of the Parco della Piana, further enriched the design first draft guidelines, and pointed out new ideas and problems to be dealt with. It increased willingness and involvement on behalf of the farmers and, at the same time, awareness of the matters at stake on behalf of the other public and private participants;
- Finally, thanks to the positive impact of the shared design activities on all the participants, the idea to define a farms network structure to promote, at local level, and with the support of the regional, local government and farmers associations, some integrated entrepreneurial projects in the field of rural development was developed. It is worth noting that the owners of the existing farms offered their willingness in order to promote, in collaboration with farmers associations, skills formation actions aimed to young people interested to undertook agricultural activities. That promoting formation of theoretical and practical activities, even with stages in the farms, aimed to foster quality and nature based agriculture and short food supply chains that could enhance the landscape and nature values of that part of farmland area, which probably represents the more meaningful one in the context Parco della Piana Area.

How has it been secured that the various project activities are in line with the project scope and the methodologies selected?

That kind of coherence was constantly monitored on behalf of Tuscany region partner, either with periodic meeting of the Tuscany periurban staff and with the exchanges and advices obtained on behalf of peer partners.

5. Stakeholders

In what function have the stakeholders (chapter 2.2 of Work Plan) been involved into the actions (actively/passively) and what has been their qualitative contribution?

The role of the stakeholders promoted by the Tuscany periurban staff was – as shown from the previous paragraphs - active and pro-active. The participative and inclusive design method is a witness to that.

The qualitative contribution, especially on behalf of the farmers, was to point out the main problems and (sometimes hidden) opportunities in developing new multifunctional farming methods fitting with the slow cycle/pedestrian track proposed in the project and the kind of cultivation activities that they could helpfully develop for the park area improvement and, at the same time, for the farm economic viability.

What did the stakeholders qualitatively achieve through their participation at the project activities?

They obtained the awareness that, finally, they could play a new role in the decision making process concerning the periurban countryside protection and development and, that, new more rentable farming methods could be supported by the public government.

Please specify which kind of knowledge has been transferred between project partners and stakeholders and what was the result of this:

Visit on the field during the Charrette meeting allowed the peer partners to exchange advice and knowledge about the experience of leading periurban agriculture activity. Peer partners' advice focused especially on changing cultivation methods and suggesting farmers to promote agrarian rotation and cultivar more related to the food local market. The result consisted in enhancing the farmers' awareness about the opportunity to pursue more environment friendly, economically profitable and qualitative exploitation assets.

6. Peer Reviews

To what degree and in what fields did the peer review partners upgrade the overall planning process? What was their input used in the component 4 activities of the pilot partner?

The contribution of the peer partners was important in feeding both the design shared process and the substantive matters to deal with and to address during the project definition. The peer partners advice were especially meaningful especially on:

- Rationale, method, priorities and phases in involving stakeholder and public actors for an effective design process and project implementation;
- Matters and problems to address in order to best trigger the project implementation (e.g. local development matters, human health promotion, attractiveness of the territory);
- Role of the slow track network as a tool aimed not only to serve the internal park connection functions but, at the same time, to promote and deliver steady green network connection urban nodes as "gates" of the park.

7. Results expected - Indicators

How can these results be quantitatively and qualitatively specified?

Long term expected results concern both the material infrastructure/service for the park realized as well as the "immaterial" rural and tourism development process. This should come about thanks to the new qualitative farming orientation supported by the new accessibility achieved for the park area.

In the short term and as a direct result of this project, the partner stresses the importance of this project in showing the local population that the Parco della Piana is not just policy and talk, but also concrete facts. It is vital to show citizens that this part can generate important benefits to them and, to do so, we need to start with very concrete actions aimed to generate things that can be seen and touched.

The participative design process involved around 150 people, including the peer partners and the officers of the two provinces and of the eight local councils involved by the Parco della Piana Project. All these people participated to the three shared design meetings that were organised by the Regional Government of Tuscany. Furthermore, for the project definition, some surveys on the field were carried out, with the direct involvement and of 10 farms that were interviewed and to which a detailed questionnaire was submitted. Out of

these farms, two collaborated in the definition of a detailed project for the reorganisation of their production features, according to agro-environmental methods.

This first pilot action laid the ground for a regional call for proposals in the Parco della Piana, which takes forward the coordination role that the Regione Toscana has played within the pilot project. The pilot project in fact guided, delivering the main points to pursue with the call, the preparation of the call itself. The calls, whose procedure finished in July 2012 with the approval of the classification, encourages local councils and provinces of the Parco della Piana Area to create new facilities for the Park development, especially related to accessibility, hospitality and knowledge services for visitors, and to promote economic activities especially for the production of typical edible quality products fitting with the agro-environmental and cultural nature of the Parco della Piana. The calls of Regione Toscana provided 60% co-funding of the total amount for 17 project proposals for a total amount of 6 MI/€.

Among the projects presented for the call and financed, three particularly – proposed respectively by the Province and the Local Council of Prato – are included in the pilot area and will take forward the work initiated within the PERIURBAN project.

The list of funded projects has just been published and projects will get underway soon.

Please, define progress indicators for this scope (except quantitative numbers of products):

Accordingly with these kind of expected result we can define a first set of indicator to be applied during the process implementation but that, at the moment –considering the stage of the project itself- were not tested yet.

Nevertheless we can define a first set of short term indicators with the aim of testing the pilot action effectiveness:

- Establishment of a stable multi agent forum for shared analysis and design between local administrations, Tuscany region, association, and stakeholders (especially farmers),
- Number of farms and associations involved and participants to the forum meetings;
- Definition and implementation of single projects connected to the pilot area goals framework;
- Quantity of farmland converted to organic and nature based farming methods.

Indicators for the longer term results can be summarized as follows:

- Km of slow country tracks developed or recovered and made accessible;
- Number of farms connected by the new country track;
- Number of visitors hosted by the new park gate and by the farms involved in the project;
- Increased quantity of water running in the channels network;
- Plants or land use Biodiversity indicators (e.g. Shannon index) improvement;
- Animal biodiversity proxy indicators (e.g. ecological networks)
- Quality of surface water indicators (e.g. SECA)
- Income increasing for the farms involved in the project;
- Increasing of farms or tourism/agriculture employed number
- Variety of cultivations improvement in the farms involved in the project;

Part 3: Conclusions

8. Results achieved

What results have been achieved through the implementation of the aforementioned actions? Please, quantify and qualify according to the aforementioned indicators:

As explained above, at this stage of the project it isn't possible to make an appraisal of expected long term results that concern in the project the creation of accessibility infrastructure and related hospitality facilities for the park.

Nevertheless some short term result can be appreciated yet and they are illustrated at point 7 above.

Which of the aforementioned actions and results were presented at the project meeting in Brussels?

At the project meeting of Brussels the start-up phase of the project was illustrated and, consequently, the project area main features, the main problems and goals preliminarily identified, and the design process structure.

Which of these actions and results were presented at the project meeting in Kosiče?

At the Kosiče meeting activities carried out with the peer partners were illustrated and debated and especially the lessons learnt from the partners during the Charrette meeting held in April with them. Those referred especially to:

- Importance, from the outset of the project, to involve stakeholders and public agents in a shared vision for the area (analysis and project goals) and in awareness enhancement about those;
- Clear definition of the process and of the action plan steps;
- Involvement of the stakeholders in the management of the project action and activities;
- Pivotal and pro active role of the farmers in pursuing environmental and landscape improvement and financial supporting of farmers initiatives;
- Importance of brand and reliability promotion policies in promoting farming activities and attraction for tourism;
- Necessity of a management agency (even in a «light» PPP form) to set out and implement the actions and in promoting stakeholders involvement and willingness even with technical stewardship activity

Which of these actions and results were presented at the project meeting in Lille?

In Lille were presented the actions undertaken with the local stakeholders accordingly with the lesson learnt and result of the first Charrette meeting with the peer partners.

These actions were mainly referred to the second shared design meeting that was organised in June in the Urban Centre of Prato, involving local stakeholders, public authorities and technicians of the Parco della Piana area, association concerned and single farmers.

The exposed results especially outlined the growing awareness and willingness on behalf of the farmers in being involved in proactive design and development process.

The meeting had a sequel with the promotion of productive activities that were considered of more interest. That especially with the support of Tuscany region experts aimed to best address the productive assets of the farms and to establish concrete way of involvement of young people interested to undertake agricultural activities related to the promotion of the Park area.

9. Methodologies

To what degree are the Methodologies selected put in practice (Please, provide quantitative and qualitative specification)?

As explained in the framework of point 7, some first results of the design process, especially in terms of relation to the local administration policy framework and stakeholders involvement, were achieved and are remarkable. Related to that and in a longer timeframe it is possible preliminarily identify some performances indicators for each methodology matters with possible related indicators and, in some cases, first results.

Methodology section	Indicator	Results
Management/relation to surrounding areas	Involvement and real participation of other municipalities members	All 8 local councils and 2 provinces participated in the design and debate meetings with stakeholders, Attention was addressed to the creation of a PPP for the park management and development.
Policy/regulatory aspects	Integration between different sector advices and representatives	Sector technicians, stakeholders met and compared their owns different approaches and matters related to the periurban areas
Environmental/rural	Biodiversity improvement; land use diversification, parcel for organic agriculture;	
Economic	Total budgetary improvement of the farms; employment and new economic activities creation Public project s funding	Around 1 Ml/€ for project in the pilot area
Infrastructure/accessibility	Km of slow track developed; number of park service points activated	Signposting funding on behalf of Tuscany Region in 8 municipal areas concerned by the Parco della Plana project

Which conclusions have to be drawn by comparing the actions carried out with the project's objectives, the Common Methodology (Toolkit) and the Good Practices developed?

Did the contribution of peer review groups or stakeholders lead to concrete policy modifications, concrete actions and the usage of specific funding sources? If yes, please describe them.

In general the PERIURBAN project has served to generate debate about a key subject: the definition of a periurban parks. At the outset of the project, the areas considered by the partners were often assimilated with natural parks; a classification that does not take into consideration the wealth of characteristics and opportunities that they represent. Furthermore at the onset the project had to preliminary deal with the remarkable institutional, juridical, lexical and planning differences of the partners' contexts in order to agree on a shared methodological approach for policies and park design.

After 3 years of exchange, fitting into a EU context that was ripe for this debate, partners have developed and shared and clear understanding of the periurban park as a territorial infrastructure that provides a range of services in periurban areas submitted to strong urban

pression.

The partners have worked hard to ensure that their parks become periurban parks and that spatial planning in these fringe areas is given a focal position on planning. These vast areas, whose survival is greatly at risk from urban sprawl, should be actively included in planning. Before, green fringes, in urban and regional planning policies and tools, were considered marginal. Now, people are starting to view them differently.

This because they can support real functional service that connect the various part of the territory and that represent, at the same time, remarkable biodiversity values. Furthermore they enhance the economic, social, environment values of the rural periurban areas, especially in contexts where urban growth was determined more by the real estate sector than by real economic development needs.

The methodology toolkit helped, as well, to deepen the matters about which could be the more effective tools aimed to pursue stable and coordinated actions in order to manage these complex and rich areas. The project results and peer partners collaboration clearly pointed out that an inclusive and deliberative governance method and related formal structures –aimed to support and enhance public and stakeholders participation and proactive action- would be the best method in order to coordinate with effective policies the multisector nature of periurban park areas.

These are some important legacy of the project.

The Common Methodology toolkit represents a helpful guide in order to address with good approximation the main problem fields concerning the periurban parks design, creation and management. The theme it defines fulfils in a quite satisfactory way the knowledge and skills demand that arise when the problem of periurban parks is tackled and developed in the public policy agenda.

Although their knowledge about the pilot was quite limited, the peer partners' review was pivotal in order to better define the project goals and actions. Through this contribution also the preliminary action in the pilot area was made more effective. Otherwise, considering the stage of project implementation, it seems to be too early to identify concrete influence of the peer partners' advices in policy goals changing and in the individuation of specific funding sources.

Based on the aforementioned conclusions, in what points could the Toolkit (Common Methodology) be improved? Please formulate concrete text passages which could be directly included into the Toolkit document:

Please provide at least one concrete example which testifies the feasibility of the selected methodologies, the potential obstacles and how to overcome them, also including the estimated costs:

About the Policy aspect the feasibility of the methodology selected is related to the strategic opportunity to create a Public private partnership (PPP) in order to act in a strategic way for the park project definition and implementation, via participatory and strategic approach.

Obstacles to this activity could consist of the difficulty with the various sectors interact between themselves as well as of the not easy availability on behalf the public administrations to give up some other organisation of their own managing prerogatives. Furthermore, in this moment, public budgetary cuts strongly hamper the creation of new, although lights, expense centers.

Estimated costs for such an agency in a vary length form with max thee officers employed –

encompassing administrative and technical skills - supported with tools and spaces lend by the public administration, would not overcome the 90.000 €/Y

10. Future Collaboration

Please, identify areas of potential future collaboration. Please, describe models for bilateral or multilateral cooperation and describe the entities from outside the project who have been constantly involved in project activities or who should be involved in the future and why:

The EU project has provided vital input to the development of Parco della Piana and the partner fully intends to maintain contact with all peer review partners.

Related to the kind of problems that the Parco della Piana has to cope with, there is peculiar interest in the Parco Sud Milano and Lille Metropole Nature experiences. At the same time the formative initiatives promoted during the last year by Fedenatur, aimed to promote and deepen in Europe the knowledge on Periurban Parks, resulted of strong inters in sharpen the knowledge about the good practices.

Moreover, thanks to the project, the partner has made contact with another area undertaking similar actions to those in Parco della Piana (Glasgow and Clyde Valley Network Partnership, who is developing a wet land park that represents an interesting example of a periurban park and, therefore, of a green infrastructure). This experience was presented at a project meeting and contact has been maintained since them. Indeed, 2 representatives recently visited Tuscany to share experiences and discuss possible cooperation opportunities, particularly in the field of water management.

In general, while EU cooperation is important, the real collaboration must lie at regional level. With the Regione Toscana playing a coordination role, the local councils and provincial administrations in the Parco della Piana area must continue to work together. Beside it isworth noting that, through the coordination by Tuscany Region, Periruban Project offered to the municipal technics an European level opportunity of formation and knowledge on periurban parks matter, hardly achievable for a single local administration.

The Regione Toscana is evaluating means of doing this (the above-mentioned funding for projects being part of this).