

## WORLD HERITAGE LIST

### Portovenere/Cinque Terre (Italy)

No 826

#### Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Portovenere, Cinque Terre, and the Islands (Palmaria, Tino, Tinetto)
<i>Location</i>	Province of La Spezia, Ligurian Region
<i>State Party</i>	Italy
<i>Date</i>	28 June 1996

#### Justification by State Party

This Ligurian coastal region, from Cinque Terre to Portovenere, is a "site" as defined in Article 1 of the Convention. It is a unique example of the creation of landscape that is the work of humankind and nature.

The natural landscape and that of human settlements as we know them today has come down to us thanks to the assiduity and perseverance over the years with which humans have repaired the stone walls surrounding the cultivated fields.

Monumental constructions have also been subject to restoration, so that on the one hand the additions of several periods have been handed down to us and on the other we have preserved the oldest parts of them, so that we can now consider this area of territory as a particular portrait of the history, the economy, and the life of the communities of Liguria.

The characteristic form of the slope of the mountain, modified by human hand, is comparable with that of certain landscapes in the Andes: steep terraced slopes which follow and intermingle with centres of habitation.

The clustering of the compact centres of population on the coast also recall some of the islands of the Aegean. The legislative protection of the landscape and of the monuments has ensured that the sites have been defended against speculative building.

The site nominated for the World Heritage List has outstanding universal value from the historical and anthropological points of view, because it comprises a geocultural region where a small number of people have changed their natural environment profoundly

over a millennium using special agricultural techniques.

Despite this continuous struggle between humankind and nature, it is here that the unique character of the site can be seen, with the contrast between the wild and impenetrable nature of the Mediterranean *garrigue* and the controlled order of the geometry of terraced fields, still maintained by a small group of people.

The cultural landscape of Cinque Terre bears unique witness to a living civilization, and to a cultural tradition now menaced by economic crisis and by that of the social values of the peasant society. That society has been penetrated by models of life far removed from those which supplied the basis of the landscape, founded on the self-sufficient patriarchal family, united in their work and their lives, on rural activities as the only source of profit, on work linked with manual labour and the use of traditional agricultural techniques and recovered materials.

Criteria iii, iv, v, and vi

#### Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is, as the State Party points out in its "Justification" above, a *site*. It is also a *continuing cultural landscape* as defined in paragraph 39(ii) of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (1997).

#### History and Description

The area that is the subject of this nomination covers some 15km along the extreme eastern end of the Ligurian coast, between Levanto and La Spezia. It is a very jagged, steep coastline, which the work of human beings over millennia has transformed into an intensively terraced landscape so as to be able to wrest from nature a few hectares of land suitable for agriculture, such as growing vines and olive trees.

The human communities have adapted themselves to this seemingly rough and inhospitable nature by building compact settlements directly on the rock, with winding streets. The general use of natural stone for roofing gives these settlements a characteristic appearance. They are generally grouped round religious buildings or medieval castles. Their small harbours provide shelter for the boats used for the other traditional activity, fishing.

The five villages of Cinque Terre (the name of its famous wines, which received an *appellation contrôlée* in 1973, but were given this name as early as the 15th century) date back to the later Middle Ages; there are resemblances between them, but they also have their own socio-economic characteristics. The cultivation terraces that typify much of the Cinque Terre landscape, some of them extending as much as 2km in length, were mostly built in the 12th century, when Saracen raids from the sea had come to an end. The drystone walls are most often carefully

constructed of sandstone blocks, bonded together with beach pebbles. It is estimated that 130m<sup>3</sup> of walls per hectare of vineyard and 30-300m<sup>3</sup> per hectare of olive grove are now in need of urgent reconstruction.

Starting from the north, the first of the Cinque Terre is the fortified centre of *Monterosso al Mare*, on the top of St Christopher's hill, which first played an important role in the 7th century, during the Lombard invasions. After being disputed over by different noble families during the Middle Ages, it threw in its lot with the Republic of Genoa. It is a coastal town in a valley, its most prominent features being the church of St John, built in 1244, with its bell-tower, originally an isolated watch-tower, the ruins of the old castle, and the 17th Capuchin monastery which dominates the town.

Next comes *Vernazza*, founded in 1000 by people living on the Reggio hills. It became part of the Republic of Genoa in 1276. The houses are built along the *Vernazza stream* (now culverted) and up the slopes of the rocky spur that hides the village from those approaching it by sea. Narrow streets run down to the main street, which opens out into a small square looking out over the sea. Here the church of St Margaret of Antioch is a typical example of Ligurian Gothic.

*Corniglia* is the only one of the villages of Cinque Terre that is built not on the coast itself but on a high promontory. It is dominated by the church of St Peter, built in 1334.

Further south, *Manarola* is a small hamlet established in the 12th century by people coming down from the mountain village of Volastra. Its houses are ranged in part on a rocky spur running down towards the sea and partly along the (now culverted) Grappa stream. A group of religious buildings - the church of St John the Baptist, the free-standing bell-tower, and an oratory - are all of 14th century date.

The most southerly of the villages is *Riomaggiore*, another medieval foundation. Its houses line the narrow valley of the Maggiore stream (also now covered). The village is dominated by the church of St John the Baptist (1340) and the castle, construction of which began in 1260.

*Portovenere* is an important cultural centre. Among the remains to be found there are those of a large patrician Roman villa on the coast at Varignano and a Benedictine monastic establishment with a fine proto-Romanesque church dedicated to St Peter, on the Arpaia rocky promontory, which was later surrounded by a Gothic construction. In the town, below the Castle there is a second church, with both Romanesque and Gothic elements, dedicated to St Lawrence.

The town is a Roman foundation, *Portus Veneris*. It was occupied by the Genoese in 1113. It is compact in form, giving the appearance of a fortified town, culminating in the Doria castle (early 12th-16th centuries), which dominates the settlement and is an

historical palimpsest, with many traces of its medieval predecessor.

Off the coast at Portovenere are the three islands of *Palmaria*, *Tino*, and *Tinetto*, which are noteworthy not only for their natural beauty but also for the many remains of early monastic establishments that they contain. *Palmaria* and *Tino* have a strategic military function because of their proximity to the NATO base at La Spezia across the gulf of the same name. Because of the restricted access (*Tino* may only be visited once a year) their natural environments are especially well protected.

One final point should be noted. This landscape has attracted many writers and musicians, among them the English Romantic poets Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron, the French novelist George Sand, and the German composer Richard Wagner, as well as Italian artists and writers.

The area was almost inaccessible, except by sea, until the Genoa-La Spezia railway was built in the 1870s, passing through all the villages and Portovenere. This coincided with the building of the Arsenal at La Spezia, which provided alternative employment for the local people. From this time onwards there was a gradual change in the socio-economic basis of life in the Cinque Terre and Portovenere.

The flora and fauna of the nominated area is of interest. The natural *garrigue* and *maquis* vegetation survives intact in the higher parts of the steep ridge. They intermingle with one another in areas of abandoned cultivation terraces, providing a flora of exceptional quality. The nature of the terrain and of the vegetation provide food and shelter for a wide range of insect and animal species.

## Management and Protection

### *Legal status*

Individual buildings and urban ensembles within the nominated area are protected under the provisions of the basic Italian cultural property protection Law No 1089 of 1939. The entire area of the communes of Cinque Terre and Portovenere are covered by the basic Law No 1497 of 1939 on the protection of natural and panoramic beauty. As a result, all interventions require the approval of the relevant national heritage organizations.

Regional Law No 12/1985 is concerned with the protection of areas of natural environmental interest. Regional Law No 12/1995 designated the area as part of the Regional Natural Park of Cinque Terre (*Parco Regionale Naturale delle Cinque Terre*); this brought with it compliance with the provisions of the national Law No 394/1991 on protected areas, which imposes stringent controls over all forms of activity within the designated park. A proposal for the creation of a marine reserve along much of the coastline is currently being studied by the Italian Parliament.

### *Management*

Water resources, coastal waters, railway lines, and main roads are the property of the Italian State.

Secondary roads belong to the Province of La Spezia, whilst minor roads and public buildings and open spaces belong to the relevant commune administrations (Monterosso, Vernazza, Riomaggiore, and Portovenere). The whole area of cultivated terraces and woodland and all the dwellings are owned by many private individuals.

Overall supervision is the responsibility of the national Ministry for Cultural and Environmental Property (*Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali*), working through its Ligurian *Soprintendenza* based in Genoa. This body works closely with the Provincial Administration of La Spezia, the relevant commune administrations, and the administration of the Regional Park.

Protected buildings such as the churches of St Peter in Portovenere and St Venerius (Tino) and the Castle in Portovenere are the subject of systematic restoration campaigns by the *Soprintendenza*. There are also regular maintenance programmes for all the protected monuments.

There are strict limitations on the establishment of tourist facilities. No new hotels will be permitted outside those existing in Monterosso and Portovenere. The commune administration in Riomaggiore is investigating the possibility of providing bed-and-breakfast facilities. It is also providing subventions to permit the refurbishment of viticulturists' huts on the terraces to provide simple tourist accommodation.

Whilst there is no management plan *per se* for the nominated area, the various forms of statutory protection ensure that the *status quo* of the cultural and environmental heritage of the area will not be further disturbed, and that the threat from speculative investment for mass tourism that loomed large in the 1960s and 1970s is now permanently averted.

It should also be noted that there is a Regional Plan for Landscape Coordination, resulting from Regional Law No 431/1985, which operates at regional, provincial, and municipal level, and that each of the commune administrations has its own plan.

There is also no buffer zone. However, this is not deemed to be needed, given the nature of the terrain that surrounds the nominated area on the landward side.

## Conservation and Authenticity

### *Conservation history*

Conservation as such has not been practised in the area until the past twenty years. This was a region that was difficult of access where the cultivation of vines and olive trees continued in the traditional way, as it had for a thousand years. However, in the 1870s economic changes led to the decline of these activities (see above), and there has also in recent years been the threat of an extension of the tourist industry from the western part of the Ligurian Riviera.

The railway does not have an adverse effect on the landscape. A section of the Litoranea, a coastal highway linking La Spezia with Levanto, and thence on to Sestri Levante, was built between Riomaggiore and Manarola, but work then came to an end. A decree of 1986 resulted in the decision being taken not to complete this road.

The economic decline was reversed by Government aid in order to revive viticulture and to increase its productivity, through the introduction of monorail systems to transport produce on the steep slopes (replacing or supplementing the traditional footpaths and donkey tracks), the creation of an effective water-distribution network for the terraces, the restoration of ruinous drystone walls (so as to prevent eventual catastrophic landslips that would jeopardize the villages themselves), and the creation of co-operatives. There was no attempt to bring back into cultivation those terraces that had been abandoned for any length of time.

The declared aims of the protected zone of Cinque Terre by the Ligurian Regional Law No 12/1985 are to ensure the preservation of its natural and cultural values, to promote public knowledge and understanding, and to contribute to the social and economic development of the inhabitants. The programmes in force over the past decade have contributed, and continue to contribute, significantly to the achievement of these aims.

### *Authenticity*

This is a continuing organic cultural landscape, as defined in paragraph 39 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*. As such, its authenticity rests on the extent to which the traditional way of life has been preserved without significant loss, despite pressures from modern socio-economic development. In these terms, the authenticity of the Cinque Terre nominated area is indisputable, and the protection measures now in force will ensure that this continues.

## Evaluation

### *Action by ICOMOS*

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the property in February 1997. ICOMOS also benefited from the advice of its International Committee on Historic Gardens and Sites.

### *Qualities*

The Cinque Terre nominated property is a remarkable cultural landscape created by human endeavour over a millennium in a rugged and dramatic natural environment. It is an outstanding example of "the combined works of man and nature," as described in Article 1 of the World Heritage Convention.

### *Comparative analysis*

It is difficult to conceive how the parameters might be drawn up for a comparative study of landscapes of this type, which are known to exist in other parts of the world. It may be claimed with confidence,

however, that this is one of the most exceptional landscapes of its kind in the Mediterranean.

*ICOMOS recommendations for future action*

There is a potential risk to this property from tourism, which could be exacerbated by eventual inscription on the World Heritage List. ICOMOS therefore urges the State Party to ensure through legislation and management that its essential qualities are protected and maintained.

At its meeting in June 1997 the Bureau referred this nomination back to the State Party, requesting detailed information on tourist management, legal instruments and mechanisms, and community involvement to preserve the characteristics of this cultural landscape. When this evaluation was sent for printing (early September), no reply had been received to this request.

**Recommendation**

In the event of the supplementary information requested by the Bureau being received and favourably evaluated by ICOMOS before the Extraordinary Meeting of the Bureau in November 1997, it is recommended that this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria ii, iv, and v*:

The eastern Ligurian Riviera between Cinque Terre and Portovenere is a cultural site of outstanding value, representing the harmonious interaction between man and nature to produce a landscape of exceptional scenic quality that illustrates a traditional way of life that has existed for a thousand years and continues to play an important socio-economic role in the life of the community.

ICOMOS, September 1997