



Regional SWOT Analysis

WP 3 - Action 3.3.1

PP6 - LAMORO Local Development Agency

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*THEmatic Transnational
church Route development
with the Involvement of
local Society*



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Description of the pilot area

The pilot area includes the territory of three municipalities of the province of Alessandria: Bosco Marengo, Sezzadio and Cassine.

Bosco Marengo

The surface of the town is 44 km² with a population of 2,550 inhabitants. The municipality is located in the park of the River Po and Orba.

Bosco originated during the Roman Empire as Media Silva, but the Lombards changed the name to indicate the dense forest where the village stands. Later it became a fortress with strong walls, a moat surrounding them, three archway gates and 12 towers the last of which is the current bell tower of the Church of Saints Peter and Pantaleon. Under the Spaniards, the walls were torn down and remained only the ramparts of the fort that we still admire today. The Marquis of Bosco participated in the founding of Alessandria, which was built on land owned by them.

In 1865 the acronym of Marengo was added, a near village famous for the battle of Napoleon.

In 1566 Antonio Ghislieri, a native of Bosco, was elected Pope and took the name of Pope Pius V Boschensis. Pope Pius V remains the only pope from Piedmont in history.

Sezzadio

The surface of the town is about 34 km² with a population of 1,320 inhabitants. It is located in the plains of Alessandria, on the right of the Bormida river, by the river Stanavazzo.

The origins of the name "Sezzadio" is widely debated in historiography. Some attribute the name "Sexadium" to a town far six stages from the Via Aemilia Scauri, which connected Piacenza in Ventimiglia. Presumably Sezzadio originated in the second or in the first century a.C., as the land befitted for agricultural exploitation by the Romans. We might also think that Sezzadio was born around in 109a.C. as a "staging post" where Roman travelers could let the horses rest before continuing their journey.

Around 934, in Sezzadio, was born Aleramo, founder of the Marquis of Monferrato.

Sezzadio had a distinctively feudal print and people often had to suffer invasions and devastation due to the relationships between the various feudal lords.

In 1799 it was conquered by the Austro-Russians and the population suffered many privations of food and money because of military troops.

After the battle of Marengo 14 June 1800, Sezzadio returned as part of the French domination and the population had to undergo other costly contributions.

Cassine

Cassine is a town of about 3,050 inhabitants, with an area of about 34 km².

The name Cassine binds to name “ad Cassinas” indicating the presence of “cassi”, i.e. barns or stables complex with houses, or even farms with buildings for the cows. Archaeological evidence found in the municipality witnesses an attendance in the Neolithic period and the Bronze and Iron Age. Roman finds indicate settlements of rural type. Cassine is documented in the acts of the Emperor Otto II in 985 and 995. In 1161 is part of the fiefs of William of Montferrat and is described as a “oppidum with walls, towers and a castle on the hill”. Free Commune in sec. XIII, then passed alternately between the Marquis of Monferrato and the Duchy of Milan and to the latter, finally, in 1535. It has been the seat of military clashes during the wars of Monferrato between French and Spaniards. In 1644 the castle was destroyed by the French. In 1707 it was annexed to the dominions of Savoy. The old town is full of medieval testimonies with religious and civil buildings.

A - SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

Aspects to be addressed:

- situation of SMEs, characteristics, specializations;
- quality of agricultural production, natural resources;
- quality craftsmanship, tradition, experience;
- real estate market;
- loans to businesses;
- employment / unemployment;
- new entrepreneurial actions, market dynamics, opportunities for cooperation, links between activities, areas of development;
- possibility of skilled labor;
- type of population, immigration-emigration (age, qualification ...).

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Diversified manufacturing	Inability of farmers to systematize	Good number of companies	Presence of criminal organizations
Industrial excellence at an international level	Inability of farmers to do business and fragmented initiatives	Possible recognition of the territory as UNESCO Area of Interest (World Heritage Site)	Progressive depopulation of small towns
Agriculture with long tradition	Sluggish real estate market	Proximity to Novi Ligure, Europe's most important confectionery hub	Economic crisis at national level
Valuable products (wines)	Difficulty in maintaining competitive small shops	Considerable flow of visitors at the Serravalle Outlet (about 5 million per year)	Market in mature phase and much more selective about the relationship quality / price
Quality agricultural products and niche products (honey, melons)	High cost to the municipality for the maintenance of services	Further enhancement of local food and wine products	Steadily rising cost of living as on the whole Italian territory
Handicraft quality production (bakery as a art)	Progressive aging of the population	Spreading of piedmontese culture through specific actions of cooperative marketing	Difficulty in perceiving the real strengths of some provinces of the region from the point of view of tourism
Increase of female entrepreneurship	Shortage of social welfare services		Pollution
	Less interest in crafts by the new generations		

The territory of three municipalities has a good reality of production. All three municipalities have a dedicated industrial area, away from the center of the municipalities, a benefit for the environment and traffic. On the territory of Bosco Marengo 51 companies have developed in various industries: metallurgy, textile, construction, food, graphic arts, paper processing, handicraft production of wood and iron, health and social care for the elderly and children. In Cassine there are cutting-edge industries in the mechanical engineering industry for the production of machine tools (grinders), in the construction industry with a furnace of clay, with mining and supply of concrete, with production of prefabricated floors and trading of construction materials, in the furnishing sector with production of kitchens, furniture and awnings, in the logistics sector with transport companies. In Sezzadio stands a firm in the mechanical sector, companies in the handicraft sector, in the maintenance of green areas and gardens, garages, shops, and a furnace for the production of bricks.

A common feature is the presence in all three municipalities of industries operating in the international arena. At Bosco Marengo *Metlac SpA* (it is among the most important producers in the world in the field of paints used in the domestic production of metal containers for the food and for the external decorations of metal packaging) and *Mangini SpA* (it is an important reality at national and international level for the production of candies).

At Cassine the *IMT SpA* (integrated solutions for grinding) is a company of international importance, as well as *Novembrall Imballaggi srl* in Sezzadio.

In all three cases, companies have an impact on the employment situation in important ways: IMT and Novembrall each provide about 110-120 local recruitments.

Agriculture remains the main vocation of the territory. Bosco Marengo is characterized by the cultivation of cereals. Sezzadio is experiencing a shift away from the long tradition of viticulture. Cassine confirms a well-established tradition in wine and cereal production. Also important is the collection of honey, from acacia flowers mainly present in the forests of the area. There are also nurseries for the cultivation of flowers and vegetables.

Also of importance is the rearing of pigs and cattle.

Sezzadio (the least populous of the three communes) complains of a lack of ability of the farmers in doing business: there are small plots of land cultivated with poor products and agriculture becomes in most cases an expensive hobby that does not contribute to the growth and competitiveness of the territory.

The real estate market is currently in a recession, in line with the national trend.

The immigrant population is about 10% of the population. Immigrants come mainly from Romania, Morocco, Macedonia, Ukraine, Senegal.

The immigrant population is employed principally in the construction industry, in agriculture and in care services and assistance to the person.

The use of renewable energy is still limited: there are home photovoltaic systems owned by private individuals and a biomass plant.

The second regional hub for incidence of foreign artisan of entrepreneurship is the province of Alessandria, particularly in the areas corresponding to the capital (19.7% of the total), Acqui Terme (16.8%) and Novi Ligure (13.8%). In general, the “weight” of companies with foreign owner is grown in all the territories of the Region, in this sense, the craftsmanship of Piedmont is increasingly designed to gain a multi-national physiognomy, becoming a key channel for the integration of many families of foreign origin. Companies that have experienced a contraction are concentrated among those with the people of the younger demographic classes (“up to 30 years,” and “between 30 and 44 years”). The only exception is the branch of business services, the increase of which is also found among “under 30”entrepreneurs. The senility artisan entrepreneurship is related both to the lower consistency of demographic cohorts following the baby-boom generation is the change in attitude of the entrants in the labor market. During the period 2004-2008 Piedmont women’s entrepreneurship has grown by over 3,000 units (+2.9%). The incidence of women-owned businesses within the whole is equal to 23.7%, in line with the Italian average of 23.4%.

We find “Artisans of excellence” in the wood and restoration sector, in addition to artists currently working in the fields of metals, glass, stone and the like, tapestry, embroidery, food. Also in the area of iron, wood and ceramics, again, we find all materials typical of the Piedmont tradition of craftsmanship. The only real distinctive specialization of the province of Alessandria is handcraft jewelry - albeit characterized by reorganization phenomena that are resulting in growing difficulties often ruinous for the handcraft component. Also the production of fabrics and wool has reached very high levels and international awards. In Alessandria was born the production of Borsalino hats, known all over the world. The production of fur felt hat is historically ‘piedmontese’ and still today resists the hand crafted production especially for particular products such as the top hat.

B - ROUTES AND ACCESSIBILITY

Aspects to be addressed:

- existent touristic and cultural routes;
- tourist attraction;
- quality of tourism: type of interests (culture, gastronomy, events ...), duration, origin ...;
- placement of the religious heritage: the situation of roads, railways ...;
- transport;
- accessibility of the sites: structure of the area, accessibility to the elderly, young, disabled people

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Quality local products, food and wine tourism	Inability on the part of the various actors of the territory to systematize; fragmentation of initiatives	Opening of the new Predosa highway exit	Public funds for tourism promotion are shrinking
Consolidate local traditions (festivals and events)	Insufficient promotion by the agencies and related only to the product 'Marengo'	Picturesque landscape	National economic crisis
Good accommodation capacity	Packages targeted to attract tourists are missing	Places of strong historical evocation	Difficulty in perceiving the real strengths of some provinces of the region from the point of view of tourism
Proximity to the main motorway networks	The involvement of the tour operators is insufficient	Considerable flow of visitors to the Serravalle Outlet (about 5 million per year)	
Alessandria –Acqui Terme and Alessandria - Savona railways		Proximity to the spa town of Acqui Terme	

Three municipalities are in good position with respect to the motorway networks (the junctions of reference, Novi Ligure and Alessandria Sud, are located about ten kilometers from the centers). In 2014 it will be also inaugurated a new highway exit (Predosa) that will make traveling easy.

We refer to niche (food and wine) and familiar tourism.

Each town has its own tradition of reference with an event that draws people to the local level.

In Bosco Marengo during the summer season are held a variety of artistic events, predominantly lyrical, called "Cantiere musicale" accompanied by themed dinners organized in the Monumental Complex. For nearly two

decades takes place on the first weekend of September the feast of the rooster and Marengo chicken (historic dish associated with the figure of Napoleon Bonaparte).

In Sezzadio are held musical concerts and a food and wine festival.

Only Cassine with the MEDIEVAL FESTIVAL (first weekend in September) seems to turn to a broader audience: Cassine has joined the network of Italian cities for the promotion of the Middle Age places and cultural tourism. The collaboration with the DAMS (Disciplines of Art, Music and Performing Arts University) cares also the reenactment of medieval dance.

As for the Piedmont region, also the online reputation of the territory of Alexandria is strongly related to wine and food tourism, besides the presence of trekking paths and trails that branch throughout the province. Among the five tourist-cultural routes of the province, we remember "Sulle vie del Sacro", which includes over thirty sacred monuments, including the Abbey of Santa Giustina di Sezzadio, the Church of San Francesco di Cassine and the monumental complex of Santa Croce in Bosco Marengo.

The territory of the province of Alessandria maintains an extensive network of routes (a network of trails that stretches for almost 1,500 km) consisting of footpaths, bridleways and country roads which, when recovered, can be an important resource for the hilly and mountainous areas. Often this network of paths is undervalued or even unknown to fans who, for hiking, traveling go to other regions.

The Department of Tourism has completed another project linked to the discovery of the territory of Alessandria: "Percorsi nel Monferrato", a series of fifty trails divided by themes (Fine Dining, Arts and Culture, Sport and Nature) downloadable via the computer, on the GPS or mobile phone (www.turismo.al.it). Soon there will be the establishment of a provincial tourism consortium that will be able to communicate with the tourist in a direct and fast way, taking advantage of the new technologies to create ad hoc "packages".

Established in 2004, the "Department of Parks and Paths of the Province of Alessandria" among its expertise is in charge of the exploitation of areas of natural interest and valuable lands, the relations with the parks and protected areas and census, enhancement and promotion of the provincial trails. The large amount of data collected by the staff of the Assessorship, made up of over 10,000 digital photos, tracks of the paths, mapping data of valuable elements of the natural environment and studies on vegetation and fauna is an important asset to the knowledge of the province and such information is collected and cataloged in the "Banca Dati del Paesaggio", a database of landscapes, constantly updating and in expansion.

The Piedmontese Via Francigena: an itinerary of history, a main route travelled in the past by thousands of faithful people that from Europe made pilgrimages to Rome, the heart of Christianity. Today, the francigena routes in Piedmont are suggestive paths of faith, but also routes suitable for all, and good excuses for tempting tastings.

In Bosco Marengo is the Natural Reserve of Orba river. This protected area was established to safeguard certain portions of riparian forest still intact and involves two distinct river segments of the flat course of Orba river. The first is characterized by the presence of small oxbow lakes with rich marsh vegetation and tall trees and is located upstream of the town of Predosa. The second one is located further downstream and comprised within the main banks, it includes a flood plain segment which encompasses natural and cultivated areas and lies in the area between the villages of Retorto, Bosco Marengo and Casalcermelli. During the spring – summer period, along the lines of natural shore, the river is home to a large group of colorful birds, such as kingfishers and bee-eaters, which nest on the steep slopes digging their nests in the ground. The vegetation is varied and diverse: shrubs, willows and poplars occupy the outer areas of the riverbed, while in the higher and dry areas cereal crops are interspersed with small woods. Over a thousand years ago, on the slopes of the river was developed the famous Selva d'Orba, an extended area that over time suffered significant deforestation due to agricultural activities of the Cistercian monks and timber requirements for the shipyards of the Maritime Republic of Genoa.

In Cassine is the old county road to Maranzana with path: North Bormida Valley state road in Reg. S. Anna up to the wooded area in the town of Alice Bel Colle with a length of about 3.00 km. There are trails not well equipped but easily passable. At the moment, recreational vehicle parks are in the planning stage but not yet realized.

C - HERITAGE AND CONSERVATION

Aspects to be addressed:

- architectural, scenic, archaeological, historical, cultural heritage (tangible or intangible: music, literature, traditions ...);
- state of preservation of monuments;
- conservation strategies-maintenance actions;
- landscape-related assets;
- models of management of the estate;
- funding opportunities;
- local or regional marketing strategies.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Large number of historical monuments	Architectural heritage needs conservation and maintenance	Considerable flow of visitors at the Serravalle Outlet (about 5 million per year)	Progressive shortage of public funds for the maintenance of architectural heritage
Presence of natural reserves and areas of preservation of natural and cultural heritage	High cost of maintenance of the architectural heritage	Private involvement in the actions of maintenance of historical assets	Progressive shortage of public funds for the promotion of tangible and intangible heritage
Strong local traditions and strong territorial identity	Accentuated localism, inability to systematize	Growth of cultural tourism in the province of Alessandria	
Territory strongly characterized by a historical point of view	The historical centers emptied in recent years have different maintenance problems	Possible recognition of the territory as UNESCO Area of Interest (World Heritage)	
Rich mesh of historical, natural and gastronomic routes		Proximity to the spa town of Acqui Terme	
		Close link between the architectural heritage and the natural heritage, particularly Sezzadio	

There are important areas of natural reserves and safeguarding zones of cultural heritage: the “Area of Protection of the wood “Le Sorti La Commona” in Cassine (area of exploitation of natural resources and landscapes and recognized as a site of regional importance) and “Garzaia” in Bosco Marengo, natural reserve of Orba river with headquarters in the old mill kept in good condition to protect the environment of the meadows and the recovery of the river itself.

The tangible and intangible cultural heritage is highly important.

Bosco Marengo is home to the "Complesso Monumentale di Santa Croce e Ognissanti". Just ascended the papal throne in 1566, Pius V promoted the construction of a Dominican monastery dedicated to the Holy Cross and All Saints. According to the intentions of the Pope, the building stood as the center of a new city, encompassing the two villages of Bosco and Frugarolo. The church was also intended to serve as a tomb for the Pope. Designed by Ignazio Danti, the works continued under the direction of Martino Longhi. The church, one of the main monuments of the late Piedmontese Renaissance, reflects the spirit and rigor of Pope Pius V. Noteworthy the marble mausoleum of the Pope and the carved wooden choir. In the monastery we can see the two cloisters and the impressive library. The complex consists of the church, located on the east and the convent buildings. The Latin cross church of the late Renaissance has ten chapels flanking the nave. The cloister has the fresco decoration of 1676 of Giovanni Battista Carlone depicting "Three stories of the life of St. Dominic de Guzman". Despite the destruction and dispossession suffered over the centuries, the complex still has valuable works: the "Last Judgement" and the "Adoration of the Magi" by Giorgio Vasari, a wooden choir with stalls carved by Angelo Marini, the Mausoleum of Pope Pius V (unfortunately marred by separation of the funerary urn) and numerous works of artists of the end of '500. The convent, suppressed by Napoleon in 1815 was intended to accommodate a veteran leader of the French and later used for various purposes: warehouse, military ophthalmic hospital and eventually turned into a reformatory. It currently houses the World Political Forum founded in 2002 by Mikhail Gorbachev. The complex is run by volunteers and is guarded by a keeper. In Bosco Marengo we can visit the house where the Pope was born and other important monuments such as the parish church of St. Peter and St. Pantaleon with the ancient baptistery where he was baptized, the organ of 1800 and the carved pulpit dated late sixteenth century, the one-nave church "Santissima Trinità" of the fifteenth century, the old medieval parish church dating from the eleventh century dedicated to Saint Rocco with frescoes of unquestionable value, the medieval walls, Palazzo Bonelli built around 1570 and an old mill with the adjoining washhouse fed by a canal system.

The Abbey of Santa Giustina was founded by King Liutprand around the year 722 on the occasion of his trip to Italy for the transfer of the body of S. Augustine.

The Abbey was restored and then entrusted to the Benedictines in the early eleventh century by the Marquis Ottoberto. During the Napoleonic era, the abbey was converted into a barn. In 1863 the building was purchased by Senator Frascara who began the restoration of the church. In 1956 there began a further restoration of the church.

The monastery, as it appears today, is formed by the church, a house and some farm buildings.

The church is severe and suggestive in the forms of the eleventh century, with the brick facade interspersed by pilasters and arches.

The majestic interior has three naves, fresco decorations of the Lombard school of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In the left apse there are the stories of the Virgin of the mid fourteenth century, while in the middle apse we can see scenes from the Passion and a Judgment artwork of the early fifteenth century.

The crypt, very impressive, dates back to the time of Liutprand. It is divided into three naves by low and elegant columns, an inscription on the mosaic floor remembers Ottoberto, "repairer of the church".

The bell tower of the eighth-ninth century has been incorporated in the eleventh century one.

Other notable monuments: the Church of S. Stefano or Santa Maria di Banno (founded before 1229), the parish church of Maria Immacolata (Gothic Fiorito), the Old Town Castelforte and the castle of Clelia Borgia.

In Cassine we find the Convent of San Francesco, built by the Friars Minor Conventual Franciscans arrived to Cassine in 1232. The church is one of the few significant examples of Gothic Lombard architecture in Piedmont, with Cistercian branches.

Other important monuments are the Romanesque church of San Giacomo (twelfth century), the Gothic church of San Francesco (thirteenth century) and the Palazzo Zoppi (fourteenth-fifteenth century) with frescoes of hunting and games of 1400. The parishes of Santa Caterina and S. Lorenzo are also baroque (eighteenth century).

D - IDENTITY AND LOCAL COMMITMENT

Aspects to be addressed:

- sense of identity related to cultural heritage
- local commitment: voluntary associations of citizens, politicians, investors (public-private partners)
- involvement of citizens, education
- intent in the long term
- sustainability

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	OPPORTUNITIES	Threats
Citizens sensitive and involved in various associations of cultural promotion	Lack of coordination among the different associations	Growth of cultural tourism	Lack of public money to fund the initiatives of the associations
Particular attention to environmental issues	The associations are often driven by political intent	Possible use of local guides	
Territory with strong historical roots	Privates little involved in initiatives to promote local		
	Lack of an overview that focuses on the public body (commune)		

In Cassine it was established the area of environmental protection “Bosco delle Sorti - la Communa”, remnant of an ancient forest used by the community for timber harvesting until 1869 and then privatized. Now it is used for educational tours and nature walks among trees of great value.

There is a municipal association of social care services for the municipalities ofAlessandria area (C.I.S.S.A.C.A.), which aims to ensure the performance of social care in the municipalities associated, including Sezzadio and Bosco Marengo, in addition to groups of volunteers for the Civil Defense in each municipality.