

Croatia – innovation example 4

DRYSTONE WALLS: KEYSTONE OF MOSAIC HNV

Local action group LAG 5 www.lag5.hr

- **Location:** Croatian coast and islands
- **HNV system:** mosaic agriculture and extensive grazing, mainly sheep on EU Mediterranean grassland
- **Scale of operation:** islands, coast, coastal hinterland of Croatia
- **Timespan:** The origins of the initiative go back to 2002 and is ongoing. Dry stone walls as a farming technique in the islands are over 2000 years old
- **Keys to success:** enthusiasm, EU funding, EU recognition (Europa Nostra award)



Figure 1

Problems addressed by this example

Preservation and restoration of HNV habitats and grasslands. Protection from soil erosion and actions to prevent landscape closure. Transgenerational knowledge transfer and promotion of HNV friendly land management practices.

Respecting the knowledge and skill of our ancestor to manage natural resources in this vast and often arid carst area, making the best of it, we aim to promote sustainable ways of managing land and water resources. The aim is to re-establish dry-stone techniques as an efficient, aesthetic, humane and sustainable alternative to concrete in construction of simple buildings and objects in the Mediterranean, especially in areas such as national/natural parks and protected heritage sites. (Bubalo, 2017)

Story in a nutshell

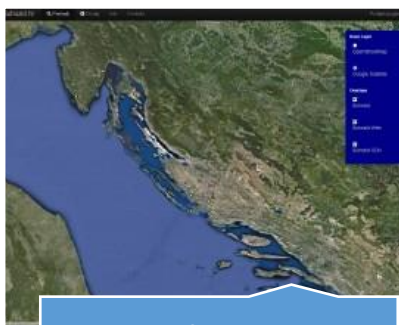
NGO 4 Grada Dragodid is a group of enthusiasts who have established an organization that is promoting and re-actualising the dry stone skill and heritage through workshops, field research and media. They are making links between the bearers of knowledge and the audience: young professionals (agriculture, architecture, construction, tourism, etc.), heritage enthusiasts, tourists.



What do drystone walls and NGO 4 grada Dragodid achieve for HNV farming?



Education on dry stone wall heritage and techniques



Cadaster of dry stone walls of Croatia



Promotion of traditional agricultural landscape

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Achievements

Revival of local knowledge on nature protection and sustainable use of its resources. Creation of a platform for reviving local traditional practices of sustainable use of natural resources and land management.

In the communities where the continuity of agricultural production was broken by the abandonment of the agricultural land during the 20th century, there is a noticeable generation gap between the elder, who are, if still alive, mostly retired, and the younger generations of agriculturists, who are revitalizing the agricultural practices in the new circumstances. Recently, this gap has begun to fill in with the activities of various organisations and enthusiasts that organize workshops and issue printed and digital handbooks and newsletters. Often such actions bring the elder masters “from oblivion”, giving them the opportunity to show their skill and share their knowledge. Promoting the valorisation and protection of vernacular heritage as a growth asset in the region lead us to trans-national partnership with similar organizations, and interdisciplinary collaborations (home and abroad) resulted in UNESCO nomination for dry stone walling on representative list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity. (Bubalo, 2017)

Economics of HNV farming

Data is not available on the economic impact of the programme for HNV farms but the overall mosaic agriculture in the learning area is fenced and managed through the system on several hundreds of kilometres of dry stone walls.

Maintaining or improving HNV values

The programme was not designed to achieve specifically HNV or conservation objectives, but probably had benefits as a result of maintaining extensive grazing systems and reducing scrub encroachment. Potentially the programme could have been adapted to give it a more explicit HNV focus, for example, with greater involvement of the nature-conservation authorities.



Figure 5

How do dry stone walls and NGO 4 grada Dragodid respond to the HNV LINK innovation themes?

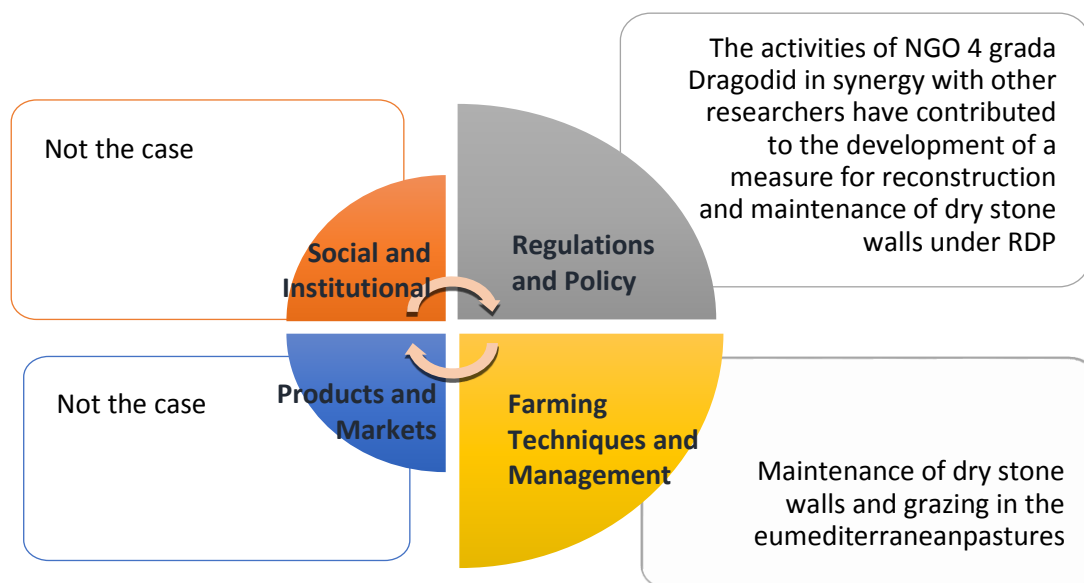


Figure 6 Shows how this innovation addresses the four themes of the HNV-Link innovation framework.

- **Regulations and Policy:** The activities of this NGO that has been working on the promotion of dry stone walls have resulted in policy recommendations and have translated in concrete measures (4.4.1. and measure 10 of the Croatian RDP)
- **Farming Techniques and Management:** Dry stone walls are one of the oldest and most effective ways of land management in the LA of Dalmatian islands. Promotion of this techniques and its transgenerational skill transfer is a key innovation in maintaining mosaic landscape.

The process that made it happen and critical factors for success

- Enthusiasm
- Volunteer work
- Main practitioners of dry stone walls: shepherds, vine and olive growers.

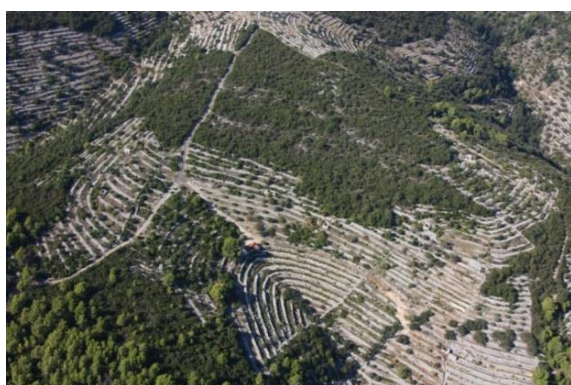


Figure 7



Figure 8

Actors and roles: They key actors were local NGOs and local highly educated youth that wanted to find a way to connect to their heritage but also to be able to ensure its economical viability in the islander area. It was this NGO that opened lines of communication with public institutions and with the “holders of heritage” using formal and informal acquaintances to foster a long term multistakeholders, multi islander platform for sustainable development that is still ongoing.

Institutional context that made it possible: The process of acquis harmonization of the Republic of Croatia and access to EU funding.

Resources: Volunteer work and funding available through different EU programmes.

Processes: The initiative started in 2002 and is still ongoing.

Critical factors for success: *For us as an association, the enabling factors were basically set of circumstances. First of all we all participated in international workshop on the island Of Vis where we were introduced to abandon village of Dragodid and the owner Mr. Andrija Suić, who taught us traditional skills of dry stone walling. Although funding was and still is a problem, our commitment for preservation and DIY aesthetics slowly led us to forming national network of partners (heritage professionals, institutions, local NGOs) and local stake holders. With few national and one international award, it all fell into perfect timing and we were able to create momentum with numerous workshops throughout Croatia and abroad, making this traditional skill very popular on numerous events especially in rural areas. However, there is a need to establish some formal or semi-formal courses in order to make the knowledge and skills available to those who wish to acquire them so as to cultivate their own estates or do it professionally for other, especially now that new measures for rural development (maintaining dry stone walls) have been approved. (Bubalo, 2017)*

Limiting factors, actual/potential problems, and how could they be overcome: Project based funding puts constraints on the number of actions that could be done as they are always unexpected opportunities and constraints for the implementation of the vision proposed.

Lessons learnt from this innovation example, and its potential replication

The dry stone as intangible cultural heritage of humanity is from the start the result of a dialogue among communities, groups and individuals that see the element as something they have in common and wish to cooperate in order to promote its significance and value, and therefore is applicable to every country included in project. By creating a platform for the future cooperation, except being a centre for distributing traditional knowledge, it would create attention to local, regional and national stakeholders of the importance of dry stone walls both as cultural and natural (biodiversity) heritage, and raising awareness of importance of using sustainable and traditional way of maintaining agricultural landscape.

Overall lessons from this example, especially from point of view of HNV farming?

For HNV preservation of traditional landscapes and revitalization of agricultural practices in a way that it answers to the contemporary needs of the locals (incorporation of nature protection, revitalisation of landscapes and sustainable tourism).

Is the innovation unique to its territory and its characteristics, or is it replicable in other areas?

It is an innovation that is replicable and that has been in some extent implemented in other areas.

Could it be rolled out on a bigger territorial scale?

The innovation itself is already being implemented on different scales.

What would be needed to do this successfully?

Ensuring long term financial support as these activities are time consuming and require a lot of man power both in terms of research, education, mapping and reconstruction itself.

Photo credit: NGO 4 Grada Dragodid

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