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THE IFUGAO TERRACES LEARNING FROM CINQUE TERRE

2001 was conceived an international outreach to connect the Cordilleran Rice Terraces World Heritage sites to outside activities. Thus a study tour was encouraged to foster a linkage with the World heritage Centre and connect it to other WH cultural landscapes. The vine terrace landscape of Cinque Terre in Italy was chosen and recommended. In May of 2009, the Philippine delegation composed of Ambassador Preciosa S. Soliven of UNESCO, Arch. Ma. Joycelyn Mananghaya of the Committee on Culture of UNESCO, Ifugao Gov. Teodoro B. Baguilat Jr., Hungduan Mayor Pablo Cuyahon went to Italy to pursue the preliminary stage of the Twinning Programme with Cinque Terre.



Cinque Terre and the Ifugao Rice Terraces are both "organically evolving cultural landscapes". These 2 sets of terraces are both cultural landscapes created thousands of years ago by their ancestors, and to this day are living testimonies to the traditions and cultures of the people and the land that bears them. "These are cultural sites with outstanding values, representing the harmonious interaction between man and nature to produce a landscape of exceptional scenic quality that illustrates the 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", as according to ICOMOS.

The Ifugao Terraces are located in clusters all over the province, stubbornly sitting like immortal statues in pedestals, reminders of the ways of the old and examples to the young. How the province was and the way it is now, all the way to where it would be heading next. These days the clusters are in different shades, most are the browns of the earth and partly watered by nearby irrigations, the mud ripening and awaiting the next "tunod". Then from afar are the pale greens of sparsely planted new rice crops. A few other fields still sway with the wheat-browns of old crops, soon to be uprooted and watered. But proud as they are, the terraces sit, nursing their cracks and aches like dogs licking their wounds. Yet, more and more with age, the terraces suffer. If it was a man, the teeth are falling and the hair starting to fray at the edges. But stay it must.

In the same way Cinque Terre was also. This piece of land is situated at the end of the eastern Ligurian coast of Italy, beyond are the powerful cliffs of the Portovenere promontory. Within Cinque Terre are five major villages surrounded by vineyards and olive landscapes in patterns of terraces following the natural topography of the land. Being located along the coast of steep cliffs, the landscape is exposed to the natural elements, subject to strong winds and rains and such other risks as landslide and erosions, all difficult to farming. All these difficulties have resulted to the abandonment of the terraces by more and more settlers back then.



Such are the similarities of Cinque Terre with the Ifugao Terraces. Both are extremely old, both are historical, tourist attractions, in dire need of attention and repair...and both beautiful to the core.

Cinque Terre though has since transformed, most houses in the villages have become tourist accommodations and that traditional agriculture is now in itself a self sustaining economic resource that caters to the need of the tourists. The visitors are then attracted to both the scenic beauty of the place but also to the variety of the products ranging from food to artifacts, all locally made as is the encouragement for the settlers.

From Cinque Terre now comes the lesson, they rose from the ruins. Amidst the beauty of their land and the hopes of the people came the will to persist. And they did.

With all these in mind Ifugao in turn became host to the Italian delegation. Hopefully with the info sharing they conducted and the many studies to crop up from the problems related with the farming practices and the terrace preservation, the Cordilleran terraces would persist too the same way that Cinque Terre did.

By: Glo Abao Tuazon

Email: twilight_glo@yahoo.com