Newsletter, diary, that long thing that nobody reads all the way through, Maïlys' exciting adventures, call it what you will, but here's the first specimen! The frequency will depend on where I'm going, so get ready to see them every 3 or 4 weeks or so. On that note, happy reading 🤓

* : for further details, you can check the following link
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1NGG1U3lY7uW8BOjAxUN4htQkQ268F7_B?usp=sharing

* Etincelles : what is it ?

That is the name of my project. From March to August, I will be visiting 5 countries in Europe, discovering ecological initiatives. With the aim of demonstrating the importance of hope in current socio-environmental issues, I'll be taking the opportunity to broaden and deepen my knowledge of the subject, while discovering Italy, Hungary, Austria, Germany and the Netherlands. I hope that each of my encounters will be a spark (*étincelle*), an example of hope, joy and optimism.

Begining of the aventure

On 25 February, at 8pm, the FlixBus in which I was to spend the night left Paris. I slept through most of it (except in the middle of the night, when the bus driver shouted in Italian (with the gestures that go with it, of course) for one of the passengers to go and sit down in the right seat). Arriving in Milan was less of a dream than it is in the tourist guides: it was raining even more than in Paris, and there were a lot of concrete in the region. In fact, I later found out that the north of Italy is one of the most polluted and concreted regions in the country. Arriving in Padua, I met Enrico and Giovanna, and their children Mario and Lucia (their eldest, Francesco, lives in Austria so I didn't see him). I was welcomed like a queen by this lovely family. I dine with them in the evening, and sometimes at lunchtime. A little tip: save some room when you're eating pasta, because often a second course comes along afterwards!

My plan was to work at the Campo dei Girasoli for three weeks, to see the project from the inside. A little detail I should mention: the day after I arrived in Padua, I still hadn't received a reply from Tommaso, my contact there, who I'd spoken to on the phone in November and who seemed very enthusiastic about the idea of my visit and my project. So I decided to drop in to see for myself. After getting lost several times on my bike (Google Maps isn't the most efficient when there are roadworks, dead ends and one-way streets at every 4th corner), I arrived covered in mud at the Campo dei Girasoli. Fortunately, a few people were there, and Tommaso welcomed me and explained the park's activities. In fact, he hadn't received my messages, which explains why there was no reply! Unfortunately, I arrived 3 weeks too early: with the bad weather, the park won't be opening for a few weeks, so I won't be seeing much of the park's relationship with the public. But that doesn't stop me from being able to help with the preparations when the weather allows it.

Urban agriculture, valuing nature and link with society

*** Basso Isonzo and Campo dei Girasoli**

You're probably wondering what the famous Campo dei Girasoli is. It's an association located in the Basso Isonzo Park. I spent several days there in the company of Tommaso, Andrea, Yuri, Alicia and their friends who lent them a hand. Here's a brief description.

Urban and eco-friendly agriculture

- **Basso Isonzo** public parc of 17 ha
- Explotation of **4 ha** by Campo dei Girasoli : operating rights in exchange for park maintenance
- **Organic** cultivation of cereals, flowers, fruits
- **Agroforestry** principles and ancient farming methods: rotating fields, natural hedges, canals, diversified crops grown in the same area, etc.

Planting seeds in people's minds, in the hope of sprouting great ideas

- **Open to** public parc
- **Bar** with **local products** (fruits, vegetables, pasta, beer, wine...)
- **Convivial events**: concerts, festivals, conferences, open days, summer camps...
- Wide public : gardening workshops with **schools**, gardens for **retired** people, inclusion of **disabled** people to the various activities...
- Welcoming **volunteers** and working with **professional** people for the agricultural work

Projects for the future

- **Pedagogical path** with aromatic herbs
- **New plantations** separated by hedges of vines and fruit trees, with paths for the public
- **Restauration of an old house** to set a to set up a workshop to **process** local products, with the aim of bringing production, processing and consumption closer together
- **Ecomuseum** describing the history of the parc

With the events and bar not opening until spring, I mainly helped with the preparatory work:

- Sanding and staining the sheep fence
- Planting trees for a future hedge (old species, aesthetic with different colours, more shade, natural filter for the soil, refuge for small animals)
- Pruning young trees (compromise between nature and society's expectations, as this is a public park: being able to walk on paths, avoiding injury from thorns, etc.)
- Weeding and cutting bamboo to make room for the new, larger and sturdier bar.

Gianpaolo Barbariol, retired member of Green Spaces team for the municipality of Padua, at the origin of project Basso Isonzo:

"Contact with nature helps us to change perspective."

Tommaso Napoli, member of Campo dei Girasoli :

"Trust the new generation, trust people like Maïlys: they will change the world!"

As I unfortunately did not think about taking a picture with them, here is one that I took fro their social media 😉. Yuri, Alicia, Andrea et Tommaso, in front of the sunflower field (these flowers gave its name to the Campo dei Girasoli).

Here is the website of the parc:
Campo dei Girasoli - Campo dei Girasoli

Etifor and University of Padua

I met Paola Gatto, research professor at the University of Padua, and Giulia Amato, project manager at Etifor. Etifor is an environmental consultancy company set up at the University of Padua. Nature is at the heart of its decisions: the aim of each of its projects is to preserve ecosystems. The organisation is based around 6 key areas : *Nature governance* (link with decision-makers for a better consideration of ecosystems in decision-making), *Forests* (support for forest owners and operators), *Nature positive* (measurement of the impact on biodiversity and CO2 emissions), *WOWnature* (reforestation involving a large public), *Tourism* (promotion of sustainable ways of tourisme), *Supply chain* (linked with the products from the forest). We talked about nature-based solutions, ecosystem services and the different projects lead in the region to strengthen the link between society and nature.

*** Paola Gatto**, teacher at University of Padua, department of Land, Environment, Agriculture and Forestry :

"If you want to, you can make the change!"

"In my students, I see very beautiful people, I trust them."

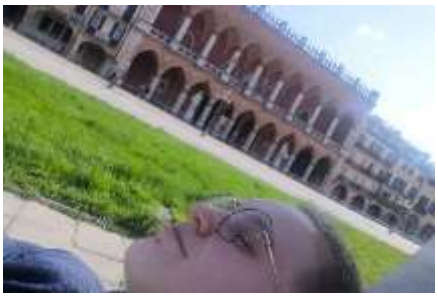
If there is one thing I will keep in mind from our discussion with Paola Gatto, it's **the importance of nature and ecosystems**. Many of the solutions to today's problems are to be found in nature, and the place we give it is beneficial for ecosystems and for us. As examples, we can mention two projects led by ETIFOR: **Bosco Limite** (trees to retain water for longer and thus limit droughts and floods), and **Life Brenta 2030** (restoration of the land around the river Brenta, naturally helping to purify the water). For all these projects linked to natural solutions, the relationship with the various stakeholders, particularly the **support of the public authorities**, is as important as the academic research. The approach is therefore highly **multidisciplinary**.

*** Giulia Amato**, member of Etifor :

"It's important that everyone feels comfortable and at the right place in today's world."

Finalement, même s'il est trop tard pour éviter certaines conséquences du réchauffement climatique, **on peut tout de même avoir un impact** et faire comme on peut pour éviter de pires conséquences, et **s'adapter au mieux** aux nouvelles conditions.
The concept of **ecosystem services** needs to be mitigated because it is very **anthropocentric**: by considering that "this ecosystem is beneficial because it can bring that to society", we can quickly forget the fact that nature is not necessarily "at our service". For example, some ecosystems will be able to recover or adapt to global warming very quickly, but humans will no longer be able to benefit from them as they did before, and vice versa.
There are two types of solution to the ecological situation: **anticipatory** or **adaptive** measures (forecasting future conditions, depending on the different scenarios, and finding ways for society to adapt), and **mitigation** measures (slowing the rise in temperature, reducing emissions or capturing CO2, for example). Etifor mainly proposes adaptive solutions, centred on nature.
Finally, even if it is too late to avoid some of the consequences of global warming, **we can still have an impact** and do what we can to avoid worse consequences, and **adapt as best** as we can to the new conditions.

Photo report



Padua

Prato della Valle is one of the largest squares in Italy and even in Europe.
Surrounded by water and statues, it's an ideal spot for a siesta in the sun or a picnic with friends. Some of the photos show the domes of the Basilica of Santa Giustina.

Etincelles - March 2024

Padua is named the city of the 3 "without":

- Saint without a name (Saint Antonio of Padua is often referred to as "the Saint")
- The square without grass (Prato della Valle only has grass on the central island)
- The café without doors (refers to Caffè Pedrocchi that was always open)

Many thanks to Enrico, Giovanna, Lucia and Mario for welcoming me so kindly during these three Italian weeks!

I loved the Italian food, and I even got to eat gluten-free in a pizzeria!

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Campo dei Girasoli

In order: the pretty path along the river that I took to get to Campo dei Girasoli, the sunset over the park, the park with its trees and paths, Gianpaolo and me, one of the trees I planted along the road, one of the fields of Campo dei Girasoli (half flooded by the heavy rain of the last few weeks).

Venice

I took advantage of the proximity to Venice to spend a day there, out of time: the Grand Canal, the gondolas, the boutiques, the island of Murano with its colourful glass and Saint Mark's Square.

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