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Monferrato and the Po River Valley

Land, water and countryside landscapes

from **The Arezza Network** correspondent in Italy, Maddalena L. M. Brunasti maddalena@arezza.net

The **countryside around the Po River** is now a huge expanse of fields, but once was a vast *brughiera* of swamps and forests. The village of Trino - at the crossroad between the old Roman military camps and medieval towns of Milan, Turin, Vercelli and Asti - was a sacred forest called **Lucedio** (Lucus Dei), is where the Cistercian monks settled in 1123 and built an abbey (now *Principato di Lucedio*).



Monferrato, il Po al tramonto d'inverno - foto © Stefania Monsini

Near the settlement of the Cistercian monks at Lucedio there is still a forest - **Bosco delle Sorti della Partecipanza di Trino** - managed with sustainable socio-criteria since 1202 and from 1991 a public park under FSC protection. Elsewhere in the Po Valley, the monks slowly reclaimed and brought the land under cultivation creating a new eco-environmental system, the *Pianura Padana*.

In the Monferrato area by the Po river, the *Pianura* is an expanse of rice fields divided by canals and flooded in spring time, the so-called **Terre d'Acqua**, a water-land populated by many migrant animals - herons, storks, swallows,... In between the fields there are many old and unique farmhouses, the so-called *grange*, built by the monks at a distance of half a day's walk from each other. The reflections of sun rays and moon lights on the still water that covers the flat fields design a very particular landscape, which has been also captured by many artists (Gianni Berengo Gardin in a famous black-and-white photo reportage and Mark Cooper in his *earthscapes*), and in the masterpiece of "neorealismo italiano", the movie *Riso Amaro*.



Risaie del Monferrato © Mark Cooper

The Monferrato area around the Po river is a park - **Parco Fluviale del Po e dell'Orba**, while conservation and environmental protection of the cultivated lands is assigned the **EcoMuseo delle Terre d'Acqua** located in the **Antica Riseria San Giovanni**, founded in the 15th Century, which preserves the original plant and a 17th Century watermill. It also houses the **Museo delle Macchine da Riso**.



Antica Riseria San Giovanni a Fontanetto Po, VC - Museo delle Macchine da Riso

Since 2007 *Palazzo Mossi* (Mossi Palace) in Frassineto Po is where the **Centro di Interpretazione del Paesaggio del Po** shows environmental changes, the many historical, natural and geological events which over time have changed the landscape and the current configuration of the area. An environment that was recently studied by a team of experts coordinated by prof. Pier Luigi Dall'Aglio in collaboration with the *Department of Archaeology* at the *University of Bologna*. The research was presented on October 20th, together with the opening of new facilities of the *Center*, and the presentation of the improvement of the **Po Vercelli-Alessandria Greenway**, and *Ecology & Economy in Tourism Businesses* and *Farms & natural environments*, books edited by the **Sportello per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile INFOFIUME**. On this same occasion there was an awards ceremony for the contest *Par coii bsogna semnà*, a project on the artistic interpretation of the territory.



PAR COII nel Po

Bosco delle Sorti della Partecipanza di Trino - www.parks.it/parco.partecipanza.trino/par.php

EcoMuseo delle Terre d'Acqua - <http://ecomuseo.schole.it>

Par coii bsogna semnà - <http://www.parcoii.org/main/>

Parco Fluviale del Po e dell'Orba - www.parcodelpoalessandriavercelli.it

Centro di interpretazione del paesaggio del Po Palazzo Mossi - Frassineto Po (AL)

Sportello per lo sviluppo sostenibile INFOFIUME - sportello@parcodelpo-vcal.it