

Living in a beautiful place, between the hills and the Ticino River

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A world of green and bright blue that is all the more astounding when you consider how close it is to one of the most densely built-up areas in Italy, near Malpensa. This is the **Ticino Valley**, a beautiful but still little known area. The project **“Vivere in un bel posto – tra colline e fiume”** (Living in a beautiful place – between hills and the river) has been created to publicise the area and highlight its qualities, using new instruments (**here is the site**).

Giovanni Martinelli, a nature guide and walker in the Ticino Park, and **Marco Tessaro**, the highly regarded documentary filmmaker specialised in environmental communication, have defined it as “a social innovation project.” Together, they started to work on an integrated idea.

“We’re both enthusiastic about the territory where we were born and raised, so we decided to develop a project that **highlights the beauty of the northern part of the Ticino Park**, to show people its real importance,” they said. “We believe that environmental education, knowledge of local culture and ecological tourism can help to tackle indifference, which sadly is **often the cause of degradation within territories**.”

To realise this project, they put together two things: on the one hand, a bicycle, on the other, videos and photography. These are the two “languages” that characterise the two promoters.

“We believe that, in a territory like this one, which has so many trails and cycle paths, bicycle touring is an element of success, that can relaunch the economy, as demonstrated by many European countries. The second aspect is that of documentaries. **We want to show the beauty and the importance of the Upper Ticino Park, with targeted communication**, producing **short films** that can be shown on web channels and social media. We think a real communication project plan will enable us to implement the actions described above.”



In this, the pandemic plays a paradoxically positive role; many people, who are forced to stay within the confines of their municipalities or are limited in their movements, have gone back to visiting the green areas between the river and the hills, in that vast area that goes from **Sesto Calende** to the densely built-up area of **Gallarate, Malpensa and Busto Arsizio**. While some routes (Via Gaggio in **Lonate Pozzolo**, the Panperduto area) are well known and visited, other lesser-known routes have begun to enjoy greater popularity.

This is a potentially significant moment, and Martinelli and Tessaro rightly talk about the need for “stable continuity over time”, that is, for getting people to experience the territory, to get to know it, and become more aware of the risks that the environment occasionally runs, starting with the constant littering. “To defend the territory.” The excursions ([click here for the upcoming excursions](#), which are always updated) are intended **not for sporty cyclists, but for anyone who wants to get on a mountain bike and discover the territory**, perhaps gradually getting used to this means of transport.



Before the pandemic, **Martinelli and Tessaro organised seven excursions, which involved 150 people.** “Today, we’ll be limited to **fifteen people per group.**” The cost of the organised excursion covers not only the accompaniment, but also a thorough knowledge of the area: **Martinelli works as a nature guide,** and the **cultural and historical aspects** are entrusted mainly to **Cristiano Brandolini**, a well-known archaeologist in the area, who has also often taken part in excavation campaigns in the very places travelled through.

Between the river and the hills, we encounter prehistoric traces, the Golasecca Civilisation, which marked the transition from prehistory to history, the Romans, the Lombards, up to the Middle Ages and modern and contemporary times.



Brandolini is also in charge of setting up the museum on the **Isolino Virginia**, which will be one of the “targets” of the next excursions. In addition to the tours in the Ticino Valley area, there is a train+bike service, which allows you to visit the valleys between **Luino**, **Valcuvia** and **Valganna** (with a well-developed system of cycle paths) and the area of the smaller lakes (**Varese** and **Comabbio**, with their cycle and pedestrian paths).

The images and videos by Tessaro, who has participated twice in the popular **documentary festival of the parks of Sondrio**, will also help to publicise the area outside Varese Province.

The project may also become **an attraction for tourists from outside; it has received sponsorship from the Ticino Park, the Chamber of Commerce** has made a small contribution, and there are partnerships with the National Mountain Bike Academy, travel agencies, hotels and bed&breakfasts.

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