

UNIVERSITÀ  
DEGLI STUDI  
DI PADOVA

Università degli Studi di Padova

Dipartimento di Scienze Storiche, Geografiche e dell'Antichità

*Corso di Laurea Magistrale in Local Development*

**Imagining Basso Isonzo:  
The evolution of an urban agro-landscape park**

*Supervisor:* Prof. Stefano Pontiggia

*Candidate:* Elena Favaretto

Registr. number: 2061902

ACADEMIC YEAR 2022/2023



Il candidato dichiara che il presente lavoro è originale e non è già stato sottoposto, in tutto o in parte, per il conseguimento di un titolo accademico in altre Università italiane o straniere.

Il candidato dichiara altresì che tutti i materiali utilizzati durante la preparazione dell'elaborato sono stati indicati nel testo e nella sezione "Riferimenti bibliografici" e che le eventuali citazioni testuali sono individuabili attraverso l'esplicito richiamo alla pubblicazione originale.

The candidate declares that the present work is original and has not already been submitted, totally or in part, for the purposes of attaining an academic degree in other Italian or foreign universities.

The candidate also declares that all the materials used during the preparation of the thesis have been explicitly indicated in the text and in the section "Bibliographical references" and that any textual citations can be identified through an explicit reference to the original publication.

Student's signature

E Favaretto

## Abstract

The indefiniteness of certain green areas in the urban peripheries creates a multiplicity of imaginaries in the minds of the people who cross these places. Based on interviews, methods of participant observation and conversations conducted in Basso Isonzo, Padua, Italy in 2022-2023, this work examines the diverse perspectives of residents, citizens and Padua's municipal administration on the area of Basso Isonzo, the interpretations of its spaces, the memories tied to it, and the interpersonal connections among locals. The lack of boundaries defining a perimeter of the area, of signs claiming one specific name for each zone, and the decades-long battle to protect the agricultural landscape vocation of Basso Isonzo, are all elements that have led to an imaginative competition on the scope of the area and its portrayal. Because of the multiple and contradicting regulatory variants carried out by several city administrations, Basso Isonzo is still a patchwork zone – undefined and, at times, multi-named. While the place is currently stuck in this limbo, the workers and residents of Basso Isonzo, through their imaginaries of the place, are already making Basso Isonzo something real, despite hesitation by the administrations. Thanks to their actions, they are giving life to the urban agro-landscape park of Basso Isonzo – a reality that does not, concretely, exist.



## Extended Summary

L'indeterminatezza di alcune aree verdi nelle periferie urbane crea molteplici visioni negli immaginari delle persone che attraversano questi posti. Basandosi su interviste, metodi di osservazione partecipante e conversazioni condotte nel Basso Isonzo – spazio a vocazione agricola nella periferia di Padova – negli anni 2022-2023, questo lavoro esamina le diverse prospettive dei residenti, dei cittadini e dell'amministrazione comunale padovana rispetto all'area, le interpretazioni dei suoi spazi, le memorie legate ad esso, e le connessioni interpersonali tra i locali. La mancanza di barriere che definiscano un perimetro dell'area, di cartelli indicanti un nome specifico per ciascuna zona, e la sfida pluridecennale rivolta alla protezione della vocazione agro-paesaggistica del territorio, sono tutti elementi che hanno portato ad una competizione immaginativa rispetto allo scopo e alla rappresentazione dell'area. A causa delle tante e conflittuali varianti regolative effettuate dalle diverse amministrazioni cittadine, il Basso Isonzo rimane ancora un mosaico indefinito e, alle volte, dotato di molti nomi.

Questo elaborato è organizzato in quattro capitoli che analizzano diverse dimensioni degli immaginari nel Basso Isonzo. Il Capitolo Uno, "Moving", esplora gli scopi delle zone del Basso Isonzo, l'indeterminatezza di alcune di esse, la discrepanza nei nomi di vari luoghi, e i problemi legati alla mobilità e al parcheggio nel territorio. Nel Capitolo Due, "Remembering", si traccia la storia del Basso Isonzo, focalizzandosi sul periodo tra gli anni '50 e i giorni nostri, analizzando come le memorie legate ai paesaggi possano differire tra le persone, creando narrazioni conflittuali. Il Capitolo Tre, "Growing", segue le attività di varie persone che lavorano nel Basso Isonzo, con un'attenzione alle strategie di sviluppo, all'agricoltura biologica e ai problemi legati a questi. Nell'ultimo capitolo, "Uniting", si descrivono le relazioni tra chi risiede e chi lavora nel Basso Isonzo, cercando di capire i diversi aspetti del far parte di una comunità, le positività e i problemi, e che cosa questo significhi nell'elaborazione di un progetto condiviso. Nelle conclusioni, "Imaginary," si ritorna ai capitoli precedenti, specialmente al concetto di immaginari, e si discute della sostenibilità sociale, accanto a quelle ambientale ed economica, dei sistemi di agricoltura alternativi. Si conclude analizzando come le persone che vivono il Basso Isonzo, immaginando realtà differenti, e di conseguenza applicando le loro idee con approccio spontaneistico, stiano dando vita all'area, pur in assenza di un ufficiale riconoscimento del 'Parco Agroubano del Basso Isonzo'.

# Index

Introduction

*Interlude I*

Chapter One: Moving

*Interlude II*

Chapter Two: Remembering

*Interlude III*

Chapter Three: Growing

*Interlude IV*

Chapter Four: Uniting

*Interlude V*

Conclusions: Imaginaries

References

## Introduction

*In vain, great-hearted Kublai, shall I attempt to describe Zaira, city of high bastions. I could tell you how many steps make up the streets rising like stairways, and the degree of the arcades' curves, and what kind of zinc scales cover the roofs; but I already know this would be the same as telling you nothing. The city does not consist of this, but of relationships between the measurements of its space and the events of its past. (Cities and Memory 3, p.10)*

Despite being born and raised in Padova, I had never heard of Basso Isonzo before October 2021. On a university field trip in the first year of my Master's degree, I walked through its fields and green areas for the first time, discovering a piece of countryside among train tracks, a ring road, and the military airport. What drew me to Basso Isonzo was the unconditional love pouring out of Federico, one of the four managers of Campo dei Girasoli, as he spoke to our class, narrating the history of the place, its hardship and evolution, and the future projects at hand. Campo dei Girasoli is one of the many green areas of Basso Isonzo – as well as the starting point of my research.

When it was time for me to decide which place to choose for my internship and its related final thesis, Basso Isonzo sprang to my mind and never left. The sense of community I had heard through Federico and the other residents he presented to us, the enthusiasm for future projects, the objective of making the agricultural areas flourish without exploitation and chemicals while giving the best conditions to nature to revive its natural ecosystem, were all elements that made me curious about the place while asking myself, “Will it really apply what it preaches? Does it sound too good to be true? Are this community and this place as united as they look?”

Following these first questions, my aim was to build my thesis on storytelling, interviewing residents and local workers to understand the dynamics of the place, its history and the way it had developed. Federico had highlighted multiple times the importance of an official recognition at an administrative level of the Parco Agropaesaggistico del Basso Isonzo – so I decided to start from there. “Why has the park not been officially recognised yet? Is someone against this officialisation? Which obstacles are there?”

After a summer of semi-structured interviews, conversations, and visits to Basso Isonzo, I felt lost. I was stuck – I could not find a solid ground for my thesis. Storytelling was not enough; I wanted to have a root. Basso Isonzo felt so vast, yet so empty and scattered. I could not find a common thread that held everything together – I had stories, information, and pictures but nothing to hold on to. Through multiple meetings with my thesis advisor, I was

able to put some clarity on the information I found, and after some trial and error, we realised something; the multiple layers of projects, ideas and imaginaries carried out by the different people making Basso Isonzo what it is today are founded on a reality that does not concretely exist. Despite the interpersonal bonds, the administrative plans, and the existing activities, Basso Isonzo is in the middle of a competition of imaginaries that does not seem to have a defined path for the time being.

Basso Isonzo's current situation can be situated into the wider international debate concerning hybrid agricultural/urban formations of cities, known in Italian as 'città diffusa' (Indovina 1990). The settlement system of the central area of the Veneto region sees a coexistence of a polycentric urban structure along peripheries in an urban-rural continuum, the so-called 'agrouban' structure (Ferrario, Lironi, Barbariol 2019). While urban and rural areas tend to be perceived as physically and politically separated, in the last few decades agricultural issues have been crossing the urban planning international debates – for example, concerning cities as potential food producers (see Garnett 1999; Mougeout 2005). This new vision of agricultural areas has developed a different conception of such spaces, not only recognised for farming and food production, but also as places for leisure, the social sphere, and areas supporting environmental values – something that could be defined as a multifunctional landscape (see Chapter Three).

This multifunctionality has influenced the different possibilities of imaginaries of the people living in agro-urban areas, specifically in Basso Isonzo: when you have a variety of opportunities, it is easier for multiple visions to arise. To better understand the concept of imaginaries, we must start from a wider perspective. In his 1974 work 'The Production of Space', Henri Lefebvre defines three different concepts of space: 'spatial practice', the space of experience connected to sensations and physical touch; the 'representation of space', meaning the conceptualised space; and 'representational spaces', the spaces of emotions and imagination, incorporated into the human experiences of the world we live in. These concepts influence one another, as one's material actions make a person integrate a sense of how spatial representations function, while forming representational spaces for oneself. Representational spaces are connected to the realm of imagination – something dreamed of, something hoped for; in Basso Isonzo's case, something that still has to come. But not having a concrete practice does not reduce the importance of representational spaces: their diversity and multiplicity reflect the various and sometimes conflictual realities of humans. The same place may be imagined differently from one person to another – and who is to say what "the right way" is? "By what right and on whose authority does one claim to speak for those "others"? On whose terms is a space created in which "they" are called upon to speak?"

(Gregory 1994: 205). Different visions create different realities – a battle of imaginaries stratified under a variety of ideas, which may create, as in Basso Isonzo’s case, a reality that is more similar to a patchwork, than to something defined and concrete.

I wanted to understand these visions, their implementations and the reasons behind them. When I found more clarity concerning the development of my final work, I went back to Basso Isonzo to do more fieldwork, in the winter of 2023: the latter consisted of additional semi-structured interviews with old and new interviewees, taking fieldnotes while walking through the area, engaging in participant observation, and taking part in meetings of local projects and situations. Participant observation is a qualitative research method in which a researcher takes part in the activities and interactions of a group of people as a way of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life, ‘tacit’ meaning the aspects of a culture that remain outside one’s awareness. It is a method for understanding the processes of social life and provides context for interviews and other structured methods of data collection. Some of the main elements of participant observation are: learning and using the local language and dialect; actively taking part in activities with full participants; living in the analysed context for a period of time; informally observing during leisure activities; recording observations in field notes; and more (DeWalt, DeWalt 2011). On the other hand, the act of walking as a critical research methodology may be used as a way to make people recollect memories, episodes and emotions connected to a certain place (Anderson 2004). “By sharing conversations in place and at the participants’ pace, researchers are beginning to more fully appreciate the transient, embodied and multisensual aspects of ‘the social’” (Bates, Rhys-Taylor 2017: 2).

While I did not live in Basso Isonzo during my fieldwork, as the participant observation method would suggest, it only takes fifteen minutes of biking to get to the area from my house. I consider myself a “native” researcher, as Padova is the only place I have ever lived in. Throughout the last few decades, anthropologists have been detaching themselves from their archetypal figure of a lone person (more specifically, white adult man) immersing themselves within a community that was unknown to them before the start of the research, and the action itself of “doing fieldwork” has been going through a process of rethinking (Gupta, Ferguson 1997). On this note, anthropologist Kath Weston points out the issue when studying queer communities: as a queer person herself, she is considered a “native” researcher, someone studying “her own people”. Weston defines this condition as ‘virtuality’, where a researcher lacks an authentic Other – but this hybrid personal situation can bring a different understanding to the research itself, becoming potentially useful. If a researcher has to establish direct contact with their source of information in the most unobtrusive manner,

what better observer than an “insider”? Being a resident of Padova, knowing the city, speaking the local dialect, and having personal connections with some of my interviewees are all elements that influenced my perception of Basso Isonzo and my research.

Having visited the area on and off for one year, I have built relationships with the people I have talked to – some steadier than others. Among other reasons, this divergence is dependent on my own identity as a person, before that of someone doing fieldwork. Being a young, white Italian non-binary person has affected my research both as a result of my own positionality and personal experiences, and through the perception that the individuals I interacted with had of me because of my identities. Being in my early 20s gave me the possibility to interact more easily with other young people, such as activity organisers in Campo dei Girasoli and a couple of workers of Basso Isonzo, but it also affected my relationships with older people, especially men, a couple of which used dismissing and patronising language and expressions during our conversations and interviews. On another note, being non-binary gave me the possibility to bond more with other people from the queer community present in Basso Isonzo, but because I was perceived most of the time as a girl, this inevitably affected other people’s perception of me and influenced our relationships – for example, making it easier for women to share sensitive information with me, and evoking in a couple of men a sense akin to fatherhood towards me, with behaviours such as providing guidance, presenting other locals to me to deepen my research, and keeping me updated with events and situations without prompting on my part.

Before presenting the structure of the book, I want to clarify that, while I found it necessary to give a name to each individual cited in this work because of the interpersonal relationships among them and the ones they developed with me during and after my fieldwork, personal names have been changed to respect each person’s privacy.

This work is organised into four chapters, analysing different dimensions of imaginaries in Basso Isonzo: space, time, activity evolution and community. Chapter One, “Moving”, explores the purposes of different areas of Basso Isonzo, the vagueness of certain areas, the discrepancy in the naming of various places, and the mobility and parking issues present in the territory. In Chapter Two, “Remembering”, I retrace the history of Basso Isonzo, focusing on the time between the 1950s and the present day, while analysing how memories tied to landscapes can differ among people, creating conflicting narratives. Chapter Three, “Growing”, follows the activities of various people working in Basso Isonzo, with a focus on development strategies, organic agriculture and its related struggles. In the last chapter, “Uniting”, I describe the relationships among who works and lives in Basso Isonzo, trying to understand the different aspects of being part of a community, its positivity and issues, and

what that means for the elaboration of a solid, shared project. In the conclusions, “Imaginaries”, I retrace the steps of the previous chapters, focusing on the concept of imaginaries, and discuss the social sustainability of alternative agri-food systems, alongside the environmental and economic ones. I draw the conclusions by analysing how the people living in Basso Isonzo, by imagining different realities, and consequently applying their ideas with a spontaneous approach, are giving life to the area, despite the lack of an official recognition of the ‘Parco Agrourbano del Basso Isonzo’.

The chapters are interspersed with edited excerpts from my personal fieldnotes, titled as numbered ‘Interludes’. Finally, each chapter opens with a different quotation from Italo Calvino’s ‘Invisible Cities’, – a 1972 novel mostly consisting of brief prose poems – anticipating the themes of the chapters in question; I read this book for leisure while writing the last chapter of this work, finding among the two more common themes than I thought I would.

Basso Isonzo has carved itself a special, unique place in my heart; its residents, workers, and the administration have shared with me their feelings, their dreams and their desires for the future of this area. They all have and will continue to influence Basso Isonzo, and what is to come of it. There is not one right or wrong way of imagining; through their differences, their detachment from reality, their impossibility of realisation – they are all part of what makes Basso Isonzo what it is today, in its vagueness and multiplicity.

*“Indeed, isn’t the whole business of ascribing responsibility a kind of cop-out? We want to blame an individual so that everyone else is exculpated. Or we blame a historical process as a way of exonerating individuals. Or it’s all anarchic chaos, with the same consequence. It seems to me that there is – was – a chain of individual responsibilities, all of which were necessary, but not so long a chain that everybody can simply blame everyone else. But of course, my desire to ascribe responsibility might be more a reflection of my own cast of mind than a fair analysis of what happened. That’s one of the central problems of history, isn’t it, sir? The question of subjective versus objective interpretation, the fact that we need to know the history of the historian in order to understand the version that is being put in front of us.”*  
(Julian Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending*: 21-22).

## *Interlude I*

*People flock inside the public library at nearly nine in the evening; most past their fifties. I enter with a careful step, looking for an empty seat among the dozens of chairs. We are about sixty, waiting for the start of the meeting on the mobility of via Libia, one of the roads connecting the neighbourhood of Sacra Famiglia to Basso Isonzo. Iris, former head of the local council, presides over the session, with the interventions of the Municipality's deputy mayor, and the Councillor for Mobility.*

*The room is clean, and there is a seat available for everyone – I pick one in the last row for myself. The bright overhead lights hurt my eyes, but the wooden roofed ceiling gives the room an intimate atmosphere. Two children sit on the stone steps of a staircase leading to the second floor, whispering to each other. Guido, a resident of Basso Isonzo I have grown close to after our first interview, greets me as he comes in, taking a seat a minute before the beginning of the meeting.*

*It all starts calmly – people listen to the administrators silently, and no one is interrupted. The deputy mayor states that this is his first time in the neighbourhood since his election – nine months ago, give or take. On the other hand, most of the attendees are residents, knowing and happily greeting each other.*

*Via Libia is a narrow, residential street. When the first slide is shown through the projector, muttering can be heard from the crowd. A couple of times, the deputy mayor tries to make a joke to lighten the mood, but the residents do not seem in the right mind.*

*A woman sitting in front of me leans close to her friend as they look at the map in the slides, saying, “The field is still there.” This makes me believe that the map is old, and something has been recently built over it. Half an hour later, my suspicions are confirmed: the Municipality lost the appeal concerning the area's building license, and the owners built a condo on the green area.*

*After the administrators' speeches, dozens of questions come in a row, with a loud background noise. “Private construction is out of control in this area: making via Aosta open to traffic only creates a bypass,” one of the residents says, followed by a round of applause from the locals. “We've been sending proposals for modified viability since Lorenzoni (2017), but the Municipality never listened. We are tired.”*

*“A safe mobility system for bicycles and pedestrians was never made for Basso Isonzo,” Teresa, one of my interviewees, says, followed by another woman. “Buildings sprout like*



*weeds, and there will be no more greenery if you keep giving them building permits.” The Councillor for Mobility has a calm voice when he explains that it is not them who can give building permits – if privates have licenses given by past administrations, they cannot take them away from them.*

*Sacra Famiglia and Basso Isonzo, like many other neighbourhoods in Padova, were not born for the kinds of big cars that are popular today, especially SUVs. “Technologies such as electronic gates and speed control could be used to regulate the traffic and access to the area,” one of the locals proposes, “because if buildings continue to be constructed, traffic will increase, along with the number of residents, of parked cars, and pollution.”*

*It is nearly eleven p.m. when the meeting ends, with locals speaking over each other. Guido comes close to me, whispering in my ear, “They’ve already decided everything. They’ll do as they said tonight and people will get angry in a couple of months.”*

*I have heard a lot of turmoil in the past forty minutes. I sense distrust towards the politicians from the locals, not believing in their promises anymore. Residents do not feel like they are part of the life of their neighbourhood, as if everything was always decided for them, and they were never listened to, their ideas never taken into consideration.*

*There’s a profound rage towards institutions and their power over people’s life. If sixty people are not heard over an issue involving two roads, then what about a whole neighbourhood or an entire city?*

*Will it ever be possible to get to a compromise?*

# Chapter One

## *Moving*

*In every point of this city you can, in turn, sleep, make tools, cook, accumulate gold, disrobe, reign, sell, question oracles. Any one of its pyramid roofs could cover the leprosarium or the odalisques' baths. The traveller roams all around and has nothing but doubts: he is unable to distinguish the features of the city, the features he keeps distinct in his mind also mingle. He infers this: if existence in all its moments is all of itself, Zoe is the place of indivisible existence. But why, then, does the city exist? What line separates the inside from the outside, the rumble of wheels from the howl of wolves? (Cities and Signs 3, p. 34)*

A family car speeds next to me as I bike down one of the main streets of Sacra Famiglia. The cycling path is a pair of white lane lines drawn on the concrete, running next to an uneven sidewalk. Parking my bike on a big, metal loop rack in Piazza Firenze, I cross the street to get to my meeting spot, one of the most popular bars in the neighbourhood.

Teresa waits for me at one of the outdoor tables, reading a newspaper. She is an event planner who hopes to be retiring soon. Born in Abano Terme (PD), she has been living in Sacra Famiglia ever since she got married. Her office is not too far from her home, and now that her son has grown up, she gives her full commitment to her neighbourhood, taking care of it.

Sacra Famiglia is a zone located on the southwest side of Padova, a city in the northeast of Italy. This area is enclosed within several geographical barriers: via Sorio on the north, via Goito on the east, the Bacchiglione river on the south, and a military airport on the west. Because of these limits, the neighbourhood cannot expand, and that is one of the reasons that made Teresa choose this area as the place for her home. It has a way out towards the riverbank – a fundamental element for someone with a sporting history like Teresa. On foot or by bike, to make her way to the river, she has to cross the zone stretching west from Sacra Famiglia: the area known as Basso Isonzo.

Even on the map, Basso Isonzo is not a well-defined territory. Some people may place its limits along the main roads that cross it (via Monte Pertica on the northeast, via Isonzo on the south, and the tennis clubs and the airport on the west), while others may individuate it by its green areas (among them, Campo dei Girasoli, Parco del Basso Isonzo, Giardino degli Ulivi di Gerusalemme). But even when asked to give a name to certain areas and mark them out, the answers from the people I interviewed were different.

Ambiguity is a characteristic that can be found in other sides of Basso Isonzo aside from naming – the purpose of certain areas, the accessibility of its streets and fields, and the mobility in and out of the zone.

It is difficult to imagine the extent of a place without a name. Without explicit signs or gates, people create their own ideas about it. Stemming from the theories of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, the concept of the imaginary is defined as an internalised representation constructed by oneself as a means of negotiating relationships between the private and social realms (Lacan 1966). Developing and applying this psychological approach to the realm of space, the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1991) claims space not to be an abstraction, but rather a socially-produced identity, formed by different histories, processes, and meanings. The neo-Marxist theorist Cornelius Castoriadis also acknowledges the flexibility of space, identifying “place imaginaries” as symbolic constituents of space coming from different and possibly conflicting perspectives (Castoriadis 1987 cited in Larson 2018). As Lefebvre, Castoriadis intends these elements not only as perceptions but as active forces with cultural meanings contributing to the contested creation of space.

The material and the ideal are not as distinguished as they might appear, and a binary view of them, a “in my head” and “out there”, is a perspective I do not share. I find myself closer to anthropologist Tim Ingold’s theory, who writes in his 1993 essay ‘Temporality of Landscape’, “The landscape, I hold, is not a picture in the imagination, surveyed by the mind’s eye; nor, however, is it an alien and formless substrate awaiting the imposition of human order. [...] [T]hrough living in it, the landscape becomes part of us, just as we are part of it” (Ingold 1993: 154). Following Ingold’s view, a place in the landscape is not disconnected from the whole – it is characterised by the experiences lived in them, and the sights and sounds that make a place a certain way depending on the activities held in them.

Because there are no conditional boundaries defining the specific limits of places, as each possible boundary becomes one in relation to the activities that human and non-human animals perform in it, experiencing it as such (Ingold 1993), placing borders and giving names to specific places can be an interesting activity to engage in. When asking Stefania, who has been living in Basso Isonzo for the past twenty-three years, and whose garden looks right over the east section of one of the local parks, to locate “Parco del Basso Isonzo”, she traces the area in yellow – the outline that can be seen in the map (Fig. 1.1). As noticeable from her strokes, she modifies her answer by adding a section on the northwest area of her first perimeter – “Maybe I’ll also put these fields in,” she says. The same thing goes for the second question I ask her – locate “Campo dei Girasoli”: her answer is given by drawing the thinner, yellow lines. When asked the same question, Arturo V., Councillor for Urban

Planning, Mobility, Environment, and Cycling for the Municipality of Padova<sup>1</sup>, answers differently. While extending his imaginary of Campo dei Girasoli, for him Parco del Basso Isonzo is a much smaller area (Fig. 1.2). On the Masterplan of Basso Isonzo, an annexe to the 2022 Green Plan of the Municipality of Padova<sup>2</sup>, the areas are defined in another way: Campo dei Girasoli becomes Parco dei Girasoli, and Parco del Basso Isonzo is considered to be the whole mapped area, giving the name to the map itself (Fig. 1.4).

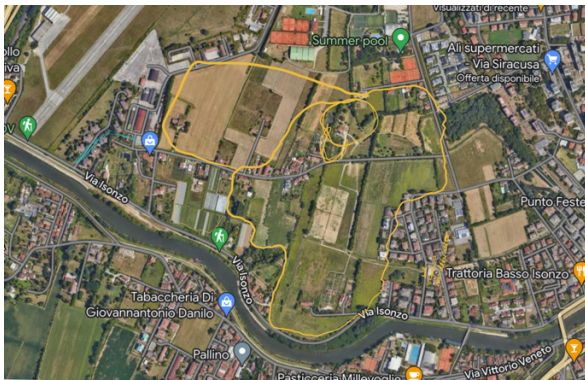


Fig. 1.1: Stefania’s map.

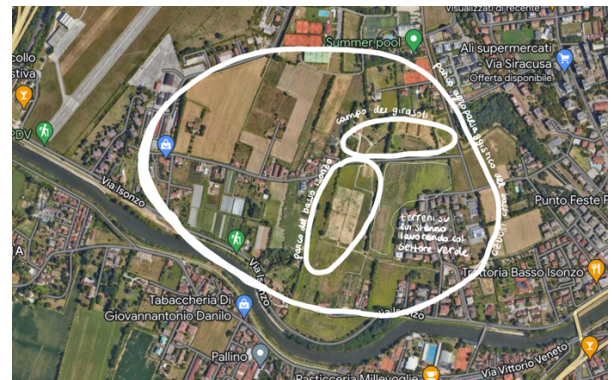


Fig. 1.2: Arturo’s map.

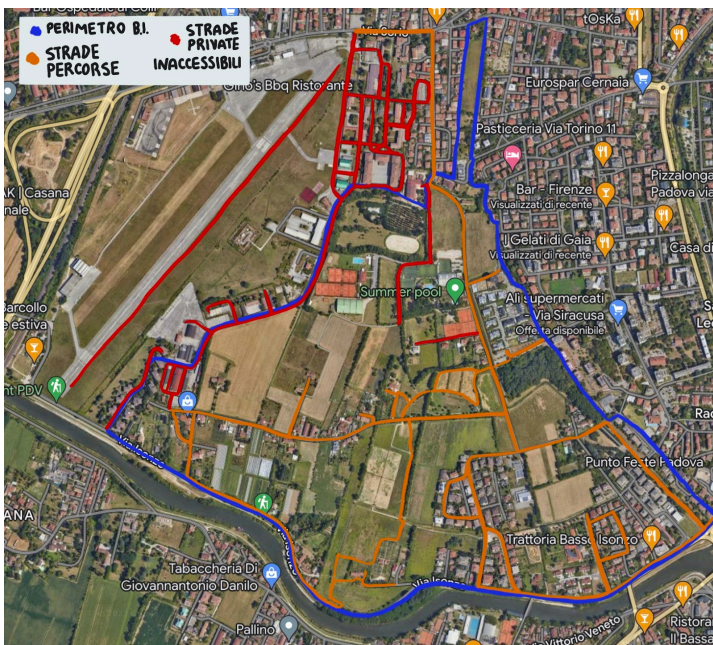


Fig. 1.3: My map (in blue: perimeter of Basso Isonzo area as stated in the “Piano del Verde del Comune di Padova”; in red: inaccessible roads; in orange: walked streets).

<sup>1</sup> Italy is administratively divided into 20 regions, each of them featuring a large number of *comuni* (almost 8000 in total). A *comune* is the equivalent of a township or municipality, providing essential public services and communal structures. It is headed by a mayor, assisted by a communal council, elected by resident citizens, and a communal committee.

<sup>2</sup> The *Piano del Verde di Padova* [tr. Green Plan of Padova] is a voluntary, integrative tool of general urban planning, which defines the “green profile” of the city starting from its fundamental naturalistic ecosystems, with the provision of interventions for the development and enhancement of urban and peri-urban greenery. It is a strategic tool that guides the policies of local urban transformation and the consequent choices of the municipal administration in the field of public greenery, defining the principles and setting the guidelines for the construction of public green areas. <https://www.padovanet.it/informazione/piano-del-verde-comunale>





Fig. 1.4: Map from the Piano del Verde del Comune di Padova, 2022.

Because of this uncertainty, I found navigating the area of Basso Isonzo quite puzzling at first. After having gotten to know well the most popular location in the area, Campo dei Girasoli, I wanted to walk the main streets of Basso Isonzo to get a broader understanding of it (Fig. 1.3). My initial objective was to circumnavigate it, but while I walked from via Monte Pertica to via Libia and found myself in front of the closed access of the military airport in via Goito without any other road to walk, I had to retrace my steps and go back the same way I had gotten there.

Moving by bicycle in my daily life, I had never walked through the streets of Basso Isonzo before, and the experience was at times dangerous. There is an extreme lack of sidewalks in the area, and those which exist are uneven and can only be found on a couple of streets on the southeast side. The roads are narrow and it is impossible to build any footways, but the presence of cars, the worn-out, uneven concrete, and, in some sections, the drop between the roads and the ditches, make walking a risky activity (Fig. 1.7, 1.9 and 1.10).

For this reason, locals have created their own path in the street that is considered the least safe by both Teresa and Stefania – via Monte Pertica. The way allows people to walk more peacefully, but it is not accessible to wheelchairs, strollers, or whoever is not sure-footed. Exiting the intersection of via Palermo, the passage between the guardrail and the wall of a building is extremely narrow, and even a bike would struggle through it (Fig. 1.8).

Via Libia has the additional weight of cars parked on the roadside, which makes being on foot even more of a feat, despite the white lane signalling a makeshift sidewalk running outside the military zone. On the gate of one of the houses, a person hung up a sign saying “Please do not park near the gate so we can exit safely.”

Even though these streets might not be considered part of Basso Isonzo by some people, they are the ways through which one can get to the green areas from the north and northeast sides. If a person cannot walk or bike safely to get to a park, how are they supposed to reach it?

The possibility of avoiding via Monte Pertica is given by the path traced inside the grove close to the Sacra Famiglia neighbourhood (Fig. 1.5 and 1.6). With one entrance on via Urbino, and the other right outside the Giardino degli Ulivi di Gerusalemme, one can walk or bike through the trees without meeting any car – but the track is uneven and it can be dangerous at night, especially because of the many brambles growing on the sides of the trail.

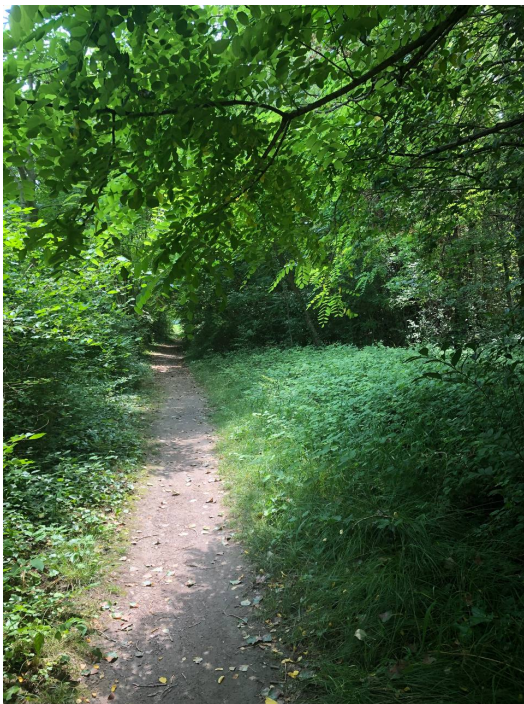


Fig. 1.5: Inside the grove.



Fig. 1.6: The grove and the fields seen from via Monte Pertica.

The only crosswalk present in the area surrounding the parks is the one that connects the bridge of via Urbino to the east entrance of Campo dei Girasoli. From there, one can walk through the gravel road and stop in the park, sitting on the grass or one of the benches – some of which are paired with picnic tables –, or enter the fenced area of the kiosk of Campo dei Girasoli, which differs from the former area by, among other things, not being open 24/7, having multiple gates, selling food and drinks, and hosting farm animals.





Fig. 1.7: Roadside of via Monte Pertica.



Fig. 1.8: The intersection of via Palermo and the pathway.



Fig. 1.9: Via Monte Pertica and the pathway in the background.



Fig. 1.10: Via Monte Pertica and the drop between the road and the ditch next to the field.

Outside Campo dei Girasoli, on the opposite side of via Bainsizza, Parco del Basso Isonzo is instead much less defined, and not equipped in any way. This is why the area is hardly considered a park by Teresa and other locals, given that, apart from a gravel walkway and multiple paths beaten by the ones who walk it, there are no benches, no bathrooms, and the grass can get tall in some areas.

This section of Basso Isonzo is considered by a couple of locals I talked to as “a place to stroll” and “walk the dog”, but others appreciate it in different ways. Teresa enjoys it because she can walk from her house to the riverbank without having to step on any concrete, and notices that, along with many dogs, some parents also bring their kids there to run. Guido, local resident and co-founder of the Europa Verde [tr. Green Europe] political circle of Padova<sup>3</sup>, does not mind it, but he thinks that some elements – such as benches and trees for shadow – could make the park more accessible even to the local population of Sacra Famiglia, which is consistently composed of elderly people.

Stefania likes it exactly as it is: even though it is a public area, she considers it part of her home since she can see it from behind her fence. She walks it almost daily, sometimes stretching her way towards the riverbank or Campo dei Girasoli, especially since a new entrance was created close to her house, more or less four years ago. She describes the area as “a field”, and while the grass is not well-kept for people to sit on, she sees many people walk there every day, many of them with unleashed dogs. “During the 2020 lockdown<sup>4</sup> it looked like a highway,” she tells me, laughing. She would not want it to be any other way – she likes that one area is equipped, while the other is not. “Maybe it is a little selfish of me,” she says, “but I would not want any loud noise right outside my garden.” She enjoys the tall grass, and the winter scenery with the grove coming out of the fog.

While these matters might come down to a personal preference, the lack of signs is a general problem in the area. When I first came to this part of Basso Isonzo, I entered the zone from the southern side, walking down the drop from via Isonzo to the area around Casa Bortolami Sud, an old farmhouse now in ruins. Because there is no indication of the park entrance, I stepped on loamy, rough soil, and given the altitude difference from the road to the field, it can be unsafe to do so.

---

<sup>3</sup> *Europa Verde Veneto* is Veneto’s Regional Federation of Green Europe, the Italian ecologist party affiliated with the European Greens.

<sup>4</sup> From March 9th to May 3rd, 2020, Italy underwent its first Covid-19 lockdown. The regulation entailed the suspension of common retail activities, educational activities, catering services, and all the activities not deemed necessary for the production chain, and prohibited the gathering of people in public places. In the following months, it was possible to walk outside while keeping a mask on.



Because there is no designed pathway, it is easy to step on the ground where Gentil Rosso wheat<sup>5</sup> is grown, in the field right behind Casa Bortolami Sud, close to the community gardens<sup>6</sup>. There are a couple of home-printed signs posted on trees by the farmers, but they can easily be overlooked, and surely are not waterproof.

It was only on my second visit that I was able to individuate a safer way to get to this area – coming from the east side of via Isonzo one can see a gravel path descending from the road when the sidewalk stops. If I had not already visited the area, I would not have been able to understand where the road would take me: while there is no sign declaring any private property, there is no indication that the street brings one to the park, and the only board in the area, hidden from the road, signals the community gardens.

While locals might not have any issue understanding how the green areas are connected, for a person new to the area it is not clear where the boundaries stand. During our interview, Teresa tells me that, a couple of weeks back, as she was walking in the green area close to via Lucca, the workers building a new house had parked their truck on the grass. She told them that was a park, asking them to move their vehicle. “They were rude – one hour later, the truck was still there,” she says, “but it is not their fault. There is no sign, the communication is not clear.”

Houses under construction are a common sight in the area, especially along via Isonzo. Because of its richness in green areas and groves, and its closeness to the city centre, Basso Isonzo is considered a great zone to live in. Throughout the last decade, this has generated a steady construction of new buildings, four-storey apartments often located alongside single houses built in the Sixties and early Seventies.

“The elderly die, and their sons and daughters build new storeys over their houses,” Teresa says. “The Municipality does not intervene because they say they go in derogation to regional law<sup>7</sup>, but the Region says it is for the Municipality to decide. An investigation should be done

---

<sup>5</sup> *Gentil Rosso* is a variety of ancient wheat. It is a remarkable grain for its strong resistance to diseases and its qualities of rusticity and adaptability. Throughout the last century, it was replaced by other types of grains with a higher gluten proportion – which helps them withstand industrial processing –, but it has been rediscovered in the last decade, especially by organic farmers.

<sup>6</sup> The Sector *Green, Parks and Urban Agriculture* of the Municipality of Padova manages 19 community gardens for 710 plots of about 30 square meters each. With the new Regulation of Urban Gardens, new types of gardens have been introduced to develop and support projects of community creation, social integration and inclusion of vulnerable population groups, training, education, and environmental research. *Basso Isonzo Orti* in via Isonzo holds 127 plots. <https://www.padovanet.it/informazione/orti-urbani>

<sup>7</sup> The *Casa Veneto 2050* Plan is a regional law of 2019 that aims to improve the quality of life by limiting land consumption and promoting the use of renewable sources. Its three fundamental points are the expansion of existing buildings, the demolition and reconstruction of inefficient buildings, and the use of building credits. Thanks to this, one can expand up to 15% of their house by bringing it to an A1 energy class and using renewable sources, with an additional 25% if one does as per Annex A (removal of architectural barriers, increased energy performance, technological improvement of plants, the use of renewable sources, application of recovery systems, construction of green roofs), and up to another 20% by using the Building Credit from Renaturalisation. The potential total volume increase is up to 60%.

but I do not have the time to understand how much money these firms give to politicians. The seven or eight-storey buildings prompt the height for the next buildings, and the low-rise houses lack in lighting.”

Because there is not one single type of permit to build houses, and many licences were given years ago, the situation is complicated. “There are many possibilities,” Councillor Arturo V. says. “The main problem is being fixed, now we only have minor interventions.” The “main problem” Arturo V. refers to is an operation of land equalisation in Parco del Basso Isonzo that will be discussed in the second chapter of this work. “Demolition and reconstruction can always be done,” he continues. “If you are a farmer you can automatically request the building of a house which is conventionally called Casa del Contadino (tr. Farmer’s House) to the AVEPA (Agenzia Veneta per i Pagamenti in Agricoltura, tr. Veneto Agency for Agricultural Payments) and they have to let you build it because it is your right to own it. But we are talking about individual interventions, nothing big.”

Even though the new constructions seem to be ceasing, the population of Basso Isonzo has grown since the start of the new millennium, and this has increased the presence of the preferred means of transport for an area without sidewalks, cycling paths, or bus stops: cars. Aside from residents, who have a right to get out of their houses in their vehicles, the presence of cars has steadily increased since the new opening of Campo dei Girasoli.

When Roberto, Emma, Federico and Corrado won the call for its management in April 2021, they would have never expected it to become so popular in such a short amount of time. The location close to the city centre, the desire to stay in the open air – especially after the Covid lockdowns –, the informal, friendly atmosphere, and the green surroundings are all elements that contribute to the success of Campo dei Girasoli. But while many benefits come from this new project, one big downside brings a huge problem to the area of Basso Isonzo: the increasing presence of cars, coupled with the absence of a parking lot.

As for public transport, no bus lines get to Basso Isonzo – the closest stop is at the roundabout in via Caserta, which is a 10-minute walk from Campo dei Girasoli, but the street has no sidewalks and the buses stop running at 9 p.m. The nearest tram stop is a 16-minute walk, which includes sections not suitable for pedestrians, so people who cannot cycle come to the park with their car. While many cycle to Basso Isonzo, a large group does not, for multiple reasons: parents with little kids who cannot bike or deem the road too dangerous to do so, especially because of the absence of cycling paths; elderly who cannot bike; people with dogs coming from other neighbourhoods; people who want to stay at the park after 9 p.m. and believe cycling to be dangerous at night; people with disabilities who cannot cycle; people who live far from the park and do not see cycling as an option; and more.

I have asked myself many times how this issue could happen in a territory that has undergone multiple planning variants in the course of the last two decades. If an economic activity such as the kiosk of Campo dei Girasoli is opened, it is expected for the Municipality to have a plan concerning the management of the traffic and parking of private vehicles. “It was an error of the Zanonato<sup>8</sup> administration to focus directly on the area and not its surroundings,” Teresa tells me. But just because a plan made in 2007 had a certain view, it does not mean that it could not be changed – in fact, it has partially changed, throughout the last few years.

“The idea is to reach the place as little as possible by car,” Councillor Arturo V. says. “There are alternatives. You can park in via Urbino and enter the park.” It is worth noting that the parking lot on via Urbino has only thirteen spots and is often full. He continues, “It’s a clash between the theoretical approach of not wanting any car, and the need for parking spots when you have an activity. We need a right middle way: while it’s impossible to have zero cars, we need to disadvantage their use.”

“To think that the whole city will come by bike is impossible,” Stefania tells me. “Maybe they [the Municipality] could think of a shuttle. But we must see if it is compatible with the idea of the park. I would find it completely inconsistent to make a concrete parking lot where cars now park.”

Guido has the same idea as Stefania. He is one of the people that fought the hardest against the creation of a concrete lot to serve the needs of the park’s visitors. “You don’t have to drive to the park,” he states during our interview. “We can fight together for the administration to create services. A proposal has been made, but the municipality does not listen.” Guido has multiple solutions – the first one being the use of the parking lot of the local gym in via Lucca. The idea had been presented in the past, but the administration rejected it because it required the presence of a night guardian. Since the concerts in Campo dei Girasoli end by midnight, and they are solely hosted during the warm seasons, hiring a watchman could be a possible answer to the problem.

Another option is to create a shuttle service for the entire Basso Isonzo area, stopping at the park-and-ride down the Brusegana overpass, or using the abandoned area of the airport as a parking lot, or the lot that already exists there. I found this last idea a very interesting one, but since the military airport is a private location, I had many doubts about its

---

<sup>8</sup> Flavio Zanonato is an Italian politician and journalist. He was mayor of Padova from 1993 to 1999, and from 2004 to 2013, and Minister of economic development during the Letta government (April 2013 - February 2014). In 1998, the Zanonato administration took one of the first steps towards the realisation of the Basso Isonzo Park, creating the Garden of Olives of Jerusalem, but it did not work in the direction of connecting the area with the other parts of town – the walkway on the Bacchiglione river was built only ten years later.

implementation. Bringing up the topic to Councillor Arturo V., he replied by telling me that it was impossible. “The airport is still active,” he says, “it is a matter of security – and the abandoned area is becoming the National Fire Department’s school. If we create a parking lot, we encourage people to come with their cars even more,” he continues. “We have to find a middle ground, and it is not easy. On one side we have people complaining about the parking lot, and on the other side, we have people complaining about it not being there. We have to compromise.”

A final solution has yet to be found. The temporary parking lot has been placed by the managers of Campo dei Girasoli inside Parco del Basso Isonzo, in the field facing via Bainsizza. “Last Monday [April 10th 2023, Easter Monday]<sup>9</sup> there were at least six rows of cars, each row with eight to ten vehicles,” Stefania says. “It [Campo dei Girasoli] is very popular. It is time to think about the issue, especially because they do so many activities for children. If I had kids and I came from outside the neighbourhood, I would never take them here by bike.”

The temporary car park is problematic for several reasons: it is part of a green area, and it is not sustainable to have such a high number of vehicles drive over it; the soil is loamy, and when it rains the tires create many, big puddles, making it difficult to avoid them while walking through the field; the fluids coming out of cars may pollute the soil, which is close to cultivated fields; there are no limits to the spots or parking lines, and the cars are usually scattered disorderly; it disturbs the animals that live in the field; the cars can create traffic and possible blocks in via Bainsizza, especially when moving in groups.

Federico, one of the managers of Campo dei Girasoli, tells me that they are looking for funds for electric bikes and racks for the next year, but they cannot do anything about the parking lot until the Municipality does something tangible to help them. “We don’t want concrete in the field,” he says, “but we need a practical solution to the issue. It’s not enough to tell people not to come by car – I think they wouldn’t, if they could. The Municipality has to create a new mobility plan, with different services for the area.”

Stefania thinks the same and even proposes a possible solution. “Rather than creating a big parking lot, they could equip the area with a dozen parking spaces for people with disabilities, and then create spots around the neighbourhood at a five-to-ten minutes walk from the park, or put a shuttle that could take people to the park from via Urbino, which is the safest entrance.”

---

<sup>9</sup> Easter Monday is the second day of Easter, a public holiday in Italy, among other countries. It is customary to have a picnic or barbecue in the countryside with friends or family.

These are all valid solutions, but the Municipality seems intent on keeping its current position: without any new services, they hope that people will stop driving to the park on their own and use their bicycles as much as possible. “It’s a rural neighbourhood,” Councillor Arturo V. says. “We have to limit the use of cars – it’s an area where cars have to adapt to people walking. There are no other answers.” However, this is not a long-term solution, because, without sidewalks, cycling paths, accessible public transport, and a positive incentive to a change of mentality coming from the Municipality itself, people will hardly modify their behaviour.



Fig. 1.11 and 1.12: Temporary unofficial parking lot on via Bainsizza (pictures by Teresa).



Fig. 1.12: Cars parked in via Bainsizza on April 1st, 2023.

Fig. 1.13: Parking lot on the morning of April 16th, 2023.

After my first walk throughout Basso Isonzo, the high number of barriers of different kinds is the issue that struck me the most. It looks like an area left to itself, without defined connections among spaces. The absence of sidewalks and pathways, the lack of signs and the increasing presence of cars are some of the main issues that were tackled in this chapter.

Nonetheless, Basso Isonzo is one of the most popular areas in Padova for people who are looking for a calm place to live, and hundreds of people come to its green areas during the weekends to enjoy the sun and relax. How did the area become so popular among people living outside the neighbourhood when its connections to the rest of the city are so poor?

The Municipality of Padova has been working on multiple projects regarding Basso Isonzo for the past twenty years, imagining it as the first example of an area with an agro-landscape vocation within the city, having an agricultural production and hosting multiple educational activities. Because the administrations that have occurred during this time have had different ideas and plans for the area, Basso Isonzo is still a patchwork zone – undefined and, at times, multi-named. But the importance of an agricultural area close to the city centre, and the emotional ties that many citizens and administrators have to this place, are some of the elements that keep Basso Isonzo alive, regardless of its ambiguousness.

As Marxist geographer David Harvey theorised (1973), geographic imaginaries make people acknowledge the links between space and their own social relationships. Because space is a “mental as material construct” (Harvey, 2005), people can experience it in multiple and at times conflicting ways. Even when clashing, the act of imagining different space organisations and mobilities for Basso Isonzo is enough to have a hold on locals and continue this competition of ideas, in order to find long-term solutions to issues that have concerned the area for a long time. The people that have walked this territory, with their different land uses and interpretations of spaces, have transformed it into what it is today. But an effort is needed to get to its roots. We need to go back in time – when roads were not paved, wild green areas thrived, and Benedictines were the keepers of these grounds.

We need to go back to the Sixteenth century.

## *Interlude II*

*Crossing the courtyard of Palazzo Moroni, Padova's city hall, I climb the outdoor stairs up to the first floor. I find myself in a waiting room with a typical Venetian floor and a huge promotional poster of the future tramline of Padova. Currently, only the first line exists, with seven more planned. Looking outside the window of the old palace, I watch people cross Piazza delle Erbe and the historical city centre, feeling a strong contrast between the Medieval city, and this new project that will revolutionise its mobility.*

*A woman comes out to print some photocopies and asks me if I am waiting for someone, making me come in. I thank her and walk through the corridor, knocking on the second door to the right. Two secretaries welcome me behind their desks, telling me that Arturo V., Councillor for Urbanism, Mobility and Traffic, Environment, and Cycling, is ready to receive me.*

*Arturo is a man of few words, sitting behind his antique wooden desk. He is in his forties and looks tired, repeatedly pinching the cover of his phone. He answers me in monosyllables, stating multiple times that "it is not my department." Arturo does not think that the realisation of a park recognised at an institutional level for the whole area of Basso Isonzo will be possible, or desirable. "It would lead to heavy changes to urban planning and mobility, involving numerous expropriations of private properties," he says. His vision is that of an area with an agro-landscape vocation, not strictly defined by borders – a place of farming where activities commonly associated with the countryside can be done, hopefully reached by bike or on foot. "Since roads cannot be changed, it should be one of those areas where pedestrians and bicycles are the main characters."*

*But is it possible, without a push from the administration, for locals to change their behaviour? Arturo thinks that people will start using the bike, not finding any parking spots in the area, but without a good communication campaign, endorsing the use of bikes, and clear, connected and safe lanes in the streets, it will hardly be possible for this change to happen. Public transport tickets cost 50 cents more compared to last year, and the price of public bikes and scooters is prohibitive for a lot of folks.*

*If the City aims to reduce pollution and traffic, why is public transport not as supported as it should be? Why are some areas still out of reach and dangerous to cross for people without a car? Why not fix the current issues, before building new ones?*



## Chapter Two

### *Remembering*

*If the traveller does not wish to disappoint the inhabitants, he must praise the postcard city and prefer it to the present one, though he must be careful to contain his regret at the changes within definite limits: admitting that the magnificence and prosperity of the metropolis Maurilia, when compared to the old, provincial Maurilia, cannot compensate for a certain lost grace, which, however, can be appreciated only now in the old postcards, whereas before, when that provincial Maurilia was before one's eyes, one saw absolutely nothing graceful and would see it even less today, if Maurilia had remained unchanged; and in any case the metropolis has the added attraction that, through what it has become, one can look back with nostalgia at what it was. (Cities and Memory 5, p. 30)*

Memories are the visions that shape and fuel our understanding of the world and our positioning as individuals and communities. They pervade places and attach themselves to objects, monuments, and street names – they make feelings arise, whether positive or negative (De Nardi et al. 2020). The landscapes attached to memory and the values and perceptions they create in people can become sites of historical identity. A sense of place and belonging within local landscapes can influence the memories and meanings tied to events that happened in those places (Stewart, Strathern 2003). In the words of Edward Said (2000: 179), people acknowledge memory “especially in its collective forms, to give themselves a coherent identity, a national narrative, a place in the world.”

Divergent stories and accounts can shape different memories tied to the same place, and social memory can be instrumentalised to follow the agendas of those at the top of the hierarchy of power (Hoelscher, Alderman 2004). Landscapes are forged by the social structures that dictate who has the authority to control them – but those oppressed by those dominant forces can create counternarratives, offering alternative histories tied to the same land (Bridges, Osterhoudt 2021).

In a place influenced by conflicting narratives and subjected to various administrative variations as Basso Isonzo, a multitude of actors shape the memories tied to its landscape, and the imaginaries generated by them. From the first sources dating back to the Renaissance period up to the present day, the agricultural vocation of Basso Isonzo has remained stable – but not without its struggles. The permeating urbanisation during the 1960s put the territory on a seesaw, oscillating between the hungry real estate agents, and the residents – culminating in the direct actions carried out by local activists in the 1990s and later on in 2021 to protect



the green areas of Basso Isonzo from the decisions of private agents and municipal administrations. But in order to understand these dynamics and injustices, we must go back – we must start from the roots.

The memory of the area currently named Basso Isonzo dates back to the XVI century, when the land is owned by the Monastero di Santa Maria di Praglia and headed by the Court of Brusegana. The maps of the time kept in the State Archive of Padova prove that the area is included in the Guasto, a large zone free of buildings created between 1509 and 1513 to defend the city beyond the Venetian walls<sup>10</sup>. Settlers possess all the houses in the area, entrusted with the churches that depend on the Court of Brusegana – now home to the Duca degli Abruzzi Agricultural High School.

Alongside the Monastero di Praglia, the Fathers of Sant'Agostino<sup>11</sup> own a small plot of land with a furnace along the Bacchiglione river, in a place that some of the local elderly still refer to as *il fornassotto*<sup>12</sup>. The remaining lands are kept by other religious bodies (the Reverend Mothers of San Biasio<sup>13</sup>) and by private owners.

In 1800, engineer Giuseppe Maria Pivetta maps the hydraulic agricultural system showing the typical cavin or *padovana* method, characterised by a very pronounced *baulatura*<sup>14</sup> placed in the direction of the length of the field. In the following map of 1805, the territory of nowadays Basso Isonzo is destined for arable land with vineyards. This is the first systematic map of the area, showing the settlements distributed along the riverbank and the current via Bainsizza. Numerous paths cross the zone and connect it to the ancient Strada Montanara (the current via Sorio, which still clearly marks the northern border of the area).

Through various papers of the Military Geographic Institute cited by the 2022 Basso Isonzo Masterplan it is known that, in 1890, the agricultural area close to the river is already

---

<sup>10</sup> From 1405 to 1797, Padova was under the domination of the Republic of Venice, one of the Italian maritime republics.

<sup>11</sup> The Fathers of Sant'Agostino are part of a religious mendicant order of the Catholic Church, founded in the XIII century under Pope Innocent IV. <https://www.agostiniani.it/>

<sup>12</sup> While this place is reported in Gianni Belloni's book as "fornassotto", it is called "fornarotto" in the 2022 Green Masterplan issued by the Municipality of Padova. It is mentioned multiple times in Belloni's interviews by different people, and only addressed once in the Masterplan, but it is interesting to notice how even in published literature and official documents the names of the places change, perhaps because of diverse sources – a recurring theme highlighted in the first chapter.

<sup>13</sup> The Reverend Mothers of San Biasio were tied to the San Biagio e Cataldo Church situated in the western corner of the Giudecca island in Venice. The original building dates back to the 10th century, but the church was demolished in the second half of the 19th century. <https://web.archive.org/web/20150518085402/http://www.archiviodistatovenezia.it/siasve/cgi-bin/pagina.pl?Chiave=710&Tipo=ente>

<sup>14</sup> *Baulatura* is an agricultural technique that turns the soil convex by lifting the centre and lowering the sides. The scope is to drain the water when it stagnates. The crop is situated in the heaped part so that the slope helps the draining of the excess water. <https://antropocene.it/2020/02/24/baulatura/>

crossed by the railway (1866), while in 1935 a shooting range is built and the drill ground becomes a military airport.

Reaching the Twentieth century, the details of the history of Basso Isonzo become more precise, thanks to the memories and the imaginaries of the people who live and experience this land. Many of these recollections are stored in the 2022 book of the journalist Gianni Belloni titled ‘Basso Isonzo - Il futuro del passato’ [tr. Basso Isonzo - The future of the past]. “To really experience a territory,” Belloni claims, “it is necessary to go through the narrations and the testimonies of its life, thus bringing to light the dynamics – even the distant ones – that have woven it” (Belloni 2022: 16). Listening to the stories of elderly locals, he recalls how the land used to be sixty years ago – before urbanisation took a toll on the area.

As seen in the first chapter of this work, names are multiple and often interchangeable characteristics of many areas of Basso Isonzo. To understand the history of this place, it has to be considered that the people who have been living in this zone for a long time, such as Belloni’s interviewees, do not call this area by this name. Basso Isonzo is a recently adopted place name, of administrative origin. Brusegana is the name used by the respondents. “For us it was Brusegana,” Franco says, interviewed by Belloni. “Until the mid-1950s, via Bainsizza stopped at the Bortolami Nord house [a/n: inside Campo dei Girasoli], there was a ditch and the road [...] stopped, you could not go further. To go towards Brusegana, we crossed the airfield and then we passed under the railway: there was the school, the church, the tavern” (Belloni 2022: 19).

Brusegana comes from *brusa* or *broscia*, meaning cane – creating a picture of a swamp covered in reeds. This concerns in particular the area called *Basse di Brusegana* [tr. Brusegana Lowlands]. Researcher Pier Giovanni Zanetti reports: “In the historical cartography they were lowlands where water stagnated. The area of Basso Isonzo has always been subject to excavations, because the activity of the furnaces required a continuous extraction of clay, with consequent lowering of the soils. All the areas near the furnace have been lowered by one metre” (Belloni 2022: 20).

While the 1957 General Development Plan, signed by Luigi Piccinato, provides in the east of the area one of the expansion units of the city, the neighbourhood currently called Sacra Famiglia, many families of farmers are still living in rural conditions. “There were scattered farmer houses and then there were clusters of houses in Borgo Brusegana, in front of the old church, and the *fornasotto* here on the riverbank,” (Belloni 2022: 16) A.O., one of Belloni’s interviewees, says. The families living at the *fornasotto*, a small cluster of houses near the riverbank, are not farmers and are regarded with some suspicion by those who cultivate the land. “*Fornasotto* was a lime kiln, there was a group of houses, there were laundresses,

servicewomen, workers, masons, labourers. It was said that when there was someone stealing they usually came from there” (Belloni 2022: 18).

In the same year, the Church of the Madonna Incoronata is built, becoming the stronghold of the inhabitants of via Bainsizza, and little by little the area of Basso Isonzo is connected with the expanding city. This changes the cardinal points of the area: “Only after the 1950s via Bainsizza was extended to via Monte Pertica and the reference church became the new church of Sacra Famiglia” (Belloni 2022: 23).

Not too far away, an INA-Casa<sup>15</sup> district is located in the southern part of the building area provided by the Piccinato Plan, followed by the Peep<sup>16</sup> of via Siracusa, already included in the Peep Plan of 1963, but only realised in the 1970s and 1980s.

The prolonged survival of farm work, according to A.O., is possible thanks to the opportunity given to war veterans to make hay on the land of the nearby airport: “We left at [...] four o’clock in the morning, one or two per family with a sickle, from the riverbank of Bacchiglione we arrived [...] to via Sorio. It was a disaster for those who had gone to war. I brought milk to the aviators’ cafeteria. There were a hundred fields of hay, which meant you could keep two or three more cows. Everything [was done] by hand, only in the 1960s came the *rosteon* [a/n: a kind of rake] that formed rows of hay called *maree*” (Belloni 2022: 17).

During this period of time, the first cracks in the rural society start to become evident, resulting from the stories of locals comparing themselves to the emerging urban models: “Back then, the road was all [made of] dirt, and when I had some money and bought a Mini Minor [a/n: a type of car], I was ashamed to go out with the girls because it was all dirty” (Belloni 2022: 18).

A change emerges, running along the thread of real estate renting and the adoption of new lifestyles – the construction of single-family houses with a gate next to the large farmer houses where several families and generations lived together. A radical transition that creates expectations. The possibility of building a house is the pass to free oneself from the peasant condition, the access to a modern way of life.

In the early 1980s, on the one hand, the three most inhabited areas of Basso Isonzo are connected by a new road, and the part of the Piccinato Plan destined for urban expansion is

---

<sup>15</sup> The INA casa (1949-1963) is a plan that stems from the draft law “Measure to increase the labourer employment by facilitating the building of houses for workers”. The plan is proposed in a dual key: as a manoeuvre aimed at relaunching the economy, by building economic houses, but also as a device of “institutionalised charity” on a national scale. English garden cities are used as models to design not only houses but micro cities within cities, or self-sufficient neighbourhoods that rely on concepts of common good and community. [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/il-piano-ina-casa-1949-1963\\_\(Il-Contributo-italiano-alla-storia-del-Pensiero:-Tecnica\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/il-piano-ina-casa-1949-1963_(Il-Contributo-italiano-alla-storia-del-Pensiero:-Tecnica)/) <https://www.inacasa.org/>

<sup>16</sup> The Peep (People’s Economic Housing Plan) is an urban planning tool used by municipal administrations to program interventions concerning economic public housing. <https://studiopanagia.it/blog/piani-zona-peep-cosa-sono-municipi-roma/>

completed. According to it, the area between the district of Sacra Famiglia, bordered by a new ring road – which will never be built – and the airport, has to accommodate a multi-sports area with a stadium, playgrounds and a park, with the aim of attracting the planned construction of a Sports Citadel for the CONI (Italian National Olympic Committee).

The multi-sports area is confirmed by the following variants and plans, but is never realised: a tennis complex is added to the existing shooting range and the Italian Riding School – randomly arranged and not contextualised in a space that continues to be cultivated despite the expectations of urbanisation, justified by the fact that already in the 1960s the area destined to the sports centre had been subjected to a private allotment.

On the other hand, via Bainsizza, which hosts most of the farmhouses, undergoes a process of densification with a progressive detachment from the cultivated fields and the creation of residential buildings facing the road. This process is accentuated when via Bainsizza is connected to the rest of the area thanks to the construction of another allotment destined for military families, obtained in the 1980s on airport service lands. In short, the grounds of the park are gradually eroded.

“Since that time, locals started fighting against land urbanisation,” Federico, one of the managers of Campo dei Girasoli, tells me during one of our interviews. “There was supposed to be a bowling court here in the 1980s. They could get away with it because it was classified as equipped public greenery. A bowling court! Can you imagine? So they [the locals] started some of the first environmental protests [of the area]. Supermarkets and the like were close by, there wasn’t any necessity to build malls or stuff like that.”

In 1990, the Basso Isonzo Park’s Committee is created, proposing an alternative to sports facilities and trying to raise public awareness on the importance of creating an agro-urban park. The 1985 study coordinated by ecologist and landscape architect Professor Giovanni Abrami on the periurban spaces of Padova, and the 1994 dossier by urbanist Roberto Gambino on the recovery and enhancement of the river network and interconnected public green areas are two fundamental records giving precedents to the Committee’s ideas. “They chained themselves to trees – even my parents,” Federico continues. “People had the same reactions that they have nowadays with environmental activists from Ultima Generazione<sup>17</sup>.”

Struggling against the raging urbanisation impending on the territory, these grassroots activists act to protect the place they inhabit – and consequently, the memories tied to it, its history and its vocation. While they may not define themselves as activists, their role is

---

<sup>17</sup> Ultima Generazione [tr. Last Generation] is a campaign born in 2021 which adheres to the international network A22, carrying out civil disobedience actions and demanding government interventions against climate collapse. In Italy, public opinion is divided on the strategies used (ex. roadblocks, throwing washable paint on institutional buildings, etc.), and they are much discussed by the media in 2022-2023.

fundamental in the battle against the indiscriminate overbuilding of the area. “In 1990, along with Legambiente<sup>18</sup> and the Park’s Committee, we organised a big party called “Nel parco che non c’è” [tr. In the park that is not there/does not exist],” Carlo L., honorary president of Legambiente Padova, says to Belloni during their interview. “The mobilisation blocked the construction of the bowling alley that should have been built in the area where today is the Hollman Institute. Then [we] began the battle to revise the forecasts and rules of the urban plan and to create a unified plan with a public park destination” (Belloni 2022: 26).

The Municipality of Padova entrusts Paolo Castelnovi and Federica Thommaset with the drafting of a project, envisioning a division of the area between the eastern part, close to the Sacra Famiglia neighbourhood, where a conventional urban park would be built, and the other side, close to the airport, destined to be an agricultural park.

The draft will never be approved by the City Council, but the area of Basso Isonzo is bounded and subjected to protection regulations by the Variation to the PRG (Piano Regolatore Generale, tr. General Regulatory Plan) approved in 1998. The Variation cuts out the ring road between the district and the park outlined by the Piccinato Plan, freeing the vacant spaces destined for the mobility system. The removal of this road makes it possible to carry out the first public intervention for the creation of an urban park – “Parco degli Ulivi di Gerusalemme”, inaugurated in 1998.

However, there are more variations to come: in 2001, urban planning equalisation<sup>19</sup> is introduced in Padova, and in 2003 the so-called Service Variation is adopted, in open contradiction with the general variation of 1998, eliminating the bordering of the park and the corresponding protection legislation. Basso Isonzo is included in the equalisation areas, and the two major owners of the green areas stipulate agreements with the Municipality, which in return gets 25 per cent of their ownership. “With the urban equalisation,” Legambiente explains to Belloni, “previously non-existent building volumes are provided to the owners of the areas for their benefit, and in return, they must give a share of them to the Municipality, free of charge” (Belloni 2022: 26).

In the areas of Basso Isonzo, the norms of urban equalisation are translated into special conventions for two large firms. Only one of the two conventions is ever implemented – the

---

<sup>18</sup> Legambiente is a non-profit association aiming to protect the environment and support the development of a fairer, just society, basing its mission on scientific data. The circle of Padova was born in 1985 and its scopes are, along with the protection of the environment, the promotion of the territory and of the artistic scope of the city.

<sup>19</sup> Urban equalisation is an urban planning tool. Its objective is the equal treatment of real estate subjected to urban transformation, associated with the compensation of properties whose assets serve the construction of social housing, the improvement of energy efficiency, safety – especially in areas at hydrogeological and seismic risk –, social integration, the regeneration of the urban environment and the recovery and reuse of abandoned areas.

one concerning the site owned by the heirs of the Carotta family, once owners of the homonymous furnace in Sacra Famiglia, in front of the Couver Tennis in via Monte Pertica.

During this time, renting farmers are distanced, and the first large construction site opens in 2009-2010 – the Villas in the Park project, occupying a valuable area of re-naturalised senile quarries. Based on the approved Guide Plan, the second section of the public park is inaugurated in 2011, including a farmhouse where the Municipality intends to host an Ecomuseum. Another intervention is then carried out in the park’s southern area, along via Isonzo.

Following the 2012-2013 plan of the PaAM<sup>20</sup> (Metropolitan Agrolandscape Park), the administration decides to exit the binary logic of the agricultural park/urban park traced by the Gambino project and tries a different path. Instead of three independent areas – sports equipment, urban park, and agricultural park –, the idea is to think of a multifunctional landscape project, where the different activities can coexist side by side. According to Legambiente, the land equalisation mechanisms applied in Basso Isonzo, in addition to producing irreversible damage by urbanising part of the territory, would have inevitably led to a fragmentation of the interventions and prevented the realisation of a unitary design.

Taking a step back and looking at another zone of Basso Isonzo, in 2009 the company Altavita-Istituzioni Riunite di Assistenza (IRA) of Padova, a public institution of care for the elderly, sells three-quarters of its properties to the Zanonato Administration. The Municipality thus builds the current Campo dei Girasoli park, which is planned to be extended in the south of via Bainsizza, but in return, IRA acquires the right to build in the remaining part – that is, on 36 thousand square meters where it is possible to create a volume of 30 thousand cubic metres, or ten buildings with a total of one hundred apartment units: a new neighbourhood with a predictable heavy impact on the environment and the viability of the entire area. In the meantime, new farms practising organic farming settle in the area, creating initiatives aimed at raising public awareness of the agricultural potential of Basso Isonzo. Between 2010 and 2018, IRA, which is not interested in starting its own real estate operation, repeatedly tries to sell the area at auction, without success.

“I was just passing through the park [a/n: Parco del Basso Isonzo],” Guido, a resident of Basso Isonzo, tells me, “and jokingly told a man pruning the elderberry to be careful because I really cared about that tree. He told me that he’d be careful, but that the bulldozers would

---

<sup>20</sup> The PaAM project focuses on the relationship between Padova’s urban design and the management of spaces and agriculture. The heart of the issue lies in the value of the multifunctionality of open areas. The main problem is the management of the generic request of residents to have more sustainable forms of agricultural production, and its organization into a professionally competent demand with concrete solutions. Founded in 2012, the project seems temporarily suspended – given the months-long inaccessibility of its website and the lack of any other source related to it on the Internet.

come in a week. He took me by surprise.” After a spontaneous reunion at the Parco degli Ulivi di Gerusalemme and many months of struggle, supported by the Comitato per il Parco Agricolo del Basso Isonzo [tr. Committee for the Basso Isonzo Agricultural Park], founded in 2020, the population manages to prevent the construction of the ten apartment buildings in the Parco del Basso Isonzo area.

Meanwhile, on November 30th, 2020, a resolution is issued – the Municipality invests in the development of a multifunctional, sustainable and innovative metropolitan agriculture, drawing up a Plan for the Agro-Landscape and Environmental Sector at the municipal level, along with a specific plan for the Basso Isonzo Park as a pilot project of the inter-municipal agro-landscape park, a plan developed within the Green Plan of the city of Padova.

In December 2020, IRA’s land is auctioned off by Aspiag Service, the Despar<sup>21</sup> dealer in the Northeast of Italy. Held with a secret bidding system, with a base of 3 million and 180 thousand euros, the highest offer among the three participating companies is proposed by Aspiag: 4.5 million euros – clearly distancing itself from the other two firms, which offered a sum slightly bigger than the auction’s baseline. It is worth noting that the agricultural value of those same fields is 300.000 euros, which levitates to 3 million euros only because of the buildable 30.000 square metres.

In agreement with the Municipality of Padova, Aspiag obtains to relocate the volumes in the Rizzato zone – a university area bordering Parco Europa, on the other side of the city. But the destination of the hectares saved from urbanisation, now owned by the Municipality and temporarily handled by the managers of Campo dei Girasoli, is still under discussion: “I’m an old-fashioned communist and I’d like the land to go to the people,” Guido says, smiling. “In Padova, there are more than 900 requests for community gardens. It would be nice if the already existing plots in Basso Isonzo could be expanded.”

The 1990s and 2021 actions carried out by the residents of Basso Isonzo and Padova can be situated in the experiences of urban social movements that have been fighting against gentrification in cities since the 1970s. There is not a single definition for urban movements, as they can vary within a spectrum going from actions located under wider political movements to localized Not In My BackYard (NIMBY) actions (Wicke 2021). Regardless of their positioning in the spectrum, the social movements that struggled against urbanisation in

---

<sup>21</sup> Despar Italia is a consortium company that brings together under the Despar brand six food distribution companies and affiliated retailers. It is worth noting that Despar, under the deal of Aspiag, supported by Padova’s current mayor Sergio Giordani, could receive part of the land plots that will be bought by Ali Supermarkets in the zone of Saonara (PD), in an operation of allotment that is currently being treated. The issue has some similarities with the past situation of Basso Isonzo. For more information on the topic: <https://www.legambientepadova.it/ampliamento-della-zona-industriale-il-progetto-ali-va-riscritto/>

Basso Isonzo are not to be overlooked, as they acted as catalysts for a dialogue with administrations and prevented overbuilding in one of the last spacious green areas close to Padova's city centre.

Despite the multiple battles and variations, as seen in the first chapter of this work, Parco del Basso Isonzo is still an undefined area. "Basso Isonzo is a lucky case of an unrealised urban planning, which left this matter suspended," Lidia T., associate professor of Geography at IUAV University, says on the topic to Belloni. Today, the most visible ideal of a park built on the imaginary of Basso Isonzo is the area called Campo dei Girasoli: four hectares of land alongside the Bortolami Nord house, a recently restructured farmhouse, managed by the Basso Isonzo Orizzonti srls. "When, in 2006, we obtained the sale of about twenty hectares, from via Bainsizza to via Lucca, the areas were all arable land," Alvisè P., head of the Green sector of the Municipality of Padova from 1982 to 2017, tells me. "The idea is to create parks that are sustainable in many ways. An agricultural park is sustainable because it has a constant presence on the territory, and in addition, the farmer is able to care for and guard the area."

While it would be inaccurate to describe the current Basso Isonzo as countryside, it cannot even be classified as urban. It is a hybrid situation – one lacking definition and boundaries, but at the same time, "rich of opportunities," as described by Lidia T. and Carlo L.

Since the mid-2010s, different residents start embracing the idea of an agro-urban park, and in 2016, Monica and Sandro, who have learned how to farm from books, found the Le Terre del Fiume farm, providing fruit, vegetables, jams, and more in their shop located close to the fields. The farm closes on Christmas 2022, but the influence of Sandro and Monica continues to live on in the territory.

Their land plots are taken over by the Araké farm, a new presence in the area, although founded by people who have been living in Basso Isonzo since their youth. After their experience with the Terre Prossime farm, which started in 2017, Giuseppe, Anna and Gabriele embark on a new journey still under development. Gentil Rosso wheat, vegetables and lavender grow in their fields, harvested thanks to their hard work, and their collaboration with locals: in 2021, hundreds of volunteers helped in the picking of tomatoes and the creation of a tomato sauce made entirely in Basso Isonzo<sup>22</sup>. "For the old owners it's difficult to understand what is happening here," Gabriele tells me during our interview. "We aim to spread organic

---

<sup>22</sup> On top of building a sense of community and wanting locally-produced organic food on the table, the initiative of the participative tomato sauce is important because it brings light to an important issue in the Italian agricultural field: the exploitation of workers picking tomatoes (along with oranges and other products). This phenomenon is known as *caporalato*, an illegal form of work recruitment and labour organisation. The workers are paid very low salaries – if they are paid –, and live in precarious health conditions. For more information on the topic see Leogrande, A. 2008 *Uomini e Caporali*, Feltrinelli; Mangano, A. 2020 *Lo sfruttamento nel piatto*, Laterza; Palmisano, L. 2017 *Mafia Caporale*, Fandango Libri; Sagnet, Y., Palmisano, L. 2015 *Ghetto Italia*, Fandango Libri.



farming as much as we can in the area, but they [the previous owners] would still like to build. Before we bought the land in 2018, everything was in the hands of three or four families. They have many children, so they have to divide the land plots, and then you end up having to buy one and a half hectares from one person and talk to eight other relatives so they can agree and go to the notary. It was not easy: we attended an auction but the price rose and the land was taken by a real estate agent. We managed to buy one hectare of land nearby, and in this way, we stopped the construction by the real estate.” In order to proceed with the building, the real estate has to present a guide plan that includes the land plot bought by Terre Prossime, and for this reason, the project is blocked. “Franco, one of the previous owners, really wanted us to do agriculture here. He cares about the fields, he wants them to be taken care of. There’s an emotional value to this place, aside from the people who only see an economic gain in it.” This kind of activism based on – among others – economic choices is a strategy that can be tied to a general shift in the class composition of social movements, especially ones related to environmentalism. The activists operating in Basso Isonzo can be ascribed to the “new social movement” approach, concerning a plethora of movements that have been emerging in post-industrial Western societies since the mid-1960s (Della Porta, Portos 2021). While many actors of Basso Isonzo are involved in agriculture, even the ones who work in the fields as their main job, as Gabriele and his brother, they do not come from families of farmers and are often able to start their farming experiences because of savings coming from previous jobs in the service sector (for example, Gabriele owned an organic food restaurant). For Gabriele, becoming a farmer comes from a passion, a love for the land, and a deep connection with the territory of Basso Isonzo. He was born there, and the care he puts into it is a consequence of his willingness to give back to the land, the memories tied to the place, and the emotions it makes him feel. Remembering brings forward affective predicaments, influencing how people feel and process places on an emotional and sensory level (Sumartojo 2020). Feminist scholar Sara Ahmed (2004) defines emotions and affections as “things” that circulate among and between individuals, objects and places, sticking to one or the other and leaving traces in the present. This brings up the question of what feelings a place tied to memories can evoke in someone, and which emotions “stick” to it as time passes (Waterton 2020). As for Gabriele and his family, and for Federico, one of the managers of Campo dei Girasoli, it is linked to their childhood – one of Gabriele’s first memories is related to via Bainsizza when the road was still unpaved.

But not all the main working actors of Basso Isonzo have been operating in the area since the 2010s. Collaborating with these new organic farms, the social cooperative Coishla has been present in the territory since the 1980s. Working in the line of job placement in the field

of gardening, Coishla is the first entity in the area to have a social impact. Along with the farm managed by Ildo Carotta, having been in the area for a long time, they have influenced the new agriculture in the choice of their crops, especially the Gentil Rosso wheat.

All these entities collaborating do it in a spirit of community – it is completely informal, not bound by any regulations. They start to cooperate even more with the new opening of the Campo dei Girasoli park, which gives them a meeting spot and a place where many of their activities come together to be enjoyed by them and the other residents. “The Municipality made a tender for the management of the park and the Bortolami Nord house,” Alvisè P. says during our interview. “The Cariparo Foundation, which financed the project, wanted the place to have an intended purpose, so we came up with the idea of the Ecomuseum. It was born from the necessity to get people to know this place tangibly, through memories. We want to restore some rooms in the farmhouse – I saw similar projects when I went to Germany, for example with furniture, utensils, and even media tools that told the history of the place. We could put past and future together.”

The call won by the managers of Campo dei Girasoli explicitly reports, along with the farming duties, the responsibility to realise educational activities and create the Ecomuseum. But according to the managers’ project, the Ecomuseum will not be built inside the house – it will become a “widespread museum”, an itinerary showing what Basso Isonzo currently is, in the form of an agro-urban park, while the house will be used to show how Basso Isonzo used to be. “You come here,” Federico says, “you see the past, you see the present, and then you will be able to imagine the future Basso Isonzo through some activities.” But the idea of a planned agro-urban park still struggles to take root – “While there are many spot interventions,” Alvisè P. tells me, “they are not included in a logic concerning the bigger picture.”

“We are a loud-speaker for what is happening in Basso Isonzo,” Federico says about Campo dei Girasoli. “But apart from what is happening now, it is important to remember what was then. Some things have changed, some stories have been lost, but others have been kept. We hope to be able to recover most of them, little by little.” Many of the inhabitants of Basso Isonzo talk about the place with a veil of nostalgia. Wilson et al. (2015: 3) describe nostalgia as “the authentic emotion we feel in contemplating the objective fact that in many respects things were better in the past. Sentimentality sighs for a long ago that never really existed, but nostalgia is a form of social realism [...]. We have decided to pretend that ‘another world is possible’ – even if it isn’t.” Nostalgia is an imaginative process of framing evocative memories, reinforced through shared memory patterns with others (Field 2020). In the context of Basso Isonzo, it is tied to its agricultural past – something struggled for, at

times remembered as bucolic, especially by the locals who have listened to its stories set in the Twentieth century, but did not live through them, or did so during their childhood. Perhaps it is because of the numerous attempts that have been made throughout the decades to urbanise the area, and the fights of the residents – and, partially, of the Municipality – to keep its green areas alive. Knowing a territory was and is being protected from exploitation, concrete, and real estate creates an emotional bond with the people who experience that place, inevitably binding it to the narratives built around it. The feeling of nostalgia involves desires – unfulfilled desires. “Modern nostalgia is a mourning for the impossibility of return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values, a nostalgia for an absolute, a home that is both physical and spiritual, the Edenic unity of time and space before entry into history” (Boym 2001: xiii). It is a complex and nuanced emotion – one especially relevant during the so-called Anthropocene. Memories tied to a specifically desirable and recoverable past are a phenomenon of this epoch, arising at a time of diffusing mass societies (Said 2000), rapid social transformation and a search for roots.

Going back to the past to shape the present is a recurring approach found in all the new projects being implemented in Basso Isonzo – the latter one carried out by the Araké farm. Save The Zolla [tr. Save The Clod] holds its first meeting on April 16th, 2023, and with it starts the journey to create a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture)<sup>23</sup> in the area of Basso Isonzo. It is a different kind of development, something that has never been done before by any of the entities in the area.

This is only one of the many plans that are being implemented in Basso Isonzo. Different kinds of futures are imagined by the residents, regarding the agricultural work, the scope of the park, the activities held inside it, and the opportunities it can give.

---

<sup>23</sup> CSA stands for “Community Supported Agriculture” and it is a model of mutual support between a given community of people and a farmer. The community and the farmer undertake to produce certain agricultural products, investing a quota to finance the production and obtaining in return a certain amount of food according to what was decided together at the beginning of the year and depending on the success of the agricultural season. Each CSA decides independently its organization at the legal level. In Italy, it can be classified as an agricultural cooperative, a simple farm, an association, or an informal group. <https://www.reteitalianacsa.it/cose-una-csa-comunita-che-sostiene-lagricoltura/>

### *Interlude III*

*A couple of days ago I receive an e-mail from the Araké newsletter talking about a project called Save The Zolla. The topic is not clear from the text, so I decide to go to the presentation meeting to find out.*

*When I get to Araké, there are about twenty people standing in the garden, talking. The event has not started yet, but the first chairs are starting to be moved, forming a circle. Gabriele from Araké welcomes me and tells me he is happy to see me. A minute later a familiar person gets close to us – one I did not expect to find here. Alessandro, one of my professors from Local Development, is a long-time friend of Gabriele, and he was asked to facilitate today's meeting. As in class, his face smiles, and his light-blue eyes struggle to stay open under the reflection of the sunlight. After a few words, he shares with me the phone numbers of a couple of friends who could be helpful for my research. Other people join our conversation, and we talk until Gabriele invites us to sit down.*

*We are about thirty people, with an average age of forty. A couple of dogs walk among the chairs, and one of them lays down on the grass in the middle of the circle we have formed. After Gabriele's introduction, Rosa from Calicanto, a Community Supporting Agriculture (CSA) in Mirano (Venezia), tells us about her experience in a CSA, explaining how it works, its benefits and its aims. Gabriele wants to create something similar in Basso Isonzo: along with the farm Araké, he and his brother have created a cultural association supporting the agroecological transition project currently going on, to which people can sign up as members. Rosa is enthusiastic about Calicanto because it gives young people the possibility to participate in agricultural work while eating healthily without spending high prices on organic food – Gabriele intervenes jokingly saying that it will not be the case for them, since I am the only person at the meeting under the age of thirty.*

*“A CSA is a model that shortens the distance between consumer and producer,” Rosa says, “making it possible to care about your health while taking care of the land and the relationships of the local community, creating bonds founded on trust, both in the fields and out; moreover, is it environmentally sustainable because it does not involve packaging or food transport.” As community bonding activities, Calicanto hosts self-handling workshops on the creation of grocery bags using old curtains and tarp to substitute food films.*

*“The challenge is to create a suitable crop plan,” one of Araké’s collaborators says. While he speaks, explaining what people should do if they want to become members, Alessandro whispers in my ear, “I always thought that a Community Foundation would be the most fitting type of organization for Basso Isonzo,” – which is an instrument of civil society designed to pool donations into a coordinated investment, dedicated to the social improvement of a place.*

*At the end of the meeting, after some technical decisions, Gabriele leaves us with the promise of a future meeting, and new information coming soon. As I help put the chairs into place, I listen to Iris, former president of the local council, Alessio, president of Legambiente Padova, and other people talk about the petition to stop the opening of Via Aosta and the change of viability of via Libia, and someone complains about the illegal parking lot in via Bainsizza, next to Campo dei Girasoli.*

*Many people stop by to talk in small groups, and some of them buy vegetables and pasta at the outdoor shop counter. Meanwhile, Monica, who used to manage Terre del Fiume, pops out in the garden to feed her hens, and she is greeted by everyone with joy. Even though she has sold her activity, and the fields are no longer hers, she still lives closeby with her husband Sandro, and she comes to Araké to take care of the animals.*

*Money will not take away from her the land that she loves.*

## Chapter Three

### *Growing*

*If you ask, “Why is Thekla’s construction taking such a long time?” the inhabitants continue hoisting sacks, lowering leaded strings, moving long brushes up and down, as they answer, “So that its destruction cannot begin.” And if asked whether they fear that, once the scaffoldings are removed, the city may begin to crumble and fall to pieces, they add hastily, in a whisper, “Not only the city.” [...] “What meaning does your construction have?” he asks. “What is the aim of a city under construction unless it is a city? Where is the plan you are following, the blueprint?” “We will show it to you as soon as the working day is over; we cannot interrupt our work now,” they answer. Work stops at sunset. Darkness falls over the building site. The sky is filled with stars. “There is the blueprint,” they say.*

*(Cities and The Sky 3, p. 127)*

“There is a layer of soil that you cultivate. Below you find a layer of scraps, stones and bricks. There is a great rise in humidity – from the agronomic point of view it is not good land.” Sandro chooses these words when interviewed by Belloni to describe the arable soil of Basso Isonzo – something loamy, eroded by the use of furnaces. Ludovica, an expert in agroecology living in the area, defines it similarly. “The earth is not suitable for agriculture because it is clayey. If it rains a lot it does not drain and there is water stagnation – the harvest is minimal.”

“Cities in Veneto tend to grow, and the agricultural land is not worth anything,” Ludovica continues. “Farmers only have the CAP (Common Agricultural Policy)<sup>24</sup>. If you are not part of a chain that has a product of excellence – such as ancient grains – you get little, and with that money, you repay the gasoline of the threshing, and if the harvesting is bad you take a loss. Many would rather sell, building over it is worth more money. No one has any interest in buying agricultural land other than construction companies reselling apartments for 600 thousand euros.”

The land in Basso Isonzo is not suited for agriculture. But regardless of the impropriety of its soil and the meagre financial gains, its history of struggle is enough to keep alive the agricultural vocation of Basso Isonzo, for the time being. Nevertheless, the territory has to have an economic return to keep itself afloat, one way or another.

---

<sup>24</sup> The Common Agricultural Policy is a partnership carried out by the European Commission between society and agriculture that aims to support the income of farmers and the development of rural areas. While giving food security to Europe and protecting rural communities, it has been thoroughly criticised because of the waste it produces, its inconsistencies with Europe’s “Green Agenda”, and its funding to vast agro-industrial conglomerates. The debate on its withdrawal is still open, and a new 2023-2027 CAP has already been approved. [https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy\\_en](https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy_en)

“We are proposing a type of zero-impact agriculture,” Gabriele from Araké says. “The only pollutant is the gasoline for the tractor.” Before 2017, the land of Terre Prossime was cultivated with monocultures of corn and soy, pumped with stimulants and herbicides. Thanks to Gabriele and the other farmers of Araké, residents can get to know those same fields, walk through them, and have social interactions – feel like they are part of the land that produces some of the food that nourishes them.

“We have set up a project of agroecological conversion,” Gabriele tells me during one of our conversations. “We grow vegetables, cereals and aromatic plants. We dig the ditches and replant the hedges without using any pesticides or chemicals. In a city like Padova that has exceeded 50 per cent of land consumption<sup>25</sup>, we try to raise awareness on the importance of the remaining urban green areas, on choosing locally cultivated products.”

‘When you go grocery shopping, you enter a polling station where you vote for the world that you want’<sup>26</sup> (Fig. 3.1). I read this phrase when I first enter the Le Terre del Fiume farm, and as I walk through the shop and look at the varieties of kale, my mind goes to all the times I found strawberries and summer squash in every season at the supermarket. The concept of seasonality has steadily been lost in recent decades, but the organic farmers of Basso Isonzo are trying hard to provide zero-kilometre food even to those who do not have the possibility of growing a garden, while still wanting to eat healthily.

---

<sup>25</sup> According to the 2021 ISPRA (Istituto Superiore per la Protezione e la Ricerca Ambientale) dossier, the percentage of land consumption in the municipality of Padova is 49.6 per cent.

<sup>26</sup> This sentence is written on a sign that used to be hung near the entrance of the Le Terre del Fiume shop. The author is not quoted.



Fig. 3.1: Poster in Le Terre del Fiume shop.

When Terre del Fiume, Terre Prossime, and then Campo dei Girasoli first experiment with the choice of Gentil Rosso wheat as a grain to harvest, it is through trial and error. “We knew that ancient grains were more delicate [than common wheat],” Gabriele tells me. “There is less crop yield, so this means that the price gets higher. But the quality is better, the gluten is healthier. We were happy with Sandro and Monica’s first harvest, so we replicated it.”

After the harvest, the wheat goes to the mill before it is brought to the baker. Because Padova does not have a mill that caters to small-medium organic producers, the farmers of Basso Isonzo send it to the Terrevive mill, in the province of Vicenza. “Gentil Rosso is an ancient wheat, it has not been altered to increase its productivity,” Vito tells me during our interview. He is the baker of the Basso Isonzo grains – even if his Bio Forno Colli Euganei is in Valsanzibio, on the hills around the city. It is worth addressing that ancient wheat is a term that refers to all those wheat varieties that originated before the year 1961<sup>27</sup> and were not conditioned by intensive genetic improvement programs. The revival of ancient varieties has

---

<sup>27</sup> 1961 is the year corresponding to the release date of the first wheat cultivar definable as semi-dwarf, released by Orville Vogel.



increased the sustainability of wheat cultivation and granted the development of a micro-economy allowing local producers to differentiate their products and increase their compensation using recognisable drivers, such as ‘from local production’ (Cappelli, Cini 2021). “The industry does not use it because it is difficult to process,” Vito continues, “but I like to work with farmers with small plots of land. It gives me the possibility to create a relationship with the people who come to the market and the farmers.”

This newfound sense of community that breaks away from the impersonal relations of the mass distribution system is one of the reasons that leads people to purchase goods from local farmers and, when possible, grow their vegetables in urban community gardens. This is why relationships – not transactions – are needed to develop an effective cooperation process among stakeholders, in which transparent communication and resource sharing exist along the short supply chain (Casalegno et al. 2019). For the farmers of Basso Isonzo, the hope is to have the capacity to close the wheat supply chain through the construction of a furnace in the new headquarters of Terre Prossime and, in the future, that of a mill. “We aspire to have a product that is 100 per cent made in Basso Isonzo,” Gabriele tells me, backed by the managers of Campo dei Girasoli. As I speak with Gabriele, I try to picture the furnace in place of the old cottage in ruins, visible from the fields. While the project is already set, the work is going slow because of bureaucratic issues.

Instead, the mill, located south of via Bainsizza, in the land plots that were subjected to urban equalisation, is a proposal for an even more distant future. It is part of a greater project that is slowly taking hold – the Basso Isonzo community farm. The fields surrounding the Bortolami Sud house are suitable for its realisation – which, aside from the mill, would ideally feature a mini composting system for the waste generated by agricultural processing, a warehouse for agricultural vehicles, and the cultivation of cereals and other crops compatible with the presence of people walking on the grassy strips.

Projects like these take time, money, and administrative cooperation – but Basso Isonzo has various plans which are already being implemented in the area. One of the newest actors on the territory, the Basso Isonzo Orizzonti Ltd., managing Campo dei Girasoli, after the unexpected popularity of its kiosk, decides to expand its educational activities. Coming from the neighbouring Lilliputh educational farm, dwarf species of sheep, goats, and hens live inside Campo dei Girasoli. Ludovica takes care of them, and many kids and school groups can visit them as they discover how vegetables are harvested in the garden next to the animals. I chat about this with Ludovica at sunset, along with her dog Erin, before she has to close in the hens for the night.

“Managing this place [Campo dei Girasoli] is difficult,” she tells me. “I am only a collaborator, but I see how much [the managers] work for the labs, the concerts, the gardens in collaboration with Auser<sup>28</sup>, the summer camps, and more. When we did the participatory seedbed project, many families with children came, and even if the farm has just started, a lot of schools are already asking to take their classes here.”

While Ludovica has lots of plans in mind, the emotion in her voice tells me that *Ortopedia*<sup>29</sup> is the project closest to her heart. “It’s a nursery for dying plants. I try to make them recover, even if the owners think they are gone for good. But I can’t do it alone – I need volunteers available to help me because, with the animals, the vineyards, and the gardens, things are becoming a lot.”



Fig. 3.2: Sunset in Campo dei Girasoli with Ludovica.



Fig. 3.3: Ludovica working on the vineyard.

---

<sup>28</sup> Auser is a voluntary and social promotion association, supporting the active ageing of the elderly and the growth of their role in society. In Basso Isonzo, it collaborates with Campo dei Girasoli in the care of the gardens, and it manages part of the land plots in the urban gardens on via Isonzo.

<sup>29</sup> *Ortopedia* is a word game in Italian consisting of the words *orto* (vegetable garden) and *ortopedia* (orthopaedics).



Fig. 3.4: Horse in the Lilliputh farm.



Fig. 3.5: Hens in Campo dei Girasoli.

“We usually plant sunflowers here – as the name of the park says –,” Ludovica continues, “but this year it is scorching hot and sunflowers love water. We have marigolds and a variety of spaghetti pumpkins. I held two courses on organic gardening in March [2022], and I’m planning another one for autumn-winter vegetables. I’d like the place to be a point of reference for people interested in urban gardens, balcony gardens, and organic farming. It’s a lot of work, but what’s important is to have passion for these things – otherwise, you live them as a burden. I like to be in nature, the fatigue is relative if I’m doing something I enjoy.”

2022 is a difficult year for farmers, and expectations for the future are not positive. As reported by the 2022 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), heat and drought stress on crops is one of the four major risks tied to climate change for the European continent, and the ability to use irrigation systems will be increasingly limited in the next years by water availability. Adaptation options include, among others, irrigation, changes in farming practices, vegetation cover, shifting planting, and agroecology – the majority of which are already being implemented in the area of Basso Isonzo.

Ludovica tells me about the summer hail damaging the vineyards – which I see with my own eyes a few days after our interview when visiting the fields of Terre Prossime. I speak with the owners of Terre Prossime while I help them in the harvest of the – very few – tomatoes. “Experiences like these can get you down,” Giuseppe tells me as we crouch over the plants. “We do everything by hand, just using a wheelbarrow. The beddings and



vegetables were destroyed in twenty minutes. Even if we have a lot of enthusiasm and try to be optimists, the first hours were really difficult.”



Fig. 3.6: Harvesting the hail-damaged tomatoes.



Fig. 3.7: Tomatoes of Terre Prossime.

Another group of residents hosted by the fields of Terre Prossime are the bees looked after by Irene. Her hives are located in the grove born from the 2018 project “Nasce un Bosco” [tr. A Wood is Born], when thousands of locals met and planted trees in the lands of Terre Prossime. “Bees are not pets,” Irene says to Gianni Belloni during their interview. “They fly, covering up to a six-kilometre radius. This means that if they do not find food in their territory they will move, and if neighbouring soils or water ditches are polluted, the bees can suffer. They are a good ecological indicator, and it is said that every farmer should have bees to understand if their work is going well” (Belloni 2022: 37-38).

The healthy growth of these groves and the presence of fauna are two key elements for developing the agro-urban park, following agroforestry principles. Agroforestry can be defined as a set of agricultural systems that joins the cultivation of perennial trees and shrubs with the presence of arable land and pastures in the same area. In countries with intensive agriculture, such as Italy, agricultural mechanisation and monoculture have led to a drastic reduction of the agroforestry system, which was the norm in the past (ex. arable land with trees, grassland with trees, etc.). Agroforestry gives the possibility of reversing the process of crop simplification in the area where it is applied, and the tree belts help increase animal

biodiversity and allow the creation of a dense network of shaded paths – especially useful during summer. The application of this practice is only one of the projects that are being carried out in Basso Isonzo – the area is going through a continuous development.

On the one hand, three public urban parks have been created throughout the past twenty years: Giardino degli Ulivi di Gerusalemme, Campo dei Girasoli, and the upcoming Albero del Tesoro [tr. Treasure Tree], an inclusive park realised by the Municipality in collaboration with the Robert Hollman Foundation and the University of Padova, along with seventeen institutions involved in the social and disability fields. The park aims to be accessible to everybody, and it is located close to the Hollman Foundation, in via Siena.

On the other hand, farmland, hedges, trails, vineyards and historic water channels are only some of the elements that characterise the territory as agro-urban. Along with the community gardens, from what I gathered through my conversations with locals, they are the features that residents care about the most, and the ones that aim to be preserved by the Green Masterplan issued by the Municipality.

The four main principles of the development strategy proposed by the Masterplan are spatial permeability, multifunctionality, sustainable agriculture, and a smart approach. Spatial permeability would give the possibility for the entire agro-urban park to be walkable in all directions, in compatibility with agricultural activities. The main existing paths would be joined by a dense network of on-foot trails, which would allow the park to grow without sacrificing agricultural activities; this would be achieved mainly through agroforestry, the system discussed above. As seen in the first chapter of this work, an extensive connection throughout the whole area would be highly beneficial to the park, since uneven and dangerous mobility is one of its main issues.

Secondly, multifunctionality in agriculture is seen as a strategy capable of improving the economic performance of farms. It offers services to citizens (ex. agritourism, educational farm, etc.) and the environment (ex. renewable energy production, habitat maintenance, etc.). It is important to remember that the various activities should not work in competition – but in synergy. This can be a difficult feat because activities are carried out by people – and social interactions in communities take a lot of mental effort, energy and time to be taken care of, especially when they are only held up by informal agreements.

Thirdly, the Municipality addresses the problematic issue of conventional agriculture still present in the area, with its use of pesticides and poisoning chemicals. The base requirement for continuing to practice agriculture in the agro-urban parks of the city would be to have organic certification, and any activity that helps preserve biodiversity and follows the principles of agroecology and biodynamic agriculture would be highly supported.

Lastly, the smart approach consists in imagining the agro-urban park of Basso Isonzo as a place served by a system of information and digital management of services useful to the citizen. For example, parking spaces in and around the park could be managed through these operations, as well as information on the suitability of the trails in the different seasons of the year, the opening and closing of the green equipped areas, information on the maintenance activities carried out by the Municipality, the state of conservation of various equipment, etc. This approach goes hand in hand with the evolution of Padova as a so-called *smart city*, where “smartness” is used as an adjective to include all those activities implemented through the Internet infrastructure. Cities are continuously changing and adapting because of the digitalisation process, and this has influenced both how people experience them, and how planners formulate their projects. Even though “going smart” seems to be a direction that many cities worldwide aim to take, it is important to keep in mind, especially when considering marginal areas, that research has proven a correlation between digital poverty and spatial inequality (Wilson et al. 2019; Reeve 2022); this is because of financial costs, but also because of unequal infrastructure investments. In an area of the city that has been left aside by the Municipality for a long time – visible through, among others, the lack of public transport and care of part of its green areas and roads –, despite the numerous projects that have been planned on its territory, the decision to uptake a smart approach could be beneficial to the site if this meant that the territory could be better connected to the rest of the city, and more attention and care would be practised by the Municipality.

Planning does not mean implementing. As seen previously, there have been numerous projects and attempts at an administrative level throughout the years to create a unified concept concerning the agro-landscape park. But until the results of this imagined plan carried out by the Green Masterplan will not be visibly featured in the territory, they will remain segments of the great patchwork that currently shapes Basso Isonzo.

“If we really want to create this agro-urban park, we need serious working groups,” Ludovica tells me. “Every stakeholder has to collaborate, without solely putting their own interests first. This place has a lot of potential activities that have not been implemented yet. If it were for me, I would put strawberries out-of-soil here [she indicates a spot in the gardens of Campo dei Girasoli], and with the animals, I would make something like “support a hen”, or a sheep, make some crowdfunding to care for them and buy their food.”

The lack of financial support is the main reason why a lot of thought-out activities have yet to be put into action in Basso Isonzo. These ideas presented by Ludovica are only a few of the projects that the inhabitants want to carry out. “The old farmhouse [of Campo dei Girasoli] has now been restored,” Ludovica continues. “There’s room to grow vegetables – we could

have food sovereignty and self-production in the whole area. Reclaim these spaces, and feed ourselves thanks to the work of our own hands without depending on large-scale retailers. It gives a sense of satisfaction to grow your own food. Nature has its slowness, but the rewards can be seen even in a short span of time. Some products are ready after a few months.” Ludovica’s position is one that is gradually taking hold in multiple areas of the world; for example, African small-scale producers and civil society organizations, through their 2021 declaration ‘Let’s Reclaim our Food Sovereignty and Reject the Industrial Food System!’ have denounced the corporate capture of African resources, markets and knowledge, where biodiversity and ecologies have been weakened by decades-long state neglect, governance failure and public underinvestment in the continent that can be assessed as the prime subject concerning agrarian extractivism, climate change-related consequences, and industrial food production (McKeon 2021). Another case among many is the one of Aroma-Home, an artist-initiated community garden project in Villetaneuse, France. Through the collaboration of Sarah Harper of Friches Théâtre Urbain with the local inhabitants of Villetaneuse, residents managed to reclaim neglected urban public spaces by creating tiny agricultural eco-oases in brownfields through acts of guerrilla gardening, a form of civil disobedience aiming to fight the degradation of urban areas through the planting and throwing of seed bombs in non-authorized areas. This guerrilla gardening led to the sowing of a community garden that connected food-growing, story-telling, place-making and food-sharing (Haedicke 2017).

Focusing on another side of Campo dei Girasoli, by following the arrangements made with the Municipality, the managers of the park have the obligation of solely growing organic crops in their fields, monitoring the organoleptic characteristics of the soil year by year. Alongside the agricultural part of the park, the aforementioned Ecomuseum is a project that is especially treasured by the Municipality – although one that seems to proceed slowly. The concept of ecomuseums takes root in the 1960s and early 1970s re-examination of the role of museums by museum professionals, who questioned the values, meanings and authority of traditional museums in societies. Coined as a term in 1971 by Hugues de Varine, the ecomuseum was defined in the 1973 ICOM Symposium “Museum and Environment” as a museum of the environment incorporating heritage, culture and the natural environment and changes in the system of relationships constituting the environment (ICOM 1973); the ecomuseum situates the environment and the local population in the museum space, putting the local community in the forefront as an active agent (Nitzky 2016). Varine (2006: 60) describes the ecomuseum as growing “from below, [...] in response to the needs and wishes of the people living and working in the area, actively [involving] them at every stage.” Something “designed around and within the community order to combine the natural and

social environments.” While ecomuseums are based on their communities, they have not solely been driven by local grassroots initiatives – as in the case of Basso Isonzo, where it was prompted by the Municipality as one of the core objectives of the managers of Campo dei Girasoli. Stakeholders act in collaboration, seizing people’s sense and interpretation of place, and reinforcing cultural and place identity (Davis 1999). Essentially, the bottom line for ecomuseums is to evoke community-based social change (Nitzky 2016).

“It does not have to be a museum that only tells the story of our ancestors and their horses towing ships along the river – it has to talk about this place, the future we are going towards,” Alvise P. tells me. The ecomuseum wants to give the people who visit Basso Isonzo the means to observe and retrace the history and evolution of the territory through the elements that still characterise it today. While it was initially planned to be inside the Bortolami Nord farmhouse – it was the reason why the cottage was renovated in the first place – the managers of Campo dei Girasoli have a view that differs from the one of the Municipality. “We want to avoid creating it inside the house,” Roberto says to me. “Maybe keep it to one room. We think that the idea of the widespread museum suits the place better.” Continuous changes happen despite agreements having already been sealed. Even with defined objectives, the practical application of intentions clashes with interpersonal relationships, financial capacity, and time-space obstacles.

Regardless of the struggle to keep collaborations healthy and transparent, networking is the only way to keep the idea of a Basso Isonzo agro-landscape park alive – and make it possible. “We need to have a long-term vision,” Iris, former President of the local council, tells me. “Otherwise, issues like urban equalisation will continue to prosper, and we will end up without a single green hectare. That’s why it’s important to work towards the recognition of the agricultural park – so it will no longer be possible to build here.”

The institutionalisation of the agro-landscape park of Basso Isonzo is a topic that has been thoroughly discussed throughout the past three decades. As I first discovered the history of Basso Isonzo, many questions came to my mind surrounding the administrative back-and-forth on the organisation of this area. If the aim was to create a unified, coherent project, and give new life to a place that had long been left to itself, why was the area delimited as an urban park in 1998, without any approved variation implemented until they were eliminated five years later? Why did the Municipality deliberate the drafting of a plan for the agro-landscape park of Basso Isonzo, but three years later the area is still a hodgepodge of band-aids and micro-projects?

“There is no official definition of a park that can delimit the Basso Isonzo agro-landscape park unless we consider it a regional park,” Councillor Arturo V. tells me during our



interview, “which is something we [the administration] have never taken into consideration because it puts some constraints – we would have to expropriate private gardens. It is impossible to put a border and say ‘Here we enter the park’ because we are entering a place where there are private houses. [...] We should expropriate everything for it to become public – all of this with enormous costs. There are many old delimitations that did not lead to anything – or they led to construction. Delimitation is an urbanistic phase – it does not mean anything by itself. Basso Isonzo is and will remain an area with an agro-landscape vocation.”

The idea of an agro-urban park with official recognition – which would prevent the exploitation of land and give boundaries and objectives to the people operating inside it, such as the obligation of organic cultivation – is something that every non-administrative person I interviewed wants for the area of Basso Isonzo – residents, people who work there, and associations that collaborate with it.

“We have been asking for the park to be delimited so it could be protected more efficiently,” Alessio, President of Legambiente Padova, tells me during our interview. “It is different from an urban public park, but it is not the first park that unites private and public areas. Stopping overbuilding and giving dignity to this ecological network is more important than any differences in political views.” Alessio says this because the administrative turnover seems to be the main reason why the park struggles to become official. “Today there is me, tomorrow there is you,” Federico, one of the managers of Campo dei Girasoli, tells me on the topic. “There are different ideas based on the political party of the councillor at hand. There is a lack of a concrete vision – the green sector was even removed by the Destro and Bitonci administrations. [...] The Municipality says they’re working on it [the creation of the park] but the process is slow. There is no timeline, and in the 2023 intervention plan Basso Isonzo is not even mentioned.”

But time does not look like the only issue preventing the realisation of this process. “Those in power had the time to create it,” Guido tells me. “The problems are the building permits. When you institutionalise a park you need cornerstones – you cannot have continuous variants fixing issues like band-aids. What lacked was not time; it was political will.” He adds, “Why was there a gap year [2022] between the old Plan and the new one? Was it maybe to allow the people who had building licenses to proceed with their construction? There are continuous administrative variants for this area – how can you expect them [the administration] to decide on a specific perimeter for a park? The 2021 plan was expired, they let the whole year of 2022 pass without issuing a new one. The Municipality did not take this responsibility – otherwise, they would have lost a pool of votes.” (Especially in the year of local elections, I add while speaking with him.)

The residents I talk to agree with this. “I would like to see the park concluded and managed,” Teresa says to me. “Right now, it is half-done work. There are results on paper, but in reality, there are none. Most of the area is not equipped, and it’s not organized – the administration says they have no money, but I think they lack capacity. There is a general disaffection with civil and political life that must be restored, but you cannot do this unless there are people with political empathy ready to fight for it.”

“The residents should be able to decide if they are ready to lose part of their private possessions to benefit the park,” Stefania says. “Communication from the administration has to be clear on this topic. For example, I find it convenient to put some limits to construction, while other people with building land might think the opposite. As for me, I would like to continue seeing these trails through the green areas and perhaps create some new ones in lacking zones. If these parts of the park become accessible to people it will be easier to take care of them and prevent them to enter a state of degradation.”

This is why, even if part of the administration is not keen on recognising the agro-urban park at an official level, the people who live the park are trying to create a unified plan by themselves. The last project currently being implemented is the new totem inside Campo dei Girasoli, born from a tender won by an association working on augmented reality. The latter worked on the video presentation, while the managers of Campo dei Girasoli worked on the treasure hunt presented by the totem pole. The first lines read “Welcome to the agro-urban park of Basso Isonzo”, continued by, “We are promoting the realisation of an agricultural park to preserve and promote the original vocation of this place while simultaneously including it inside the contemporary urban network.” The activity proposed is a treasure hunt of the main elements of Basso Isonzo – the gardens, the animals, the groves, and more. The project is done in collaboration with the Municipality of Padova, under the urban regeneration project “La città delle idee” [tr. The city of ideas], a promotion tool including financial support for activities addressing urban and social revitalisation.

In order to continue this process of (agro-)urban transformation, it is important to keep alive and transparent the collaboration between the administration and the local realities – otherwise, results may be exponentially more difficult to obtain. On November 24th, 2020, the Municipality of Padova issued a press release on the creation of an agro-landscape plan for the city. “The creation of a super-municipal (*sovracomunale*) metropolitan agro-landscape Park is an objective of this Administration that finally takes the first concrete steps,” Councillor Arturo V. declares. “[...] The act also concerns the area of Basso Isonzo, which is identified as a zone for a pilot project of the Inter-municipal Agro-Landscape Park. Of course, with this act, we do not block the existing airspace previously authorised in the area, but we

confirm that we will do our utmost to find a solution that will protect the private interests and the ones of the whole city. With the start of today's process, which will end with the approval of the City Council, Padova takes an important step in the direction that we imagined and decided together in the past.”

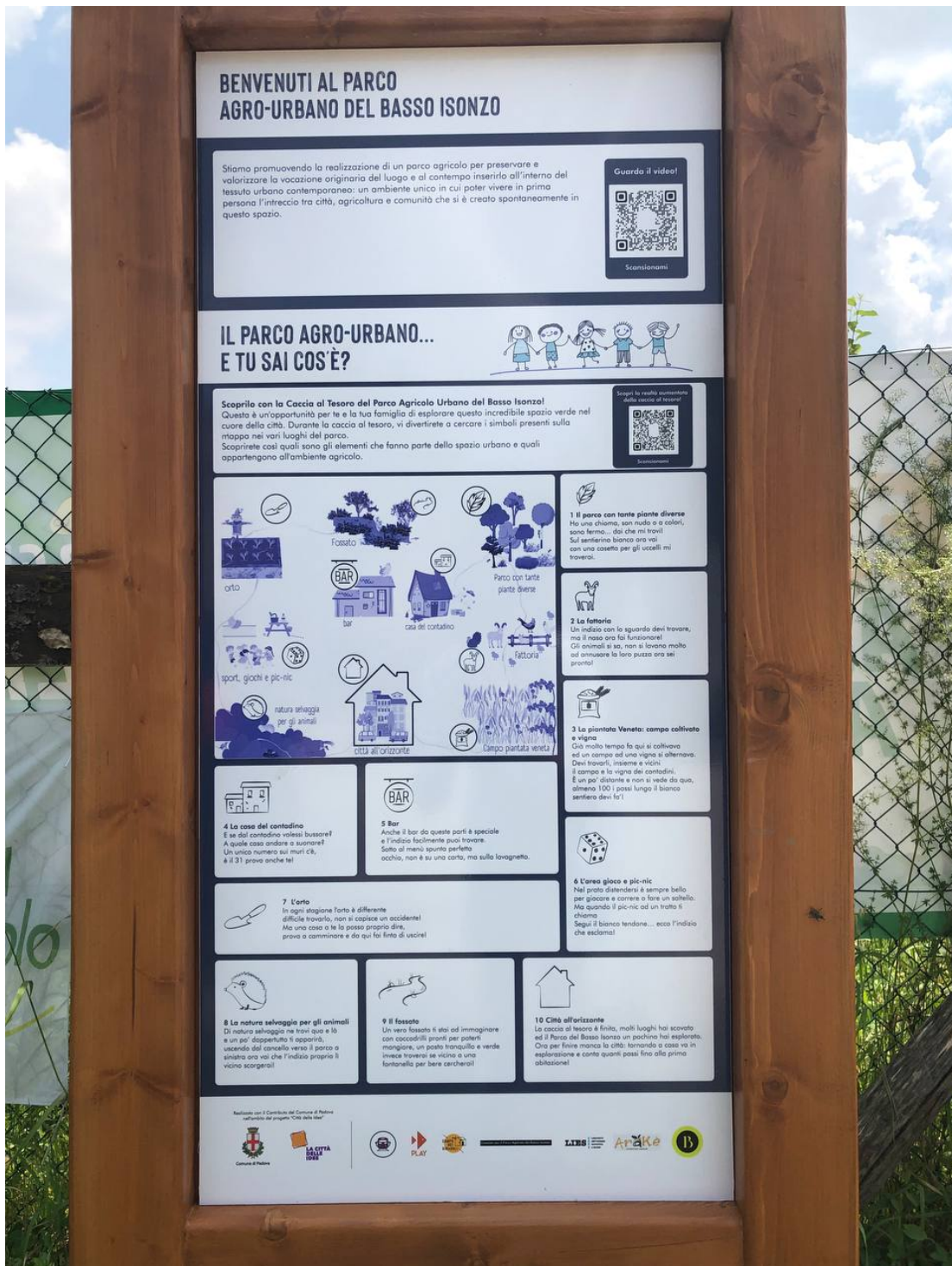


Fig. 3.8: Totem inside Campo dei Girasoli.

Three years later, changes are slowly taking place in the area – even if, as reported various times in this work, the implementation of a collective, coherent design is still far from being realised. This can only be accomplished through the collaboration of all the actors involved – residents, workers, administrators, and visitors. If not, the urban revitalisation process promoted by the Municipality will fail to acknowledge its social objectives. But interpersonal relationships are rarely as easy as they look on paper. Altercations can occur, different political views can distance people, personal issues might arise – and networking and social capital might be essential to obtain results.

#### *Interlude IV*

*Parking my bicycle in the square in front of bar Firenze, I sit at one of the tables of the stallage, where Teresa waits for me. Despite the spring sun, she wears a grey wool hat and a cyclist sports jacket. She has a newspaper and a magazine with her, next to an untouched soy cappuccino. She asks me if I want to have breakfast, and before I can answer her, she gets up and orders the same for me. Looking interested in my studies, she appreciates the way my course is organised; she says that we are the future. Deep down, I hope so, even though I know it will not be easy to receive recognition in the job market.*

*Teresa cares about her neighbourhood, its roads and its residents, and is very blunt in her speech. “Remember,” she tells me, “The fish always smells from the head. Did you see them the other night?” she says, referring to the meeting held with the residents of Sacra Famiglia, the deputy mayor and the Councillor for Mobility and Viability. “The Councillor did not even have a paper to write our questions down. If a kid goes to school without a notebook, the teacher writes a note to the parents. Should we write a note to the mayor? ‘Your councillor came to an important meeting without pen and paper, one where we decide the viability of a neighbourhood’?”*

*She recognises that there is political disaffection at the local level, and people living in a neighbourhood struggle to think that they could do something to change the situation because they are not used to doing that. “I live in a condo with seventeen inhabited apartments, and even though most of them are elderly, I see that they want to participate. Do you know how pancreatic island transplants work? You take an island, you put it somewhere else, and it regenerates. If you make them understand that we can change things and give them confidence, they will trust you. But many people do not do it because they have barriers to overcome – which are not only those of distrust but also technological ones. Interaction with people must be in the territory, it cannot always stay at the top of the ladder or by saying connect to the site. ‘Oh, we know that there is a problem related to technology’, she says in a mocking tone, “Then, face it! Communicate! Otherwise, we will all remain islands.”*

## Chapter Four

### *Uniting*

*The building with the globes is now Fedora's museum: every inhabitant visits it, chooses the city that corresponds to his desires, contemplates it, imagining his reflection in the medusa pond that would have collected the waters of the canal (if it had not been dried up), the view from the high canopied box along the avenue reserved for elephants (now banished from the city), the fun of sliding down the spiral, twisting minaret (which never found a pedestal from which to rise). On the map of your empire, O Great Khan, there must be room both for the big, stone Fedora and the little Fedoras in glass globes. Not because they are all equally real, but because all are only assumptions. The one contains what is accepted as necessary when it is not yet so; the others, what is imagined as possible and, a moment later, is possible no longer. (Cities and Desire 4, pp. 32-34)*

“We all interact constantly,” Federico tells me while we sit under the shade of the trees close to the kiosk of Campo dei Girasoli. It is opening time, and the first customers are starting to flock in. “We’re a real community.” On my first visit to Campo dei Girasoli, I do not expect to find such a laid-back environment in a place of work – while agriculture is a consistent part of it, the bar brings in the most significant revenues, and the catering industry is not famous for its calm settings. With time, I grow to understand Federico’s words, and what a term as vast as “community” means to him.

Urban agriculture and local food-growing initiatives have reportedly been helpful in community-building, developing community capacity, healthy eating, and community awareness and engagement (Levidow 2018). Many food initiatives aim to challenge the corporate food system, for example by reconnecting producers and consumers (Caraher and Dowler 2014) – as the farmers of Basso Isonzo attempt to do. It is a constant challenge between keeping the community united and staying afloat above the monopoly of the mass production system.

“I’ve seen dozens of places similar to this one,” Ludovica tells me as we trim the vineyard of Campo dei Girasoli, along with a dozen of volunteers. “What makes a difference is to work well together. You have to keep the projects alive because relational issues between people are usually what makes them collapse – along with financial problems, especially when you’re not close to the city. If you’re in the countryside, it’s far more difficult to come get your groceries on your bike. At least here, being close to an urban area, we do not have this issue.”

But paying attention to community relations is a continuous effort – one sometimes hard to keep up with when you have a great deal to manage. “It’s a challenge to find a place and time to meet up, put everything out on the table and talk,” she continues. “It’s far easier to decide things on your own, but that’s not the way we want to do things. It’s about finding common ground and going past misunderstandings, sticking together and helping each other. The dynamics are precarious – many farms go into burnout after seven years or so because it’s difficult to keep people’s interest while working simultaneously.”

Sometimes even support from the community cannot prevent ruptures to occur. “What happened with Le Terre del Fiume is still a fresh wound,” Federico tells me in March 2023. “They’re some of the first ones that started organic agriculture here back in 2016. I ask myself if we could have done something if only we had known the situation they were in.” Sandro and Monica closed their farm on Christmas 2022 without uttering a single word. Being a former customer myself, I only found out about it past the middle of December. “They had money to start the project,” Federico tells me, “but it became financially unsustainable in the long run.”

Farming is known to be a demanding occupation, with several stressors such as long working hours, unpredictable weather, uncertain markets, equipment breakdowns, lack of holidays, social and geographical isolation, etc. (Truchot, Andela 2018). Burnout is a concept that refers to feelings of exhaustion, alienation, disengagement, and demotivation due to chronic workplace stress developing over a long time. Along with the aforementioned pressures, farmers must deal with financial issues like tight margin profits, reliance on market prices and, in the European Union, the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) payments, besides complying with government policies and bureaucracy (O’Shaughnessy et al. 2022). With the agricultural system changing from traditional family farming towards entrepreneurship, as in Le Terre del Fiume’s case, more significant investments come, along with increased risks. Due to these structural changes that view farming as a more capital-intensive, industrialised activity, burnout and chronic stress can cause farmers to close their enterprises much earlier than they expected to (Kallioniemi et al. 2016) – as in Monica and Sandro’s case.

Over periods of time, long-term relationships can bring grievances with them. “Gabriele and Giuseppe founded Araké after buying Le Terre del Fiume’s lands because Terre Prossime, their other farm, is legally bound to Monica and Sandro – they had some kind of fall-out, on a work level,” Ludovica tells me. “It’s not easy to find trustworthy people to carry out a project with; as in many romantic relationships, you reach a point where you don’t know



each other anymore. You don't have the same goals anymore, you're not on the same page, and it's difficult to keep going.”

The other side of the coin comes in when relationships that should have been created on paper do not form – and unexpected ones do. “Based on the tender, we should have collaborated a lot more with some associations,” Federico says about Campo dei Girasoli, “but the relationships never bloomed. They were not local associations and their interest in us was not high – but for example, Gabriele, who I knew before applying to the call, was one of the people who helped us the most when we were starting. Our initial idea was to create an artisan ice cream shop in the former garage of the Bortolami Nord house – but then he helped us rethink the idea, and the project evolved. Gabriele never intended to be a manager of Campo dei Girasoli. Still, he became a core collaborator – asking around for help in the neighbourhood since we knew nothing about farming and animals at the start. Networking was and still is fundamental to us.” Thanks to Gabriele, Federico was able to find the people who would become the other managers of Campo dei Girasoli. “We did some interviews and I got to know Emma and Corrado, who were already a couple – Roberto and I had collaborated years ago at Emergency<sup>30</sup>, and it was kind of absurd to meet again like this. When we decided we wanted to work together and understood the kind of financial and time investments we needed to make, we built an identity that could present itself to the Municipality as a leading entity of a network that would comprehend all the other people of the community.”

In a place with mixed public-private management like Campo dei Girasoli, where the Municipality is figuratively a landlord to the managers, one of the challenges is to communicate your actions and activities to the public, while still keeping a close eye on bureaucracy. “There's the planning side where you have to answer meticulously to every question, and the human side that we all create together – we are on good terms with the former Environment Councillor and the Head of the Green Department. We want to demonstrate that public and private interests can go together and collaborate, creating an economy while still doing things that the citizens are interested in.”

The situation of the ASPIAG/IRA equalisation process (discussed in Chapter Two) was one of continuous discussion and lobbying with the Municipality, and the partnership with the public sector influenced the final decision. “When you have a common enemy it's easy to make people feel involved,” Federico says. “Lately we've been having fewer meetings with the local committee. People lose interest, but the struggle against Municipal variants and real estate speculation is constant.” One of the main issues that does not seem to have a way out is

---

<sup>30</sup> Emergency – Life Support for Civilian War Victims is an Italian humanitarian association. It offers free medical aid to victims of war, anti-personnel mines and poverty.

the presence of non-organic producers next to organic farms: “We tried to talk with the largest owner so many times, but he’s not interested. The land is inherited, and they’re waiting for a change of scenery – for politicians to make it building land, so it will be more profitable. After all, it’s private land – they’re not pouring nuclear waste in the fields, they’re putting agrochemicals that can be bought at Bricocenter<sup>31</sup>. If the Municipality supports local organic producers, they should put farmers in the conditions to work – explain the benefits of organic farming, reduce the taxes on the fields in the years they are not cultivated, and more. We have thrown the dice, and now we need the younger generations to keep studying these things, to be able to bring the change – but without the support of the institutions, it will be very difficult to do so.”

Despite the difficulties, farmers of the community enjoy working in Basso Isonzo. “Sometimes I come here to relax when I don’t want to stay home,” Ludovica tells me as we pet her dog, sitting on the grass of Campo dei Girasoli. “Since I work other jobs it’s difficult to follow everything, but volunteers help a lot. I tried to do everything alone before – and it’s a great burden. By working with people I can trust, I feel calmer.” Other kinds of workers also appreciate their job in Basso Isonzo – and recognise its differences compared to other places. “I feel like I’m working with less pressure,” Layla, one of the social health workers running the summer camp in Campo dei Girasoli, says. “It gives a sense of calmness to us [the activity coordinators] and the kids. There’s more freedom of movement, we can relax when we want to, and we don’t always have to follow a schedule. Since I’m less stressed, I’m working better.” Sofia, another activity coordinator, echoes Layla. “Our relationship with Emma, one of the managers, is very informal – it’s like we were collaborators, I don’t feel like she’s my boss. When the day is finished we stop by the kiosk all together to talk about how the day went and drink something.” This kind of perception of an agro-urban setting as Basso Isonzo can be inscribed into one of the five farmer stereotypes conceptualised by anthropologist Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan (2005) – the so-called consensual village community. This persistent valorisation of the ‘traditional spirit community’ borrows from two Western traditions, Christianity and socialism. But relationships and associations in farming settings are rarely as egalitarian as they claim or want to be, and it is easy to fall back into a reproduction of hierarchies, even when that is not the original intention of the community – be them based on status (men/women, seniors/juniors), regarding factors of production (control of workforce, of land), or disputes on power or interpersonal relations (managers, cooperatives, friendships, clienteles). “Fostering collective dynamism is certainly a

---

<sup>31</sup> Bricocenter is a popular chain store specialising in bricolage, home accessories, construction and gardening.

worthwhile objective, but it should not overshadow the full extent of the difficulty entailed in this precarious and permanently menaced enterprise” (Olivier de Sardan 2005: 74).

Despite the delicate equilibrium of this system, I receive the same kind of positive reaction from the waiters working at the bar of Campo dei Girasoli, and the people managing the stallage in front of the kiosk. My first thought after the interviews is that the situation seems almost too good to be true – not a single complaint. So I decide to ask a person who I knew would be sincere. “My first day was a lot,” Vic says to me – a dear friend of mine who recently started working at the kiosk of Campo dei Girasoli. “I tried to understand where things were because everyone was too busy to explain anything to me – but I managed.” They roll themselves a cigarette while I tell them about the fieldwork I did, and they start humming the song in the background. “Does reggae music make you fall asleep?” I ask them. They started working at 11 a.m., finishing their first shift at 4 p.m. Their next one starts at 5 p.m., ending at 8 p.m. “I endured all these hours thanks to the music and the environment,” they tell me, “It’s really calming.” I ask them how the customers were, and if they treated them well. Vic nods, “It was great compared to other experiences I had. No one curses at you, and they’re aware that it’s the opening day and they have to chill out. I’m pleasantly surprised.” They tell me that all the people they have been able to talk to are here because it is an informal and relaxed environment, in the open, and that is what draws them in. “I wouldn’t define them as environmentalists, but they are people who are aware of the importance of this place, and they enjoy staying here because of the place itself.” Four months later, Vic still works at Campo dei Girasoli, and even though they complain about their job at least once a week – as most people do –, their opinion of the place has not changed.



Fig. 4.1: Playing a board game with visitors of Campo dei Girasoli that I met during fieldwork. Campo dei Girasoli’s kiosk offers a variety of board games which can be taken for free by the customers while drinking at the tables.

Fig. 4.2: Campo dei Girasoli and the kiosk (Thursday, July 20th, 2023; photo by Vic).

Some of the people who come sit by the kiosk to drink some beer and listen to concerts are the same ones who participate in the trimming of the vineyards or the harvesting of tomatoes

in the summer. They participate in the workshops held by Ludovica on creating gardens on balconies, or on how to make a seed bomb. While a lot of them may not be residents of the neighbourhood, they still feel like they are part of the community of Basso Isonzo – especially the people who visit the area weekly, buying their vegetables from the Araké farm, and taking part in the work-in-progress Community Supported Agriculture founded by Gabriele and the other workers of Araké.

CSAs propose a different model of exchange and organisation of labour, compared to a capitalist framework. Save The Zolla, a precursor to Basso Isonzo's upcoming CSA, involves a payment in advance for a share of the produce, based on the financial capability of each member of the CSA. During the annual or seasonal assembly, the cultivation plan is arranged, and the members choose together which kinds and amounts of vegetables to grow. After completing the collective budget and knowing the available shares based on the participants, an anonymous auction begins – starting from an average, people write the share they can put on the table, giving a higher or lower price. If the auction confirms the sustainability of the project, the process is concluded; otherwise, another auction starts, until the total sum of the budget is reached. The food choices are narrower compared to markets and large retailers, and the CSA members accept a degree of unreliability and unpredictability in the quality and quantity of food received – be they positive bumper shares, or negative ones (Watson 2019). One of the appeals of CSAs is the reduction of the gap between producer and consumer (Schnell 2013) – which is even more evident in working models of CSAs, compared to distributive ones. A distributive share implies payment towards the CSA (an example is the one described above), but does not bind the participants to a commitment in the form of labour; on the other hand, a working share entails an input in the food production labour process coming from the members of the CSA (Watson 2019).

While alternative food programs such as CSAs may help relieve food access limitations, particularly in areas where supermarkets are not present (Butterfield, Ramírez 2021), this is not the case for Basso Isonzo's CSAs, its community gardens, and the former Le Terre Del Fiume shop. Urban agriculture is advocated as a practice supporting social and environmental sustainability, but these benefits are undermined by urban agriculture's implication in the reproduction of social and environmental inequalities through classism. Class relations become realities when groups of people inhabit urban spaces in specific ways – such as when middle-class clients use a local market like Le Terre Del Fiume as a site for “authentic” consumption, compared to working-class customers seeking more affordable produce. The majority of the population who purchases its food in places such as Araké and Le Terre Del Fiume belongs to the so-called green middle class, comprising middle-class individuals who

have at heart matters concerning environmental sustainability and sustainable consumption – “distinguish[ing] them as ethically responsible environmental citizens without sacrificing the material and social benefits of middle-class status” (Maurer 2020: 469).

When analysing the sustainability of a farm or a CSA, it is not only the environmental side that has to be considered – if urban agriculture is not sustainable on a social level, can it even be defined as such? This entails the consideration of equitable employment for farmers and labourers, along with the accessibility of the produce to a wide range of citizens – otherwise, sustainable agriculture risks becoming a niche to the massive conventional agricultural system or an outlet for middle-class consumers to access better-quality food compared to working-class people. Because sustainable farming still exists within the systems of class privilege and inequality, the possibilities for social sustainability both in the production and consumption of sustainable food are undermined (Pilgeram 2011). As it happens for Araké and Le Terre Del Fiume’s owners, who have all learned how to be farmers and were not born into farming families, these farmers have a higher education compared to conventional farmers, which may suggest a relationship between class privilege and an inclination toward working in sustainable farming as assessed by Duram (2005). Moreover, in line with research on sustainable farmers (Pilgeram 2011), all the farmer-owners in this case study had well-paying jobs, jobs with flexible work schedules, or both – along with family members who could help in the financial support of the farm.

The same level of class privilege seems to be found in the clients of Basso Isonzo’s sustainable farms – and the same is expected to happen concerning the upcoming CSA. While Basso Isonzo’s CSA still has not had its first official annual assembly, and its share type has not been defined yet, the kinds of citizens who will take part in it can be assessed based on the people present during its introduction meetings. Taking part in a CSA entails a certain level of privilege: being able to put in a large sum of money all at once at the start of a new year or season, having a work schedule that permits you to go to the CSA during its distributing hours, in a distributive model, or having enough free time and energy to work in the fields, in a working model, having access to a means of transport that permits you to safely get your groceries home, and more. As for this case study, in the present situation (August 2023), the awaiting future members of the CSA can buy their vegetables by booking themselves a crate through a digital form shared weekly by Gabriele and Giuseppe on a WhatsApp broadcast group, where each person can decide how much and which type of vegetables to purchase and the pickup time. The price ranges and the distribution system highlight the issues discussed above: being able to afford produce with costs higher than supermarket ones, reaching the farm, being available during the – very few – opening hours, etc. But being part of a CSA, or

buying directly at the local store of a farm, can be beneficial not only to the health of its participants and customers, but also to their interpersonal relationships – shortening the supply chain, getting in contact with the farmers, creating friendships with them, sharing stories, and sometimes, working in the fields along with the people who nurture them. CSAs can positively influence the emotional and social spheres of their participants – informants from previous research (Chen 2012) report feelings of happiness and joy after participating in CSA, along with feelings of freedom, an improvement in mood through stress relief, and a sense of accomplishment. On a social plane, CSAs give their members opportunities to spend time with their families, promote friendships between participants and friends, and can be a way for members to expand their social circle and meet people with interests similar to theirs.

The image shows a screenshot of a web form for 'Araké' farm. The form is titled 'Modulo di pre-ordine settimanale' and includes the following elements:

- Header:** 'Araké' logo with a leaf icon.
- Title:** 'Modulo di pre-ordine settimanale'.
- Address:** 'DA COMPILARE PER RITIRO DEI PRODOTTI - via BAINSIZZA 4, PADOVA'.
- Contact:** 'eliosfavaretto@gmail.com' with a 'Cambia account' link.
- Field 1:** 'Nome e Cognome \*' with a 'La tua risposta' input field and a 'Richiedi ar' button.
- Field 2:** 'Numero di telefono \*' with a 'La tua risposta' input field.
- Field 3:** 'Quale giorno vuoi passare a ritirare la tua spesa? \*' with a 'Scegli' dropdown menu.
- Product Listing:** 'Cassetta di pomodori da sugo 10kg - 12€' with a photo of tomatoes and a 'Scegli' dropdown menu.
- Footer:** A paragraph of text about the farm's mission: 'Araké azienda agricola nasce con l'obiettivo di promuovere un'agricoltura di rigenerazione agroecologica in una delle ultime aree verdi alle porte del centro cittadino. Il cuore delle nostre attività è la cura del territorio e delle persone che lo vivono, per questo lavoriamo per sviluppare e valorizzare una filiera corta e di prossimità che veda coinvolti in maniera attiva gli abitanti della città, grandi e piccoli! Attraverso questo semplice strumento, potrai inviarti il tuo pre-ordine di verdure, frutta e molti altri prodotti di nostra produzione e scegliere il giorno in cui ti è più comodo passare a ritirarle. Ti chiediamo alcune informazioni personali (email, nome e n° di telefono) in modo da poter comunicare con te per informarti su eventuali variazioni sulla disponibilità dei prodotti. x contatti [info@arake.it](mailto:info@arake.it)'.

Fig. 4.3 and 4.4: Example of an online form from the Araké farm.

Since a CSA has not officially started in Basso Isonzo, such kind of tight-knit, organised community has yet to be put into action in the area – the Comitato per il Parco Agropaesaggistico del Basso Isonzo being unfit as an example. While the 2021 equalisation process was the spark that gave birth to the Committee, and its related struggle was the glue that kept it together, after the party held at Campo dei Girasoli following the administrative decision preventing the one-hundred apartments from being built, the participants were unable to hold the attention of the locals, and the group fell apart little by little. “I was never a part of

it, but I went to a couple of meetings,” Ludovica says. “They haven’t done anything substantial after 2021. That’s my feeling as a resident.” Formally, the Committee still exists, but its trajectory has changed. “They recently had a closed-door meeting with the Head of the Green Department for the management of the Bortolami Sud house and the surrounding fields,” Guido tells me during one of our conversations. “That’s the only thing they’re working on at the moment. The call will most probably be won by the managers of Campo dei Girasoli or the owners of Araké because the administration is trying their hardest to close the circuit of people working in the area; they don’t want anyone new to tip the balance of their precarious equilibrium.” The call has not been issued yet, and according to Guido, it will probably become public by September 2023. “A citizen’s committee should be public, at least on paper,” he continues. “They’re not thinking about including the residents in the debate on what to do with the Bortolami Sud house. They’re already set on building the mill, and that will be it.” Ludovica echoes him, “Now they’re following the tender for the Bortolami Sud house, but they should listen to the population, what the residents want there, and let people suggest things. It doesn’t feel like they’re doing it.”

While the Comitato per il Parco Agropaesaggistico del Basso Isonzo’s stability seems delicate, a new yet-to-be-named committee is currently taking shape, founded by six residents of Basso Isonzo and Sacra Famiglia – open to all citizens. Guido tells me about it on June 8th, 2023, while we sit at one of the outdoor tables of a bar in Sacra Famiglia. He says that the next meetings among residents and the Municipal administration will regard the mobility issues of via Libia and via Aosta, and possibly the parking situation of Campo dei Girasoli – but what is important for them is the creation of a safe neighbourhood, one that is not used as a crossing area for cars that want to avoid the traffic of via Sorio and via Goito, one not dangerous for its residents. As we drink a white Spritz – the clock stamps 11 a.m. – Michele, Guido’s friend, sits next to me on a wicker loveseat, and his dog sits close to our legs. Guido starts to introduce us, but he is stopped by me shortly after – I realise I already met them during the Save The Zolla event, back in April. We brief Michele on the conversations, and he tells us, “What’s important is to unite around a topic – make a common proposal to present to the Municipality, without holding any past grudges.” This proposal could concern the topic of the parking lot of Campo dei Girasoli, a hot subject which brings on the same page all the people of Basso Isonzo. “Nowadays there are many different microcosms,” Guido tells me. “What we aim to do with this new committee is to create a container with everyone’s interests, while keeping the identities of every single actor.”

We meet again on August 3rd, walking around a park with cicadas chirping over our heads. “In September we will create some ‘neighbourhood bites’<sup>32</sup> on our social media pages – we plan to make 30-to-40-second informal interviews with various people living in the neighbourhood, letting them express their perceptions and ideas on the area and its issues.” The committee only needed a trigger to start its work. “After the recent behaviour of the Local Council of Sacra Famiglia, which lacked transparency, even the residents who still supported it have stopped to do so. The people you find at the head of the Council are the same ones who founded the Comitato per il Parco Agropaesaggistico del Basso Isonzo – the people who care about the neighbourhood and put in their energy and time in it have known this for a long time. They collaborate with the Municipality, and some of them aim to become part of the administration – that is their goal, not the wishes of the residents. They won’t listen. That is why the room of the Local Council is barren during meetings, apart from the times when a big issue is discussed. The residents have stated that the Local Council does not have their interests in mind – it says ‘we are taking note of it’, but it has been taking notes for six years. The administration may close its doors to us, but the community of the neighbourhood needs and wants to be listened to; we matter.”

A new chapter opens for the areas of Sacra Famiglia and Basso Isonzo – one which poses its community at its centre, wanting to make it a protagonist, not only a container of information issued by the administrations. The story does not end here – like the whole area of Basso Isonzo, it is in continuous evolution. Only the time to come will let us know if it will work, or if it will fall into yet another project looking forward to the future, without having roots in the present.

---

<sup>32</sup> ‘Neighbourhood bites’ is the translation I chose for the Italian phrase ‘pillole di quartiere’, which would be translated verbatim as ‘pills of neighbourhood’.



## *Interlude V*

*On the first day of April, Teresa's interview spurs me to observe the neighbourhood, and find traces of her words in the territory. I get to Campo dei Girasoli at half past one in the afternoon when the kiosk is in full swing. Families with children fill the tables, along with thirty-year-olds and some elderly couples. They must be about one hundred, most of them having lunch with a puccia or drinking a beer. From afar I see Vic, a dear friend of mine, moving among the clients with a tray in their hand. A month ago, during one of my interviews with Federico, I overheard Emma talk about their need for waiters for the warm seasons and the lack of need for experience. Vic has been searching for a job for the past three months, so I suggest they send in their curriculum, knowing their love for the countryside and live music. I see they have a lot to do, speeding through the patrons, so I greet them with a wave and a nod of the head, hoping to be able to talk later on.*

*In front of the Bortolami Nord house, there is a stand under a gazebo, and I catch a glimpse of Gabriele talking to a woman. He is selling vegetables, wheat, pasta, lavender and chamomile oils, and some seeds. He tells me that Araké will start selling vegetable boxes on demand in about a month and that he is happy to be here today, on the re-opening of Campo dei Girasoli; "It feels like I am part of this community," he says.*

*I walk around Campo dei Girasoli before finding a place to eat my lunch. Kids run around the park, and a couple of dogs follow them in their wild chases. Federico is behind the counter, while Corrado goes in and out of the Bortolami Nord house with big boxes from Vito's Bio Forno. Baldo, Giuseppe's dog, greets me with his big, brown eyes and his wet nose, letting me pet his head for a couple of minutes. He walks with me around the tables and the house, and I notice that the majority of the conversations among the crowd are spoken in the local dialect; most folks are past the age of fifty. I meet eyes with Vic, who is cleaning a table. "When do you get off?" I ask them. "At two, maybe," they tell me. "It's five to two." "Yeah, but I don't think so..." they say, "there's not much organisation."*

*They will only get off at four, to start again at five. I relax with them under the shade of a tree during their one-hour pause, while they roll and smoke a cigarette. "It was overwhelming, but I feel like I'm already part of this place," they say. Seeing them smile gives me comfort. They lean their head on my shoulder as we watch children play, and hear laughter over a Femi Kuti song.*

*I stroke their hair and tell them, "Happy April Fool."*

## Conclusions

### *Imaginaries*

*In this sense, nothing said of Aglaura is true, and yet these accounts create a solid and compact image of a city, whereas the haphazard opinions which might be inferred from living there have less substance. This is the result: the city that they speak of has much of what is needed to exist, whereas the city that exists on its site, exists less. So if I wished to describe Aglaura to you, sticking to what I personally saw and experienced, I should have to tell you that it is a colourless city, without character, planted there at random. But this would not be true, either: at certain hours, in certain places along the street, you see opening before you the hint of something unmistakable, rare, perhaps magnificent; you would like to say what it is, but everything previously said of Aglaura imprisons your words and obliges you to repeat rather than say. Therefore, the inhabitants still believe they live in an Aglaura which grows only with the name Aglaura and they do not notice the Aglaura that grows on the ground. And even I, who would like to keep the two cities distinct in my memory, can speak only of the one, because the recollection of the other, in the lack of words to fix it, has been lost. (Cities and Names I, pp. 67-68)*

Padova, 1990. The city is flooded by posters, students and commuters hand out flyers by the train station, talking about a big event, a local festival called ‘Nel parco che non c’è’; the park that does not exist, the park that is not there. People ask about this park, this place they have never heard of – Basso Isonzo? On the morning of the festival, a snake of hundreds of people wanders through the fields of unknown grounds, a walk ending around the green lands of the Pool Tennis, with a small concert of classical music and a puppet show. 33 years from then, Basso Isonzo is still an undefined area; full of possible futures, both realistic and contradictory.

“Our goal is to be able to close the supply chain,” Federico tells me as we speak in his office. “If Araké was able to build a furnace in their lands, we could go to the Municipality with the proof that we can make things happen – and ask for the airspace to build the mill close to the Bortolami Sud house. We stayed for a couple of days in a similar place in Tuscany – they built an open mill with 30 thousand euros, and now they offer tours for schools, a shop, and more. There are places akin to this all over Europe, and all around the world, and seeing some of them with my own eyes and online gave me – gave us the energy to strive for something similar. It is a dream, but it makes us go on.”

Imagination has been a constant of every society, but through new kinds of instruments, more people around the world can consider possibilities they had never contemplated before.

Individual lives are no longer contingent on their local experiences – “for the new power of the imagination in the fabrication of social lives is inescapably tied up with images, ideas, and opportunities that come from elsewhere” (Appadurai 1996: 54).

Imagination is here considered as a culture pattern, something anthropologist Clifford Geertz theorised in his 1973 work ‘The Interpretation of Cultures’, applying it to the realm of religion. Geertz defines two kinds of models related to cultural patterns: models ‘of reality’, where theory and signifiers help to build and understand the world around a specific meaning frame and interpretation; and models ‘for reality’, where interventions are done to the world around us by following a specific vision or theory. Geertz uses the concept of ritual as an example – people act their religious beliefs by going to churches, mosques or temples and praying, and their vision is confirmed in their ways of living outside the church, following the same principles even outside the prayer time. There is a circular bond in the way reality is represented and the way one acts in the world; reality is stripped of its supposed objectiveness, and instead it is infused in the subjective ways through which people give meanings to it. In Basso Isonzo, reality is not interpreted as something that can be seen with one’s own eyes, but as something yet to come, a model for the future. Regardless of this, workers and residents of Basso Isonzo put into practice actions that are coherent to their interpretation of reality – a reality that does not exist, one that is only one of the possible prefiguration of the area. The actors who give life to Basso Isonzo may be, to a certain extent, putting into action prefigurative politics, which can be defined as “the deliberate experimental implementation of desired future social relations and practices in the here-and-now” (Raekstad, Gradin 2020: 15). This means that, if social change is strived for, some aspects of the future social structures must be applied in the actions carried out to get there. This is generally applied by the people who have a vision for Basso Isonzo by acting in anticipation to their hoped future for the area – for example, by setting up community farms and CSAs even though the existence of agricultural urban park has yet to be officially recognised.

As aforementioned, imagination is a key element for the realisation and the existence of Basso Isonzo itself. The people living and working in it, the ones who make Basso Isonzo alive, are putting in their energies for a park that does not – and may formally never – exist; but by doing so, they are giving life to it – they are making it real. Spatial practice always entails some kind of spatial imagination, and this imagination is constitutive of the processes of socioeconomic activity intertwined with it (Healey 2006). Where collective action occurs in the absence of a structured administrative coherence, such as in Basso Isonzo’s case, the place in question can be described as an imaginary: “a collective spatial rationality which justifies and gives meaning to the range of political-economic practices while being in turn

sustained by the functional results of those practices” (Wachsmuth, Kilfoil 2020: 65-66). Without an administrative design, it is the people taking an active part in the construction of a place who build the imaginary concerning that area. Ideas on how the practical reality of a place is created may be fuzzy and overlap, or be distant from each other. Following Wachsmuth and Kilfoil’s theory concerning regional imaginaries – here applied as “local imaginaries” –, several visionaries known as local entrepreneurs are necessary to drive the political strategies of an area. While not hegemonic, the ideas and actions of these entrepreneurs influence the success or failure of collective action, the institutionalisation of (soft) spaces, and therefore a role of leadership on their part is significant, especially when concerning administrative instances. In Basso Isonzo, Araké, Campo dei Girasoli, the committees, their managers and collaborators may all be considered local entrepreneurs, acting while having in mind the institutionalisation of the Parco Agropaesaggistico del Basso Isonzo and the various activities composing it. But what is the type of park that these entrepreneurs are creating? Is it the kind that the other, more silent voices of the residents want? Do their ideas differ?

Throughout the last decade, major differences have transformed this area — from organic agriculture, to cared-for and lived-in green areas — but some issues remain in the organisation of its space. As seen in the first chapter, the lack of signs determining one area from the other prevents a clear definition of the multiple places composing Basso Isonzo, and the dangerous viability across the area affects the mobility of the people inhabiting the place, and of the ones who desire to visit it. But even when imagining space and land uses that clash together, locals manage to come together to create a place that reflects their different ideas.

Deciding to name a place a certain way creates a narrative around it, which may be tied to feelings of nostalgia. It comes with a certain ease to idealise a past we did not live, picturing parts of it in the present with sentimentality. In an area as urbanised as Padova, the ideal of a place close enough to the city which goes back to this rural state is appealing to a certain kind of target population – the one previously defined as “green middle class”. While that may not be the only public who enjoys the green areas of Basso Isonzo, it is the one towards which most of its activities and businesses are directed to.

Even though that may not have been the initial goal of the local entrepreneurs, it is not news for places similar to Basso Isonzo (see Maurer 2020). Being able to afford organic food whose price at times doubles compared to the one of a supermarket or a common bar is not a feat for everyone, nor it is easy to get to a place which is not well-connected by public transport when you do not own a private vehicle.

Consequently, when a place reaches a certain target, the language and the activities offered shape themselves based on that population. Terms such as ‘sustainable’, ‘organic’, ‘biodiversity’, ‘locally produced’, and ‘made in Basso Isonzo’ are only some of the buzzwords used to define Basso Isonzo’s products, and therefore, Basso Isonzo itself. Activities offered are mostly ones of leisure, such as concerts, game nights, and shows, but even when hands-on endeavours are proposed, such as the trimming of vineyards, the harvest of vegetables, or gardening workshops, they are perceived as entertainment by the visitors, not as work – perhaps a way to “reconnect to Earth” or spend a different kind of weekend, “out of the city”.

Even the first step towards the Ecomuseum – the totem placed in Campo dei Girasoli – is identified and presented as a game. Kids (and adults) are supposed to be searching for different park areas as if they were participating in a treasure hunt. The entrepreneurs’ vision of Basso Isonzo is a place that is supposed to be enjoyable, relaxing – one of recreation. While they do not hide the hardships of working in agriculture, both in their conversations and in the content published on their social media, the narrative they present to the public is one tied to leisure – and, potentially, the tourism sector. “We want to offer guided visits to the farm, walks through the territory, and more,” Emma tells me. Iris, former president of the Local Council and the Comitato per il Parco Agropaesaggistico del Basso Isonzo, continues on the topic, “This place could become an important resort for rural tourism – both educational and leisure-oriented. Schools could come here, as well as families – maybe you get here with a camper: one day you visit the fields, another day you learn the history of local agriculture. You are ten minutes away from the city centre, and we could have a camper parking lot close to Campo dei Girasoli, so people could visit the museums and the botanical garden in the city centre, perhaps taking the public bikes offered by the Municipality. There’s nothing like this in the region, not that I know of; Basso Isonzo could be the first one.”

This kind of imagery of Basso Isonzo is very different from what the Municipality defines as “a green area with an agricultural landscape vocation”, and also distant from the current reality of the place – taking as an example the lack of dedicated car parking spots for Campo dei Girasoli as per the Municipality’s will; I doubt the administrators would be inclined towards a camper lot.

This reflects, once again, the disconnect between what Basso Isonzo is for its residents, its entrepreneurs, and its administrators. Would the locals enjoy their residential area becoming a tourist spot for bourgeoisie families? Would the administrators want more commercial activities to bloom in the area? Would all of this be socially sustainable?

As seen in the fourth chapter, along with the idea of environmental sustainability, there is also a social element that is fundamental to consider for the well-being of a place. If only the “green middle class” can enjoy and benefit from Basso Isonzo’s activities, can it be defined as sustainable? If cultural capital influences consumers’ decisions, how do you reach the people who buy groceries at supermarkets, because of cost advantages or insensitivity to the topic of local production? Even if you can reach them, how do you make them change their minds? Why should they spend more, and take more time to do their weekly shopping?

Despite the hard work and good intentions of farmers, by wanting to offer products that are different compared to the ones of industrial agriculture, the current organisation of organic farms, CSAs and similar kinds of alternative agri-food practices is not sustainable, and it perpetuates a system of structured class inequality – which is what is expected when operating inside a capitalist economy (Pilgeram 2011).

It is difficult to transform alternative food production into something for the folk – and it might be asked, is it something wanted by the entrepreneurs? ‘Artisan ice cream’, ‘ancient grains’, ‘organic food’ – the use of these terms already implies an idea of exclusivity for the recipients of such product offers. While it is crucial to have options that do not concern industrial agriculture, if the creation of such kinds of products perpetuates a social class division, it means that there is work yet to be done to make alternative agriculture socially sustainable. This does not lessen the significance of such projects, nor does it mean that this kind of agriculture is altogether not “sustainable” (Pilgeram 2011), but it is important to highlight its shortcomings.

Moreover, this social stratification does not only relate to consumerism, but also to the imagery of the park itself, and the activities it should include. If sustainable development is one of the core values of an imaginary Basso Isonzo park, should the park not be rooted in its territory, the needs and wants of the local population? Since an official Basso Isonzo park does not yet exist, its green areas and activities as of now all exist thanks to the work of the people living in Basso Isonzo. Despite a lack of institutionalisation, they make it real; despite the distance between the imagery of the place in the minds of the entrepreneurs, and the reality of the place itself, they want to make it work. So why does the target of Basso Isonzo’s activities not reflect the majority of its local population? Basso Isonzo as imagined by its entrepreneurs, once again, is detached from its reality, from the features and the demography of its surrounding territory. Considering conversations I had with visitors, and information from various people I interviewed, most of the people enjoying Campo dei Girasoli’s kiosk, its green areas, and a consistent slice of the population buying from Araké’s farm, live neither in Basso Isonzo nor in Sacra Famiglia. Most of them live in the Municipality of Padova, but

they may cross the whole town to reach the place, travelling several kilometres, or may come from outside of the city, in the province – some even from the surrounding Venezia and Vicenza.

The perpetuation of this detachment is a sign of disconnection from reality – the residents I have interviewed do not feel like they have a say in the decisions taken by the local entrepreneurs, nor the ones taken by the administration; the latest example being the future of the Bortolami Sud house, concerning which the locals were verbally promised a public debate, which was never held.

Sustainability for Basso Isonzo's activities will never be reached if the social plane is not considered, along with the economic and environmental ones. More attention has to be put on the topic, starting from conversations about class inequality, focusing on access and inclusion, to get to a place where it is possible to act for a socially sustainable alternative agri-food production system.

Basso Isonzo is a complicated reality, while also being nothing at all. No borders define it, no unmistakable names, multiple visions stratify its past and its future history, and barely any official recognition is given to it. The 2022 Masterplan classifies it under the section of urban agriculture, naming it Parco Agrourbano del Basso Isonzo, but this park only seems to exist on paper and has no intention to be further defined by the current administration. This ambiguity finds its outcomes in the numerous visions imagined by the various aforementioned actors on the scope and the existence of Basso Isonzo itself. There is, for the time being, not one precise dominating view – many of these ideas share similarities, being born from common memories or values, while also contrasting, or being completely distant from one another. Will it be an area with an agricultural landscape vocation? An institutionalised park with a supply chain that can produce food completely “made in Basso Isonzo”? A tourist spot? A series of unnamed green areas with a couple of farms and some residential streets? A place of entertainment for the middle class? A community farm? Currently, it is stuck in limbo; in the slow, hesitant decisions from the administration, and the active practices of the residents and workers that already make Basso Isonzo something living, something real. Only time will tell if it will manage to peel itself off of its label as the ‘parco che non c’è’.

## References

- Anderson, J. 2004 *Talking Whilst Walking: A Geographical Archaeology of Knowledge*, Area, Sep., 2004, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Sep., 2004), pp. 254-261, Wiley on behalf of The Royal Geographical Society
- Appadurai, A. 1996 *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press
- Arruda, A. 2015 *Image, social imaginary and social representations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Barnes, J. 2011 *The Sense of and Ending*, Random House Canada
- Bates, C., Rhys-Taylor, A. (Eds.) 2017 *Walking through social research*, London, UK: Routledge
- Belloni, G. 2022 *Basso Isonzo: Il Futuro del Passato*, Comune di Padova, Fondazione Cariparo
- Berger, S. et al. 2021 *Remembering Social Movements: Activism and Memory*, Oxon: Routledge
- Bourgois, P., Schonberg, J. 2009 *Righteous Dopefiend*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press
- Boym, S. 2001 *The future of nostalgia*, New York: Basic Books
- Bridges, B., Osterhoudt, S. 2021 *Landscapes and Memory*, Oxford Research Encyclopedias
- Butterfield, K. L., Ramírez, A. S. 2021 *Framing Food Access: Do Community Gardens Inadvertently Reproduce Inequality?*, Society for Public Health Education, Sage Publications Inc.
- Calvino, I. 1972 *Invisible Cities*, Giulio Einaudi editore (ed. 1974, translation by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.)



Campkin, B. 2013, *Remaking London: Decline and Regeneration in Urban Culture*, London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd

Cappelli, A. 2020 *L'arte Della Macinazione: Tecniche, Effetti sui Prodotti e Strategie di Miglioramento*, Pinerolo: Chiriotti Editori

Cappelli, A., Cini, E. 2021 *Challenges and Opportunities in Wheat Flour, Pasta, Bread, and Bakery Product Production Chains: A Systematic Review of Innovations and Improvement Strategies to Increase Sustainability, Productivity, and Product Quality*, Florence: University of Florence

Caraher, M., Dowler, E. 2014 *Food for poorer people: conventional and "alternative" transgressions*, *Food Transgressions: Making Sense of Contemporary Food Politics*, pp. 227-246, Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate

Casalegno, C. et al. 2019 *From transactions to cooperation: Developing supply chain of ancient grains between relationships and joint interests*, *British Food Journal* Vol. 122 No. 5, Emerald Publishing Limited

Castoriadis, C. 1975 *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Cambridge: Polity Press

Chen, W. 2012 *Perceived value of a community supported agriculture (CSA) working share. The construct and its dimensions*, *Appetite* 62 (2013) 37–49, Elsevier Ltd

Comune di Padova, 2020, November 24th *Comunicato Stampa: Un Piano Agro-paesaggistico per la Città*, Padova: Ufficio Stampa Comune di Padova

Davis, P. 1999 *Ecomuseums: A Sense of Place*, London: Leicester University Press

De Nardi, S. et al. 2020 *The Routledge Handbook of Memory and Place*, Oxon: Routledge

Della Porta, D., Portos, M. 2021 *Rich kids of Europe? Social basis and strategic choices in the climate activism of Fridays for Future*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Derrien, M. M., Stokowski, P. A. 2020 *Discursive constructions of night sky experiences: Imagination and imaginaries in national park visitor narratives*, *Annals of Tourism Research* 85 (2020) 103038, Elsevier Ltd

DeWalt, B., DeWalt, K. 2011 *Participant observation: A guide for fieldworkers*, Lanham: AltaMira Press. Chapter 1 (What is Participant Observation)

Duram, L. A. 2005 *Good Growing: Why Organic Farming Works*, Lincoln, NE: Bison Books

Ferrario, V., Lironi, S., Barbariol, G. 2019 *Periferie agroubane come luoghi di innovazione. Il Parco agropaesaggistico metropolitano di Padova e il caso del Basso Isonzo*, in *Monastero e territorio: periferie dello spirito e dello spazio*, a cura di Castiglioni, B., Zaggia, S., Padova: Padova University Press

Gaonkar, D. P. 2002 *Toward New Imaginaries: An Introduction*, Durham: Duke University Press

Garnett, T. 1999 *City harvest: the feasibility of growing more food in London*, London: Sustain

Geertz, C. 1973 *The Interpretation of Cultures*, BasicBooks, A Member of the Perseus Books Group

Gregory, D. 1994 *Geographical Imaginations*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers

Gupta, A. Ferguson, J 1997 *Anthropological location: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*, Berkeley: University of California Press. Chapter 1 (Discipline and Practice)

Haedicke, S. 2017 *Aroma-Home's edible stories: An urban community garden performs*, *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems*: 33(6); 542–547, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Harvey, D. 1973 *Social Justice and the City*, Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press

Harvey, D. 2006 *Space as a Keyboard*, in Castree, N., Gregory, D., David Harvey: A Critical Reader, Blackwell Publishing Ltd

Healey, P. 2006 *Relational complexity and the imaginative power of strategic spatial planning*, European Planning Studies, 14(4), 525–546

Heikkilä, H. 2007 *Beyond 'Insofar as' Questions: Contingent Social Imaginaries of the European Public Sphere*, European Journal of Communication, Sage Publications

Herbrik, R., Schlechtriemen, T. 2019 *Editorial for the special issue "Scopes of the Social Imaginary in Sociology" in the ÖZS, Österreich Z Soziol (2019) (Suppl 2) 44:1–15*

Hill, C. E. 1981 *Anthropology in the Park: A Behavioral Model for the Planning and Evaluation of Urban Open Spaces*, Practicing Anthropology (1981) 3 (2): 37–70

Hoelscher, S., Alderman, D. H. 2004 *Memory and place: geographies of a critical relationship*, Social & Cultural Geography, 5:3, 347-355

Indovina, F. 1990 *La città diffusa*, Venezia: Daest-IUAV

Ingold, T. 1993 *The Temporality of Landscape*, World Archaeology, Vol. 25, No. 2, Conceptions of Time and Ancient Society, pp. 152-174, Taylor & Francis Ltd

ISPRA Istituto Superiore per la Protezione e la Ricerca Ambientale 2022, *Report di sistema SNPA 32/2022*

Jaffe, R., De Koning, A. 2016 *Introducing Urban Anthropology: Chapter 4, Social life in public space*, New York: Routledge

Kallioniemi, M. K. et al. 2016 *Stress and Burnout Among Finnish Dairy Farmers*, Journal of Agromedicine, Taylor & Francis Ltd

Larson, S. M. 2018 *Imagining social justice and the false promise of urban park design*, Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space 2018, Vol. 50(2) 391–406

Lefebvre, H. 1974 *The Production of Space*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd

Levidow, L. 2018 *London's Urban Agriculture: Building Community through Social Innovation*, International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture & Food, 2018, Vol. 24, No. 3, pp. 354-376

Low, S. 2023 *Why Public Space Matters*, New York: Oxford University Press

Maurer, M. 2020 *Chickens, weeds, and the production of green middle-class identity through urban agriculture in deindustrial Michigan, USA*, Springer Nature B.V. 2020

McKeon, N. 2021 *Let's Reclaim Our Food Sovereignty and Reject the Industrial Food System!*, Development (2021) 64:292–294

Mougeot, L. J. A. 2005 *Agropolis: social, political and environmental dimensions of urban agriculture*, London: International development research centre

Nitzky, W. 2016 *Mediating Heritage Preservation And Rural Development: Ecomuseum Development in China*, The Institute, Inc.

O'Shaughnessy et al. 2022 *The prevalence of farmer burnout: Systematic review and narrative synthesis*, Journal of Rural Studies 96, Elsevier Ltd

Olivier de Sardan, J. 2005 *Anthropology and Development: Understanding Contemporary Social Change*, London: Zed Books Ltd

Piano del Verde del Comune di Padova 2022 *Allegato 07.02, Agricoltura Urbana: Linee Guida per il Masterplan del Basso Isonzo*

Pilgeram, R. 2011 *"The Only Thing That Isn't Sustainable . . . Is the Farmer": Social Sustainability and the Politics of Class among Pacific Northwest Farmers Engaged in Sustainable Farming*, Rural Sociology, Vol. 76, No. 3, Rural Sociological Society

Raekstad, P., Gradin, S. S. 2020 *Prefigurative politics: Building tomorrow today*, Cambridge: Polity Press

Reeve, A. 2022 *Reading Lefebvre's Right to the City in the Age of the Internet*, in *Equality in the City: Imaginaries of the Smart Future*, Bristol: Intellect

Said, E. W. 2000 *Invention, memory, and place*, *Critical Inquiry* 26: 175–192

Schnell, S. M. 2013 *Food Miles, Local Eating, and Community Supported Agriculture: Putting Local Food in Its Place*, *Agriculture and Human Values* 30(4): 615–28

Stewart, P. J. et al. 2003 *Landscape, Memory and History: Anthropological Perspectives*, London: Pluto Press

Truchot, D., Andela, M. 2018 *Burnout and hopelessness among farmers: The Farmers Stressors Inventory*, Springer-Verlag GmbH Germany, part of Springer Nature 2018

Urbanik, J., Morgan, M. 2012 *A tale of tails: The place of dog parks in the urban imaginary*, *Geoforum* 44 (2013) 292–302, Elsevier Ltd

Varine, H. 2006 *The Origins of The New Museology Concept and of The Ecomuseum World and Concept, in the 60s And 70s*, Beijing: Beijing Press

Wachsmuth, D., Kilfoil, P. 2020 *Two logics of regionalism: the development of a regional imaginary in the Toronto–Waterloo Innovation Corridor*, Montreal: McGill University

Watson, D. J. 2020 *Working the fields: The organization of labour in community supported agriculture*, *Organization* 2020, Vol. 27(2) 291–313, Sage Publications

West, P. et al. 2006 *Parks and Peoples: The Social Impact of Protected Areas*, *Annual Review of Anthropology*

Wilson, C. K. et al. 2019 *Measuring digital inequality in Australia: The Australian digital inclusion index*, *Journal of Telecommunications and the Digital Economy*, 7:2, pp. 102–20

Wilson, P. L. et al. 2015 *The old calendrist: Tracts for our time*, Pearl, CO: Enemy Combatant Publications