

## Jumping into the Olona to save it from pollution

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The Big Jump, the campaign by the European Rivers Network (ERN) begun to protest the suitability of all watercourses for bathing ([www.rivernet.org/bigjump/](http://www.rivernet.org/bigjump/)), is returning. With this collective leap, a symbolic message will be sent to local and international authorities, to get them to adopt all of the policies necessary to restore the good ecological state of the various water environments. In Italy, the initiative is coordinated by Legambiente, who, as they do every year, are organising jumps throughout the country. In Lombardy, the Big Jump will take place in the waters of the Ticino, Lambro and Olona Rivers, and in the Certesa (a tributary of the Seveso).

This year, the Councillor for the Environment in Malnate, **Giuseppe Riggi**, and his Varese colleague, **Dino De Simone**, took part in the jump in Malnate.

“The Big Jump is a symbolic event, but it’s also a time to take stock of the progress of projects and interventions dedicated to improving our rivers,” said **Barbara Meggetto**, the Chairwoman of Legambiente Lombardia, “Yet again, we are highlighting the fact that Lombardy has delayed the start of necessary interventions for too many years, because the vision that should have guided the allocation of resources and investments necessary to adapt the sewer and drainage systems and purification plants has been lacking. This explains our region’s huge delay in implementing the mandatory quality requirements that, for 16 years, the EU has demanded of its member states, with the directive 2000/60. We are also worried that, even today, there are some provinces where the water governance of vast areas is a long way off.”

As always, it is the “**very sick**” that are being watched by the association: the **Olona, Seveso-Certesa and Lambro** now record unacceptable concentrations of pollutants, because of uncontrolled dumping, insufficient sewers, and purifiers that do not work or, in some cases, do not exist. But the Ticino, the blue river, also receives recurrent influxes of heavily contaminated water from the Seveso, Olona and Lura basins.

The jump into the Olona took place in Malnate, near the “Gurone Mills”, where Legambiente is carrying out the project “L’anello sul fiume” (The ring on the river), which has won funding from the Cariplo Foundation.

In Lombardy, Big Jumps also took place in Pavia, on the Ticino, in Monza, on the Lambro, and in Seveso, on the Certesa.

### **THE RING ON THE RIVER**

“The ring on the river” is the project that has won funding from the Cariplo Foundation; the overall cost is €150,000, of which €90,000 is coming from the Foundation; the funds will be spent on actions that take care of the territory, on participation and on training. The aim of the project is to support a community that can tackle the periodic phenomena of controlled flooding and the resulting abandonment and reduced care of the territory caused by the management of the dam and by the detention basin on the Olona River.

The area affected will be the section of the Olona River valley north of the flood retention dam, in the territories of Malnate and Varese. In this area, there is the old, inhabited area of the Gurone Mills, which is surrounded by a ring-shaped embankment. Although the presence of the dam protects the municipalities in the valley against the risk of flooding, the area around the Mills undergoes controlled flooding. Furthermore, in the last few years, also because of climate change, flooding has occurred more frequently, compromising the environmental value of the territory. This situation has also made life precarious for the local community and for the traditional activities, making it difficult to stay.

As a result, the inhabitants of the ring, who have already signed a group letter, are the first supporters of the project.

The community will take an active part in the activities of the project, increasing their awareness and responsibilities; this will enable them to resist and to reduce the hydrogeological dangers, turning them into opportunities for change and adaptation. The promoters hope that sharing duties, instruments and resources between the public authority and the local community will give new environmental, social and economic value to the territory.

Many results are expected: the creation of a stable group of volunteers, called “Friends of the Ring”; improvement of the quality of the flora in the wooded areas and of the environmental characteristics of the smaller bodies of water; an increase in the use of the nature in the area; creation of a shared vegetable garden; drafting of a manual of good practices to use in the area affected by flooding, entitled “The rules of the Ring”; involvement of communities along the river, with public meetings dedicated to preventing the risk of flooding; organisation of a meeting space, “the Piazza in the Ring”; creation of a map of paths for cyclists and pedestrians; scheduling of gentle exercise events; completion of the renovation and conservative restoration of the House of the Ring, to create a depot/workshop and spaces for the community.

“The participation of the local communities enables actions to mitigate and adapt to the changes caused by the climate and by environmental dangers to become established,” said Marzio Marzorati, the Deputy Chairman of Legambiente Lombardia. “Acting locally is an essential condition for changing the overall environmental situation and for bringing about a change of course. The ‘Ring on the river’ has a vast support network of people, associations and schools, first of which are the Legambiente groups (Varese and Mulini dell’Olona). We expect to begin a new phase in managing the hydrogeological risks and in improving the environment in the Olona Valley.”

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