

## MIDSUMMER SOLSTICE AT THE BOTANICAL GARDENS OF LOMBARDY: A NETWORKED EVENT OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION.

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### ABSTRACT

The Network of Botanic Gardens in Lombardy, formed in 2002, links the realities of Bergamo, Bormio (Sondrio), Cascina Rosa - Milan, Brera - Milano, Pavia, Romagnese (PV) and Toscolano Maderno (BS). These Botanic Gardens work together to attain common objectives.

'Midsummer at the Botanic Gardens' has been celebrated each year since 2004. The objective of the event is to promote the Botanic Gardens of Lombardy, to involve the general public offering new experiences and strengthening the knowledge of the Region's historical, cultural and botanical patrimony.

The Gardens organised guided tours, conferences, photographic and painting exhibitions, concerts, astronomical observations as well as laboratories for adults and children during the last three editions. In some cases the Midsummer event was part of local events, for example the Notte Bianca (White Night) in Milan and Museum Night at Bergamo. The various initiatives were nearly always carried out in partnership with other organisations.

In fact, the number of visitors has increased each year and their requirements have changed, the Network is now well known by the local media.

This paper presents the results of the initiative and evaluates this method of networking for the Botanical Gardens as an aid in achieving their many goals, particularly those of conservation and education.

### KEY WORDS

Botanic Gardens, networking, education, events, Lombardy, visitors.

The Network of Botanic Gardens of Lombardy was established in 2002 and consists of:

- Botanic Garden "Lorenzo Rota" - Bergamo township;
- Alpine Botanic Garden "Rezia" of Bormio (So) - Stelvio National Park;
- Brera Botanic Garden - Milan University
- Didactic and Experimental Botanic Garden "Cascina Rosa" - Milan University;
- Botanic Garden of Pavia University;
- Alpine Botanic Garden "Pietra Corva" - Romagnese (Pv) - Pavia Province and Romagnese township;

• Experimental Botanic Garden "Giordano Emilio Ghirardi" of Toscolano Maderno (Bs) - Milan University.



Fig. 1. Botanic Gardens of Lombardy distribution.



Fig.2 – Posters of past editions of “Midsummer Solstice at the Botanic Gardens of Lombardy”

The Network works to attain shared objectives and every year since 2004 promotes the “Midsummer Solstice at the Botanic Gardens of Lombardy”, an important event open to the public from the whole region.

This particular date has been chosen as the result of a compromise amongst the needs of the Botanic Gardens set in quite different locations - cities and towns both in the Po Plain at low altitude and on the Alps and the Apennines - therefore characterized by a different distribution of the vegetative phases around the seasons and by the number of visitors.

Solstice recalls the cycles of time and nature which the vegetable kingdom constantly reminds us but we often tend to underestimate them in our present lifestyle.

The main aims of the event are:

- to give visibility to the Botanic Gardens of Lombardy;
- to offer new activities to the public;
- to promote the knowledge of their own botanic, historical and cultural heritage;
- to pursue their own mission by means of new ideas.



Fig. 3 and 4 . Talks for adults and musical plays for children during Midsummer events.

In the three past editions several activities were autonomously organized in all the nodes of the Network:

guided tours, ludic-creative workshops for children and adults, seminars, conferences and talks on a variety of topics, exhibitions of museum specimens, documents, photographs and paintings, astronomic observations, games for children and adults, readings of fairy-tales, plays, musical and dance events, theatrical performances, food tastings and pic nics, film shows, body activities for the Public (yoga, thai chi chuan, traditional dances), presentations of the publications and of the website of the network (Figures 3,4).

The printing of a common brochure was funded by the Network while each Botanic Garden supported its own events.

The various initiatives were nearly always carried out in partnership with other organisations and sometimes the Solstice took place at the same time as other local festivals such as “The White Night” of Milan or “The Night at Museums” in Bergamo.

The common themes of the three past editions were:

2004 – *The return of time*

2005 – *Light, shadow and plants;*

2006 – *Plants and man.*

The themes were chosen in order to plan the events around a common subject, but they left enough freedom to allow the widest participation by the Gardens.

The event has been at present the first and unique example of this kind promoted by Botanic Gardens in Italy. Its constant repetition gave an important contribution to the public image of the Network producing positive results both at the educational level and as far as communication is concerned. The number of visitors has constantly increased as well as the demand for more activities. Besides the local media have become more and more aware of the role of the Network.

|                            |      |
|----------------------------|------|
| Total visitors number 2004 | 1810 |
| Total visitors number 2005 | 2650 |
| Total visitors number 2006 | 2845 |

Tab. 1. Total number of visitors in the 3 past editions of Midsummer Solstice at the Botanic Gardens of Lombardy.

The number of visitors is higher in urban Botanic Gardens. In the Alpine Botanic Gardens the highest number of visitors occurs during the holiday season therefore they can only offer a reduced set of activities on Solstice day because of the season delay due to the altitude; anyway they contribute to the offer of the whole event and take an advantage from the publicity provided by the Solstice.

In urban Botanic Gardens the number of visitors was significant both where a great number of events took place (Milano - C.na Rosa, Bergamo, Pavia) and where only a few activities were performed (Milano – Brera). In Milan Botanic Garden - C.na Rosa the number of visitors was almost the maximum amount allowed in relation to the reception capacity of the garden. In Bergamo it was possible to welcome a high number of visitors only by setting some activities in neighbouring spaces out of the Botanic Garden.

In 2006 in Pavia the amount of visitors coming from distant areas has remarkably increased. The same in Toscolano Maderno where efforts have to be made also to capture the interest of the residents.

The visitors were especially interested to scheduled events but they enjoyed also the availability of guided tours freely repeated according to the number of people.

Most of the Botanic Gardens change their programme every year introducing new activities.

Since most part of the event takes place in the open air, the number of visitors is strongly influenced by the weather and bad weather conditions lead to unsuccessful results (2004 edition in Romagnese and Pavia).

The local organization of the events involves very different numbers of people in the staff, volunteers and sponsors according to the various Botanic Gardens.

|  | Bergamo |     |     | Bormio |      |      | Milano Brera |     |     | Milano Cascina Rosa |           |        | Pavia     |            |     | Romagnese |    |     | Toscolano Maderno |    |     |
|--|---------|-----|-----|--------|------|------|--------------|-----|-----|---------------------|-----------|--------|-----------|------------|-----|-----------|----|-----|-------------------|----|-----|
| Year   | 04      | 05  | 06  | 4      | 05   | 06   | 4            | 05  | 06  | 4                   | 05        | 06     | 4         | 05         | 06  | 4         | 05 | 06  | 4                 | 05 | 06  |
| Visitors total number  | 500     | 800 | 700 | 50     | 80   | 65   | 600          | 700 | 750 | 500                 | 700       | 800    | 130       | 250        | 240 | -1        | 50 | 90  | 30                | 70 | 150 |
| Number of opening days   | 2       | 2   | 1   | 3      | 1    | 1    | 1            | 1   | 1   | 1                   | 1         | 1      | 1         | 1          | 1   | 1         | 1  | 1   | 1                 | 1  | 1   |
| Number of opening hours  | 9       | 24  | 9   | 19     | 8h30 | 8h30 | 9h30         | 10  | 11  | 10                  | 14        | 8      | 8         | 8          | 8   | 7         | 7  | 7   | 7                 | 5  | 6   |
| List of Partners   |         |     |     | -2     |      | -3   |              |     |     | -4                  | (4, 5, 6) | (4, 5) | (7, 8, 9) | (7, 8, 10) |     |           |    |     |                   |    |     |
| Contemporaneous local festivals  | -14     | -11 |     |        |      |      |              |     |     |                     | -12       |        |           |            | -13 |           |    |     |                   |    |     |
| <b>Number of people of Botanic Garden staff involved in organization</b> |         |     |     |        |      |      |              |     |     |                     |           |        |           |            |     |           |    |     |                   |    |     |
| Scientific Staff   | 3       | 4   | 4   | 2      | 2    | 2    | 2            | 2   | 2   | 1                   | 2         | 4      | 2         | 2          | 2   |           | 3  | 3   | 5                 | 3  | 5   |
| Didactic Staff   | 8       | 6   | 7   | 5      | 2    | 2    | 1            | 1   | 1   | 4                   | 5         | 3      | 0         | 0          | 0   |           | 5  | 3   |                   |    |     |
| Gardeners  |         |     |     | 2      | 3    | 3    |              |     |     | 1                   |           | 3      | 2         | 2          | 2   |           | 1  | 1   | 3                 |    | 3   |
| Volunteers   |         |     |     |        |      |      | 2            | 2   | 2   | 20                  | 30        | 20     |           |            | 3   |           | 2  | 3   | 5                 | 3  | 7   |
| <b>Performed Activities</b>  |         |     |     |        |      |      |              |     |     |                     |           |        |           |            |     |           |    |     |                   |    |     |
| Guided Tours   | 2       | 1   | 2   | 4      | 2    | 2    | -14          | -14 | -14 | 8                   |           | 9      | 2         | 2          | 2   |           |    | -15 | -15               | 2  |     |
| Workshops  | 3       | 3   | 3   |        |      |      |              | 2   |     | 9                   | 9         | 9      |           |            |     |           |    |     |                   |    |     |
| Seminars   | 3       | 1   |     | 1      | 2    | 2    | 2            |     | 1   | 8                   | 8         | 8      | 2         | 2          | 2   |           |    | 1   | 1                 | 4  |     |
| Concerts   |         | 1   |     |        |      |      |              |     |     |                     |           |        |           |            |     |           |    |     |                   |    |     |
| Exhibitions  |         | 1   | 1   |        |      |      |              |     | 1   | 7                   |           | 8      | 1         | 1          | 1   |           |    |     | 1                 | 1  |     |
| Children Activities  | 2       | 4   | 1   |        |      |      |              | 1   | 1   |                     | 9         | 9      |           |            |     |           |    | 1   |                   |    |     |
| Other activities   | 2       | 1   |     |        |      |      |              |     |     |                     | 9         |        |           |            |     |           |    |     |                   | 2  |     |
| <b>Total number of activities</b>  | 12      | 12  | 7   | 5      | 4    | 4    | 3            | 4   | 4   | 32                  | 35        | 43     | 5         | 5          | 5   |           |    | 3   | 3                 | 2  | 7   |

Tab. 2. Table of the activities carried out in the Gardens. Notes: (1) Event cancelled for hail, (2) Associazione Astrofili Valtellinesi, (3) Coop. Agricola Erba Dorada, (4) Università di Milano Bicocca, (5) Associazione IAO, (6) Associazione La Tartaruga, (7) Associazione Astronomia Ambiente dell'Osservatorio Astronomico e Naturalistico di Casasco (Al), (8) Associazione Astrofili Tethys di Retorbido (PV), (9) Coop Lombardia, (10) Associazione Amici dell'Orto Botanico di Pavia, (11) First night of "Musei di Notte", (12) La Notte Bianca, (13) Opening of the Town Museums, (14) Repeatedly guided tours according to the visitors access during the entire day, (15) Repeatedly guided tours according to the visitors access during the morning.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Midsummer solstice festival has been proved an effective means to

- promote each Botanical Garden
- link similar institutions and start working together on shared issues (networking)

- receive approval both from the general public and from the management of the institutions in charge of the Botanic Gardens
- consolidate the Gardens cultural and scientific as well as educational and entertaining role

The Network considers a strategical move the co-ordinate planning of events because, in addition to foster the actions undertaken by Botanical Gardens in education and in the conservation of natural environment, it has been proved to be effective both in reaching a consensus and building up synergies.