

**FOREST THERAPY IS THE FOCUS OF THE LAST EVENT OF THE YEAR  
BY THE FORESTAMI ACADEMY**

*The meeting that concludes the 2024 edition drew attention to the dynamics of forest therapy: how immersion in nature can favorably affect mental health, fostering improved well-being, nurturing positive emotions and reducing negative ones.*

*Talks by Francesco Becheri, Psychologist, Psychotherapist and Adjunct Professor at the University of Florence; Elena Barbierato, Doctoral Researcher in the Sustainable Management of Agricultural, Forestry and Food Resources at the University of Florence; and Viola Benedetti, Doctoral Researcher in Neuroscience and Adjunct Professor at the University of Florence.*

**Milan, October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024** – Forestami Academy, the initiative created by Forestami with the support of the Prada Group to promote and disseminate the scientific foundations, principles and values of urban forestry, held this morning the last event of the year, at Parco Nord Milano.

This edition – entitled **“Urban Forestry: Well-being and Health”** – was structured in three meetings coordinated by **Maria Chiara Pastore, Professor at the Politecnico of Milan** and Scientific Director of Forestami, with some of the most eminent national and international experts on green spaces and forestry in attendance, focusing on the **correlation between nature and physical and mental health**.

The **outdoor session entitled “Forest Therapy: Nature as a Tool for Promoting Emotional Well-being”** “was, like the previous events, fully attended.

**Lorenzo Bertelli, Prada Group Head of Corporate Social Responsibility**, said: *“We are proud to have stood by the Forestami Academy’s side in this year’s educational journey leading citizens to discover the influence of trees on their quality of life. We hope that the increased awareness of the positive impact that spending time in nature has on people’s health will lead to a change in everyday habits.”*

The experts involved in the event were: **Francesco Becheri**, Psychologist, Psychotherapist and Professor at the University of Florence; **Elena Barbierato**, Doctoral Researcher in the Sustainable Management of Agricultural, Forestry and Food Resources at the University of Florence; and **Viola Benedetti**, Doctoral Researcher and Professor of Neuroscience at the University of Florence.

In the context of the growing and widespread commitment of many cities throughout the world to the restoration of urban forests, both for the ecological rebalancing of metropolitan territories and the creation of conditions to increase wellness, the search for solutions that can offer opportunities to improve well-being through contact with forest ecosystems is a necessary challenge for those who intend to promote the valorization of urban forests.

In the excursion into the green spaces of Parco Nord Milano, Francesco Becheri analyzed **what happens inside us when we are immersed in nature**.

Using this question as a starting point meant that the 100 citizens present could explore, first-hand, through a guided experience of immersion in nature, how one’s emotional state can change significantly, fostering an improved sense of well-being, developing positive emotions and reducing negative ones.

*“Thanks to the research tools and methods that we used for our work and which we made available to the participants, everyone present had the opportunity to directly experience what happens ‘inside’ our brain when we establish a relationship with nature, whether in person or virtually, and investigate how the emotional and physiological processes that regulate our daily behavior change”* stated **Francesco Becheri, Psychologist, Psychotherapist and Professor at the University of Florence**.

The public also took part in the workshop “*Experiencing the Mind in Nature*” by **Elena Barbierato, Doctoral Researcher in the Sustainable Management of Agricultural, Forestry and Food Resources at the University of Florence** and **Viola Benedetti, Doctoral Researcher in Neuroscience and Professor at the University of Florence**, which provided **practical examples of the effects of greenery and nature on cerebral and cognitive functions.**

*“Forests are good for our health. It’s no longer just individual and personal experience that recognizes it, but a vast quantity of studies and research that, starting from the Eighties, have demonstrated increasing interest in the effects that time spent in forests and woods produces on the human body in terms of a reduction in blood pressure, cortisol levels and an improvement in memory and concentration capacity”* stated **Maria Chiara Pastore, Professor from the Politecnico of Milan and Scientific Director of Forestami.**

The next Forestami Academy event will be held next year, with a new educational cycle with three meetings. The central theme of the new edition will be *“Do we know plants? The trees and shrubs of our cities.”*

#### **Prada Group**

Prada Group is socially engaged to contribute to the sustainable development of communities and stimulate cultural debate in all its forms of expression. The Group partners with recognized players and international entities to develop educational and training programs, promote talent, support scientific research, foster women’s empowerment, and promote local culture and artistic heritage. Prada Group operates in the luxury sector through the Prada, Miu Miu, Church’s, Car Shoe, Marchesi 1824 and Luna Rossa brands.

#### **Forestami**

The project that aims to involve everyone, citizens, local communities, institutions, associations and companies in the responsibility of mitigating climate change by planting 3 million new trees by 2030. Forestami is also committed to promoting knowledge, care and enhancement of natural ecosystems of the territory for increasingly inclusive participation and greater awareness of the benefits of urban forestry. Forestami is a project promoted by the Municipality of Milan, the Metropolitan City of Milan, the Regional Council of Lombardy, Parco Nord Milano, Parco Agricolo Sud Milano, ERSAF and the Fondazione di Comunità Milano.

#### **For more information:**

Prada Group Press Office  
[corporatepress@prada.com](mailto:corporatepress@prada.com)  
[www.pradagroup.com](http://www.pradagroup.com)

Forestami Press Office – [press@forestami.org](mailto:press@forestami.org)  
Elettra Zadra – [elettra.zadra@elettrapr.it](mailto:elettra.zadra@elettrapr.it) – 335 5929854  
Francesca Raimondi – [francesca.raimondi@elettrapr.it](mailto:francesca.raimondi@elettrapr.it) – 392 9469018

### **Speaker biographies**

**Francesco Riccardo Becheri** is a Psychologist, Psychotherapist and Adjunct Professor at the University of Florence. From 2018 to 2023, he established and directed the research and development project on the Pian dei Termini Forest Therapy in the Pistoia mountains. The work, conducted in the state property of the Patrimonio Agricolo Forestale (Agricultural Forestry Heritage) in the Tuscany Region, involved from the outset a successful collaboration with the Italian National Research Council (Sesto Fiorentino Institute for Biochemistry), the Department of Neuroscience, Psychology, Drugs and Children's Health (NEUROFARBA), and the Faculty of Agriculture (DAGRI) of the University of Florence. During these years, attention to the project extended as far as developing into a national collaboration agreement (2022) with several entities<sup>1</sup> for the characterization and scientific qualification of green areas as factors in the protection and promotion of health, including the development of Forest Therapy Stations in Italy. He was the scientific advisor of Forest Therapy for Club Alpino Italiano (Central Scientific Committee and Central Medical Board) coordinating the group of Italian psychologists with whom the most extensive study on the topic was conducted, involving more than 1,000 subjects at over 40 forest sites throughout Italy (2020-2022). An international partnership was launched alongside this with Prof. Qing Li, Immunologist at the Nippon Medical School, "father" of forest medicine as well as chairman of the Japanese Society of Forest Medicine, with whom he engaged in joint research activity and publications. In 2022, at the invitation of the FAO and the Korea Forest Service, he was invited to the XV World Forestry Congress in Seoul as the sole Italian representative on the topic of Forests for Human Health.

**Elena Barbierato** gained a degree in Urban and Regional Planning and Design from the University of Florence and developed a strong interest in how people perceive and interact with urban and natural spaces. She then pursued a research doctorate at the University of Florence School of Agriculture, studying the physiological preferences and responses of consumers to wine-sector products and landscapes. Currently, as a research fellow, she is studying the effects of forests on human health, using functional near-infrared spectroscopy (FNIRS) to monitor cerebral oxygenation. Her objective is to identify the forest characteristics that promote well-being, to help develop more effective planning strategies.

**Viola Benedetti**, Doctoral Researcher in Neuroscience, is currently a research fellow at the NEUROFARBA Department of the University of Florence, where she teaches psychology disciplines as an adjunct professor. She is part of the Florence Cognitive Psychophysiology laboratory and has conducted research at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland) and the Center of Cognitive Neuroscience of Turku (Finland). Her scientific interests include the cognitive control of actions and related neural substrates, studied through techniques such as electroencephalography. Specifically, her research concentrates on how external factors influence the inhibitory control of actions.

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<sup>1</sup> The Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies (MIPAFF), the Council for Agricultural Research and Analysis of Agricultural Economics (CREA), the National Research Council – Institute for Bio-Economics (IBE-CNR), Club Alpino Italiano (CAI), Regional Reference Center for Phytotherapy (CERFIT) – Careggi University Hospital of Florence, University of Florence – Department of Agricultural, Food, Environmental and Forestry Science and Technology (DAGRI), University of Padua – Department of Land and Agricultural-Forestry Systems (TESAF), the School of Cognitive Psychotherapy (SPC Srl), Istituto Superiore di Sanità (the Italian National Institute of Health) – Reference Center for Behavioral Sciences and Mental Health (SCIC), University of Florence – Department of Neuroscience, Psychology, Drugs and Children's Health (NEUROFARBA), Sapienza University of Rome (Department of Environmental Biology, Botanical Gardens), and a test site for development and research into Forest Therapy at the Pian dei Termini Estate (PT).