



Systemic Cycles

Reading the Rice Landscape

SC Phase 2

Location & date:
Trino Vercellese
Po Plain, Piedmont
20–23 April

A Systemic Cycles journey
in Europe's largest
rice-growing landscape

This Systemic Cycles tour takes place in the Vercellese — the agricultural plain surrounding the city of Vercelli in northwestern Italy, at the heart of Europe's largest rice-growing district.

From spring through summer, the territory becomes a mosaic of flooded risaie, forming a distinctive working landscape shaped by water, soil, labour, and governance. The area lies within the broader Pianura Padana (Po Plain), with the Po River forming its southern edge near Trino, Morano sul Po, and Balzola.

From a bioregional perspective, the Vercellese is a transitional zone between the Alpine headwaters descending from the Monviso massif and the lower Po flowing eastward toward the Adriatic. It is a landscape produced over centuries of human–water co-evolution,

SC Po Tour November 2025. Phase 1 (SC methodology).
Participants carrying out daily water measuring
and collection field data.

Photo: Tobias Luthe



engineered through a dense network of canals, irrigation channels (rogge and cavi), and water-management practices developed over time by communities and institutions.

Functioning today as a working wetland, the Vercellese supports migratory bird routes, contributes to aquifer recharge, and produces more than half of Italy's rice crop. As such, it offers a meaningful counterpoint to the Venice Lagoon at the opposite end of the Po watershed — both territories shaped by the ongoing negotiation between land and water, expressed through different ecological and cultural forms.

Why this tour, now

This SC tour is a return visit within the ongoing Systemic Cycles process along the Po River. It is not about first discovery, but about deepening understanding through structure.

Positioned as Phase 2 in the Systemic Cycles methodology, the journey focuses on structural mapping and social activation: moving from an initial seed relationship (Phase 1) toward a shared system understanding and the early formation of a local regenerative cluster.

Rice cultivation is used as a lens, not a topic in isolation — a way to explore how water governance, agriculture, ecology, and regional economies interact under conditions of climate uncertainty and transition.

How Systemic Cycles works

Systemic Cycles combines slow movement, systems thinking, and bioregional sensing. In this journey:

- cycling is used as a method of inquiry rather than transport,
- the landscape itself becomes the primary teacher,
- daily mapping and visual dialogue translate experience into shared understanding,
- and complexity is held rather than simplified.

Participants practice moving between observation, inner sensing, and systemic insight, recognising themselves as part of the system they are exploring.

Phase 2 focus: mapping and activation

Across three days, the group builds a shared system snapshot by mapping:

- relationships across governance and spatial scales,
- circular flows (material, energy/CO₂, water, financial, social, and data),
- and cross-sector connections spanning production, processing, services, culture, research, and information.

Participants' take-aways

- A shared system map of actors, flows, and scales
- An activated community of interest around rice, water, and regeneration in the Vercellese
- A documented baseline snapshot that can be revisited and deepened through future Systemic Cycles iterations
- Practical experience in embodied systems sensing and bioregional mapping
- Cycling fun and cultural-culinary delights

This journey is designed to open pathways, not to conclude them.

This journey is for

- Practitioners and researchers working with food systems, water, and land use
- Designers and planners engaged in territorial and bioregional transitions
- Members of the Systemic Cycles and DRRS communities
- Local and regional level decision-makers
- Anyone interested in practicing systems thinking in the field, through movement and dialogue

Preconditions

- Sufficient fitness for moderate daily (45/60 km) cycling (with regular stops and flexible routing).
- Proof of accident insurance.
- DRRS MOOC #1 From Sustainability to Regeneration (recommended)

Practical information

- Dates: 20 April, 4 pm –23 April, 12 pm
- Format: 3 days / 2 nights (arrival and departure within these dates)
- Location: Trino Vercellese rice landscapes, Po Plain (Piedmont, Italy)
- Mobility: Bicycle-based, slow pace, frequent stops
- Gear: A functional bicycle (gravel, mtb hardtail, or hybrid), helmet, weather-appropriate clothing for April, and a notebook.
- Preparation: A welcome Zoom session will take place approximately 14 days prior to the journey
- Participation fee: 80 EUR per day
- Not included: Accommodation, food, and travel
- Insurance: Personal health, accident, and liability insurance are the responsibility of participants

Precise routes and meeting points will be defined closer to the date, in response to seasonal and local conditions.

Application to participate

Please apply by email to: apply@monviso-institute.org and send:

- a short motivation statement with your age and expectations for the course,
- brief CV (education/work) + bicycle experience.

Who is the SC guide?



Folef Hooft Graafland
SC Level 2 Guide

Folef Hooft Graafland is an MVI Design Associate and a DRRS alumnus. He has a background in hospitality, with expertise in service and experience design. He currently lives and works in the Venice lagoon at the ExperienceLAB.

Continuity and context

This journey is part of a longer-term scale-linking learning and design process in the Po River basin, connected to the ongoing work of [MonViso Institute](#), [Systemic Cycles](#), and the DRRS community of practice.

It represents the second step in an evolving process of mapping, activation, and regenerative transition — designed to be revisited, extended, and deepened over time.

Systemic Cycles down the Po River bioregion: from Ostana to Venice

