

## Environmental challenges and green initiatives in Iași

Year after year, I've literally seen summers getting hotter and dryer. Now, of course, these great heat waves make ever more people use air conditioning, drive (their air conditioned cars) instead of walk, and shower more often ... what a vicious circle we've got here!

Public transportation in Iași covers almost all areas in and around the city, but it's not very reliable (trams and busses have no schedules), so that many people prefer to drive their cars instead, even for short distances. Now, if you choose the bike as a transportation means in Iași, you must be one mighty fellow. One of the reasons is the road infrastructure. In most of the streets there are no bike lanes, so you have to dodge through the traffic. But this wouldn't be a problem if there weren't so many drivers affected by the 'crazy driver symptom', which makes them fast, angry and impatient. Despite all this, there are promising activities going on, and the number of cyclists is increasing steadily. There are several places in the city where you can rent a bike, in some places even for free. Also, cycling is supported by several NGOs (such as the the social and environmental association 'Mai bine', and the cycling and ecology club 'Iași bike'), which organize competitions, bike trips and bikemobs on a regular basis, on the principle the more the merrier, and the stronger the message. These actions have already started to attract more cyclists, change car drivers' behavior, and inspire public policy change. The first bike lanes were built over the past two years, and new ones are being built right now.

Another issue is related to the concrete-based (communist-style) city structure, with few and badly maintained green spaces, and unnecessary sealing of green spaces. A lot of patches of land within the city are being sealed every year, instead of being reconditioned and used to green the city. This makes the hot summer days even hotter and the soil poorer in nutrients, possibly unable to support vegetation in the future. Apart from this, a lot of rainwater gets wasted, because instead of flowing into the groundwater, or to the trees that need it so badly, it flows straight down the sewers, where it gets mixed with blackwater.

Waste management is another important issue in Iași. Although at least half of the households have access to selective waste disposal, the system doesn't work the way it should be, not even there. Many people still don't sort their waste, while others encounter problems at the containers (e.g. some plastic objects simply don't fit into the plastics containers, which can be filled only through a small hole for bottles). Therefore, garbage often ends up in the wrong container, lying around outside, or worse, some people even complain about the garbage truck men mixing back the garbage when they pick it up. Then there's the weird cases when waste containers simply disappear from their places. Therefore, there is both need for technical improvement, as well as, more importantly, for more and better-targeted education on selective waste disposal. The newest initiative on this topic started in August. It's a



Soil in summer



New bike lanes on Copou avenue



Typical sealed space



waste disposal. The newest initiative on this topic started in August 2010 a project from a very active green NGO called 'Mai bine' (which means 'Better') in collaboration with other national and international NGOs, aimed at evaluating citizens' perceptions on waste-related issues and waste management in the city through a survey. Based on the results of the survey, they will make policy proposals, and assist the local authorities in addressing the identified waste-related issues.

Over the past 5-10 years, environmental NGOs have found a niche in our urban community, mostly represented by concerned students and young professionals, but also older citizens with environmental and social conscience. Nowadays there

are more green initiatives than ever, involving more and more activists. 'Mai bine', for instance, is active in:



Containers for plastic & metal, and paper

- Promoting a certain set of values that would guide life-styles, such as tolerance, solidarity, equity, non-violence, protection of and respect for nature, for human- and animal rights, human demnity, diversity, transparency, citizen responsibility, etc.
- Raising citizens' environmental awareness and changing behaviours, through actions that range from practical tips on the NGOs' websites to large-scale awareness campaigns. 'Mai bine' has detailed tips on sustainable consumption (e.g. fair trade, eco-labels, organic and local products, and many others), tips on how to cut waste, through RRR&R (reduce, reuse, recycle, and refuse), as well as scientific information on the whole growth-degrowth debate. They also organize environmental documentary festivals, slow food events, charitable bazaar events, fair trade events. Mai bine also supports the 'Good Food March' (<http://www.goodfoodmarch.eu/home.html>), an initiative aiming to influence the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) at the EU Parliament. Concerned citizens and small-scale farmers from all over Europe are going to Brussels to express their demands in the 19 September citizen gathering of the future of food and farming, which will end with a conference at the EU Parliament. For more details about the programme, please see <http://www.goodfoodmarch.eu/1909.html>. In this context, Mai bine is organizing an event with local food in Iași, where people will be able to speak to local farmers and to send messages and demands directly to the European Parliament, by participating in a photographic petition.
- Greening the city, through cycling activities, battery and paper collection, collective tree planting, city clean-up, recycling projects. 'Iași Recicleaza' is a large-scale project organized each year, which aims to inform, educate and enhance people's responsibility as regards the effects of their actions on the environment. Results of the 5th edition from 2011 include collecting over 50 tons of paper for recycling, planting 1000 trees with 250 voluntaries in an area with landslide risk, organizing workshops in schools on waste minimization and creative reuse of stuff, contests in 10 schools for creating a 'green corner' with selective waste containers, installing such containers for light bulbs in several locations in the city, informing approx. 15000 people on RRR&R, through information sessions, workshops, film screenings, and other events.

Indeed what is promising about my city is the quantity and quality of green projects, and the increasing number of people involved. This makes it greener than some would think, but certainly not green enough...at least not when compared to other cities, like Freiburg. For a relatively small city like Iași, reaching darker shades of green should be perfectly feasible in the future, and this is up to its citizens.

#### References

Logos from: [Mai bine](#)



