

The secrets of root diseases

It was a late summer day when I received a call from a coastal Municipality, the technician on the other end of the phone had a worried voice, asking me if I was available to check the status of the diseases and the risk status of the plants of the whole Municipality.

I said yes, even if I didn't immediately realize that the municipality was large, with a population of about 10-15,000 inhabitants and a territory overlooking the lake with numerous areas for recreational use.

Then I went to speak to the technician in charge, who explained the facts to me.

During the summer that had just ended, a young engaged couple took a car to the side of the lake, right next to a large black poplar tree. The position was optimal, with the stretch of water in front of it, the silence and the darkness that invited you to talk, so to speak.

The plant could not realize what was happening at its feet, indeed close to its roots, and just that evening it fell due to a disease, not diagnosed in time, which causes degradation of the woody tissues of the roots.

It so happened that the Black Poplar fell right on the car with the two people on board, who managed to save themselves, not even a scratch, thanks to their position in the car, i.e. the fact that the seats had been reclined. The intervention of the rescue was necessary to extract the two unharmed people, only a great scare and some economic damage for the car by now almost useless. However, nothing could be done for the plant, which fell to the ground irreparably, with the tops in the water and the roots now useless for the purpose. Certainly the hand that planted the tree could not have known that the species is easily subject to that type of disease, that the disease affects adult plants, already of considerable size, which is part of a group of diseases that are difficult to cure.

The story goes that the two boys had a reputation of unfortunate people. An unfair reputation, as they could not have known that plants sometimes really fall, and that perhaps the species chosen for the plant was not among the most suitable.

The fact is that I was entrusted with the task of verifying the state of all the publicly owned plants in the entire municipal area, so that a situation like the one that had occurred could no longer be verified, in which only luck allowed that there were no more serious damages to the people.

For the assignment, I had to ask for the availability of another collaborator, given that the plants were very numerous. First of all, I narrated the events to the collaborator, and also the meaning of our investigative work which lay precisely in the fact that similar events should never occur again. The assignment has not yet finished, many risk situations relating to plants have been found, but for the Administration it is a good opportunity to redevelop its arboreal heritage, for citizens there is less risk that plants fall on people, who already once it went very well...