



REGIONE DEL VENETO

AT SCHOOL IN THE PARKS

IDEASS Veneto, Italy

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Presentation

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At School in the Parks is an innovative programme for primary, middle and high school-children and teachers. It is a didactic workshop consisting of 42 themed itineraries in the most important natural parks of the Veneto Region.

An area of 90,000 hectares (5% of the region's surface area) has been turned into parks and protected areas by the Veneto Region. Most of this area is comprised in six parks spread throughout the region, and includes the Parco Naturale delle Dolomiti Bellunesi, a national park. The protection and development of this natural heritage and its biodiversity is seen by the region as a strategic tool to help solve present and future environmental problems. With this in mind, the At School in the Parks programme is of strategic importance in encouraging schools to play a direct and leading role in the natural world.

The programme does not involve the occasional school trip to local parks, as is often the case, but a systematic programme of lessons organised with local schools to be held in parks and protected areas, with didactic programmes tailored to different age levels. The program includes professional development for teachers, a manual of environmental education and an open competition centred on the themes of environmental protection and sustainable development.

At School in the Parks is a programme that originated in a study carried out at the Cinsa (National Inter-University Consortium for Environmental Sciences), which started in 1996, to identify the specificities and didactic potential of the park system in Veneto. The project was then launched in 2009 by the Veneto Region Department of Parks and Protected Areas, the regional body responsible for the protection and promotion of parks, through a formal agreement with the Ministry of Education, University and Research — Veneto Regional School Office.

The program also includes a competition, 'Parchi del Veneto', which culminates with a grand event of national importance to award prizes to seven of the participat-

ing classes, chosen from among those who produced the most original promotional campaign on the issue of environmental resources. The event is also an opportunity to reward the authors of broadcasts or articles appearing on written media, radio, television, or online, on the promotion and development of parks in Veneto. At School in the Parks has also received a prestigious award from the President of the Italian Republic for its innovative approach.

The six parks involved in the initiative are the National Park of the Belluno Dolomites, the Regional Parks of the Po Delta, the Euganean Hills and the Ampezzo Dolomites and the regional reserves of Lessinia and the River Sile.

What problems can it help solve?

In collaboration with the parks authorities, the Veneto Region introduced an advanced integrated conservation policy, ongoing now for a number of years, to bridge the traditional gap separating the economic, cultural, environmental and territorial spheres. The At School in the Parks programme was set up in this context, as an innovative way to disseminate and raise awareness of environmental issues and as a tool to integrate schools into the natural environment. Natural and cultural heritage is seen as a special non-renewable resource to be promoted, developed and used for public and social purposes.

In this approach, parks and protected areas are not just seen as a resource to be preserved, as often happens in other cases, but also as a driver for local development and a key factor in the cultural growth of new generations.

At School in the Parks thus has three main objectives:

- To teach children the value of biodiversity, by looking at the many aspects of the cultural and natural wealth of the Veneto park system;
- To strengthen and promote environmental education and the integrated conservation approach promoted through the region's initiatives;
- To offer schools a practical and innovative tool to promote the didactic function of parks.

The program also aims to go beyond the inadequacies of occasional and contingent initiatives, and achieve effective results in environmental protec-



tion through long-term planning. The program is calibrated for different educational levels and operates systematically; there is an instruction manual with operational teaching modules. Finally, the program uses a teaching method that stimulates scientific curiosity through role play and by highlighting the unique features of each park, which makes them representative of the Veneto region.

The program manual contains a description of 42 didactic courses and provides students with the tools they need to boost their knowledge of natural heritage, biodiversity and awareness of the environmental issues in the region. In fact, parks are fragile organisms, home to ecosystems with balances that can be easily broken. At the same time parks are a huge resource that can meet the growing demand for a kind of tourism that is environmentally responsible and respectful of natural resources.



At School in the Parks in practice

The At School in the Parks program is divided into four distinct but interconnected phases:

- teacher training;
- setting up and fine-tuning an educational program (planning, organization and feasibility) in accordance with the didactic proposals calibrated for the various grades and types of schools;
- tour of the parks;
- classroom review of the work done in the park.

To simplify the organizational and administrative aspects of the activities, the Ente Parco Regionale dei Colli Euganei was commissioned, by all the park authorities involved, to manage the program, in collaboration with interested schools. The Veneto Region reimburses most of the necessary and documented transport costs for the lessons in the parks and attendance of the prize-giving event; it also provides nature guides free of charge.



The Manual

The Manual, At School in the Parks of Veneto - 42 Itineraries in Environmental Education, is the result of the collective research work carried out in 2009. The manual was sent to all the schools in the Veneto, together with an invitation to participate in the initiative. It is a lavishly illustrated book of over 200 pages, written by journalists and environmental experts and the managers of the six parks participating in the program.

The manual is divided into three sections:

- Discovering the Parks of Veneto. This section gives facts and figures for each park: land, flora, fauna, and typical products. All the main features of the park are presented clearly and concisely, including information on how to get there, opening times and park manager contacts.
- Understanding the Parks of Veneto. This section contains proposals for lessons, organized as itineraries and divided into three age groups: elementary, middle and high schools. In fact, each of the 6 parks responds to different didactic needs, specific for children and adolescents. Each itinerary includes a map that accompanies visitors from start to finish, highlighting points of interest and the stages of the visit, with relevant technical and descriptive data sheets on the park. At the end of each section there are also some didactic suggestions, which the children and their teachers can follow up.
- Travelling in the Parks of the Veneto. This section contains four cross-linked thematic proposals on the six parks, providing a complete guide to the environmental mosaic that makes up the parks: water, geology, resources, the orchids of the Veneto. In this section individual routes are meticulously laid out and the general features are illustrated in a map and in a fact sheet.



The Parks of Veneto Prize Competition

As part of the program, the Veneto Region, in collaboration with Veneto's Regional School Office and the Regional Park of the Po Delta, also organized the Parchi del Veneto Competition, aimed at schools, as well as park managers and the media.

In the section devoted to the region's primary and secondary schools, a prize was offered for the best work produced by a participating class. Competition require-

ments include completing the following steps, which accompany and supplement the educational activities of the program:

Class study

The schoolchildren study the main features of the six parks in the Veneto and their environmental diversity, based on information in the At School in the Parks Manual, the program website and knowledge of specific topics (park, biodiversity, ecological

network, environmental protection, etc). In this phase, each class chooses an itinerary/guided tour of one of the six parks, preferably one outside their local area.

A tour of the park

Students go to the park they have chosen and complete a programme of studies consistent with the didactic proposals described in the At School in the Parks Manual and the content on the program website.

The products and the selection committee

After returning from their educational trip, the classes work on a product that consists of a promotional campaign (on paper or in digital format) that includes illustrations and a slogan to be used as an advertisement to promote visits to the parks of the Veneto.

The material produced is sent to the Parco Regionale dei Colli Euganei, which then sends it to the a jury. The jury, which is made up of representatives of the Veneto Region and the Regional School Office, has the task of selecting seven schools, one from each of the provinces in the Veneto.



The seven chosen schools participate in the prize-giving event. The following prizes are awarded to the winning schools:

- an environmental journalism workshop, to be held at the winning school, given by teachers of renown, who work with the children to produce a documentary report on the region;
- technical equipment for the school (laptop computers, camcorders, cameras) to promote study and scientific research;
- books for the school library;
- publication of the slogan or the prize-winning promotional campaign on the regional portal www.parchiveneto.it and in trade fairs and publications relating to the programme.

For the media awards, a special jury, nominated by the Veneto Region, will assign a plaque to the authors of the most significant news reports, offering them a week's hospitality in park accommodation to discover and promote the park's unique environmental features. The prize-giving event is to be held, in turn, in all the parks participating in the program.



Results

The project saw the active participation of 17 schools, seven primary schools, four middle schools and six high schools, making a total of about 633 students.

The first edition of the Parks of Veneto prize was in October 2010 with an event held in the Parco Taglio di Po-Rovigo. The Prize recognized the quality of the promotional campaigns, produced in various schools participating in the program, on the themes of parks and biodiversity, inviting the winning schools to Taglio del Po to collect their deserved awards.

The Regional Councillor for Agriculture awarded the media prizes to an article published in a local newspaper; three special awards went to as many articles illustrating the special qualities of the parks in the region and a special mention was made of the site www.visita-delta.it.

The Parchi del Veneto Prize was awarded the Presidential Medal by the President of the Italian Republic as a sign of his special appreciation.

In 2012, the regional office of the Parks and Protected Areas Department and the Unità di Progetto Foreste e Parchi, started work on enhancing the primary school component of the At School in the Parks Program. This expansion of the program aims to ensure that the future citizens of the Veneto Region are prepared to take a leading role in the conservation of protected areas in their region.

National and international interest

The Veneto Region Department of Agriculture, Parks and Protected Areas has exchanged experiences with Italian organizations that have expressed interest in the At School in the Parks program, such as the Presidential Estate of Castelporziano in the Lazio Region and the National Park of the Tuscan Archipelago.

Collaboration was established with the Park of the Camargue, in the Rhone Delta in France, and the famous Sequoia National Park in California, one of the most popular parks in the world. Technicians of these parks have already come to see the program in action in the Veneto and exchange experiences.

There is also an itinerant photographic exhibition of the parks in the Veneto, with pictures by the photographer Marco Beck Peccoz.

Learn more

Internet site:

<http://www.parchiveneto.it>

Project webpage:

<http://www.parchiveneto.it/portalParchi/faces/public/parchi/home/scuola-universita>



Contacts

The program's technical team (Veneto Region Department of Parks and Protected Areas and the Veneto Regional School Office) can provide information and technical assistance to countries interested in using the methods of the At School in the Parks Program and prepare manuals specific to different national contexts.

Direct contacts:

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Innovation for Development and South-South Cooperation

The IDEASS Programme - Innovation for Development and South-South Cooperation - grew out of the major world summits in the 1990s and the Millennium General Assembly and it gives priority to cooperation between protagonists in the South, with the support of the industrialised countries.

The aim of IDEASS is to strengthen the effectiveness of local development processes through the increased use of innovations for human development. By means of south-south cooperation projects, it acts as a catalyst for the spread of social, economic and technological innovations that favour economic and social development at the local level. The innovations promoted may be products, technologies, or social, economic or cultural practices.