

# Elves in the Forest of Bussaco

## Bussaco National Forest

'Elves in the Forest of Bussaco' is a project that follows the "think globally, act locally" motto. The project aims at valuing natural and cultural local resources and promoting sustainable behaviors, through the engagement of the entire community via children, and as a means to solve local issues.

A fantasy universe where elves and wild animals take care of nature and are an active part in building regional identity was created. In this universe, scientific and historical facts are explained through fascinating characters and adventures.

Children, families and the entire school community were engaged in the project, which through art, games and field actions allowed deepening citizenship and local identity, as well as common and shared responsibility towards natural and historical heritage.



### BUSSACO NATIONAL FOREST, PORTUGAL

Mata do Bussaco,  
Portugal

LOCATION

*The Elves allow engaging young children with the natural and historical values that surround them, through a world of experiences that combine facts with fantasy.*

## OUTCOMES/RESULTS

- 1 Publication of an illustrated children's book.
- 2 Creation of several educative games based on the "Elves' universe".
- 3 Development of age-tailored field activities concerning the protection of natural and historical heritage.
- 4 Engaging of ALL schools and children (from 1st to 4th grade) of the municipality of Mealhada in an artistic (dance, theatre and plastic arts) competition

ENVIRONMENT  
ENGAGING CHILDREN  
NATURAL VALUES  
BUSSACO  
ENGAGING SCHOOLS

KEYWORDS

over 1000 children + teachers and educators + direct relatives were involved – ESCOLÍADAS MEALHADA.

**5** Staging of the book by 3 different theatre companies, and presentation of the shows in several localities, cultural events, and tourism and education fairs throughout the country.

**6** Production of an exhibition of materials developed by children, related with elves and natural/historical heritage in their region.

**7** Adoption of the book as mandatory working book in at least 4 primary schools and 2 pre-school institutions.

**8** Presentation of the book in several neighboring municipalities that asked technical advice for a similar approach.

**9** Nomination for the 10th edition of 'Ilídio Pinho Foundation – Science in School' Portuguese Award.

**10** In general, regional flora, fauna and cultural values became better known amongst the whole regional society.

**11** The project allowed for relevant economic income that was reinvested in education and conservation activities in Bussaco national Forest. Income came from selling the books and educational games, entrance fees for theatre plays, field workshops, and craftwork, among others.



Pre-school presentation



Elves recreation



Elves play



Escolíadas presentation

## MORE INFORMATION

### Policy

Before the project and its campaigns, children and school community were not involved in the conservation and valuing of their heritage assets. Bussaco Forest is a very touristic green area; it presents outstanding high conservation values: flora, fauna, national history/identity, and cultural heritage. However, it was only exploited as a tourist destination. Educative services started being provided with the establishment of Bussaco Forest Foundation as the management entity, in 2010. In partnership with the University of Aveiro, a strong marketing, promotion and educational strategy was built, and had great acceptance within the public.

The "Elves project" allowed reaching to children and school community, who until then were totally disconnected from Bussaco's exceptional value for their sense of belonging, identity and citizenship.

Nowadays, all children from the municipality visited Bussaco, or at least are aware of its importance, and the main aspects of its biodiversity and uniqueness.

Regional conservation and education authorities currently embed Bussaco and the Elves in their own regional policies, as a means of engaging community and promoting public participation and awareness.

Visitation to Bussaco has risen and many educational packs and services were sold, which also fostered economic assets that allow more effective conservation and educational actions.

In a nutshell, this educative/marketing project resulted in a sustainability structure for a whole region, promoting environmental/cultural awareness, social empowerment and economical assets, with great replicability potential.

## Evidence

The project was partially funded by several entities, but mostly depended on the good-will of many individuals. 100% income is reinvested in education and conservation actions.

### Children's book

University of Aveiro entirely supported the printing of the books. Illustrations by Milene Matos, pro bono. Digital layout and design by Milene Matos and Suzanna Matos, pro bono. Translation to English by Nelson Matos, pro bono.

### Educative games

A part of the educational games was funded by Fundação Ilídio Pinho and another part by Fundação Mata do Buçaco. The actual development of educational contents and games was done pro bono by Milene Matos and Lídia Dias.

### Theatre plays and exhibitions

Were supported by theatre companies and schools.

### Escolíadas Competition

was supported by Câmara Municipal de Mealhada.

## Delivery and Outreach

The project was disseminated through the national communication agency LUSA and through the communication channels of all involved entities: University of Aveiro, Mealhada municipality, Bussaco Forest Foundation, Theatre Companies, Schools, etc.

The 'Elves' received great attention by the media, and were announced in TV, radio, national and local newspapers. Also several bloggers and individual citizens such as teachers and actors mentioned the Project in their communication networks. Social media were also widely used.

## LESSONS LEARNED

1 Children are in fact a powerful changing-force within society.

2 We can reach almost the entire society by involving all children through the school system.

4 Partnerships are essential to boost projects.

5 Strong visual elements are essential to engage both children and adults.

6 Field actions are very important to settle theoretical and "fantasy" concepts approached by the book, theatre plays and games.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

- [Book \(english version\)](#)

*contact details:*

**Milene Matos**  
milene.matos@gmail.com  
**University of Aveiro**  
**www.fmb.pt**

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