



Environmental Education in Periurban Parks

A Framework of Cooperation

LIFE Urban Greening Plans

Purpose

Within the framework of the LIFE UrbanGreeningPlans program and action A10 "Innovative participatory CSR activities and educational actions to approach society to nature and help children, teachers, and parents reconnect with nature", Philodassiki Enossi Athinon has undertaken the creation of a simple cooperation framework between educational institutions and the bodies managing peri-urban parks.

In the context of this action, Philodassiki Enossi Athinon interviewed educational institutions that are active in the peri-urban Mt. Hymettus Aesthetic Forest in Athens, Greece. The interviews resulted in the drafting of the following framework of cooperation between educational institutes and peri-urban forest and park management bodies.



#LIFEUrbanGreening



LIFE UrbanGreeningPlans
Project Partners

Philodassiki Enossi Athinon

Foundation focussed on reforestation of degraded land

The Site: Mt. Hymettus Aesthetic Forest in Athens

→ The forest was completely created by Philodassiki



Actions

- Further develop **Corporate Social Responsibility** actions in Mt. Hymettus Aesthetic Forest
- Improve the **ecological and social functions** of Athens largest Green Corridor



Interview with the pedagogue Roza Triantafyllidi of the forest school of "Parea tou Dasous"

Introduction

In our time, the threat of the climate crisis, migration flows due to environmental factors, and the depletion of ecosystems due to human interventions are now sad elements of the daily life of billions of inhabitants of the planet. The importance of environmental education is based on these facts. Education in the natural environment is the first step to be taken to help people (children, parents & teachers) reconnect with nature with the aim of creating attitudes of responsible human behavior, with knowledge and respect for the natural environment.

According to international observations and studies it has been found that limited contact with nature, lack of movement, free time to play, and fresh air, as a result of a stressful lifestyle, full of numerous indoor activities and excessive use of electronic devices, has led to serious health problems in children, difficulty in motor skills and learning difficulties, as well as complete ignorance of the common local flora and fauna.

As a response to the above, in recent years an optimistic attitude of educational institutions has been observed in their will to actively develop their participation in actions aimed at environmental information and awareness among children and teachers.



Mt. Hymettus Aesthetic Forest (Athens, Greece)

Educational programs are implemented by organizations such as:
Kindergartens – Schools
Educational institutions with sports activities
Educational institutions with the aim of environmental education
Summer campuses



Why a Periurban Park?

In an urban environment where direct contact with nature is limited, the Periurban Parks are the place where educational programs with children and families as well as groups of adults are taking place actions all year round.

The selection of a peri-urban park for the conduct of nature-based educational activities is chosen because it is an area close to the city and provides easy transportation for schools and interested groups. It is also friendlier to man's first contact with nature which usually occurs in children. I.e. it has more passable paths, it does not have steep landslides, there is guidance in the paths without the risk of getting lost, and the climate is also milder because they are at low altitudes near the cities. These are some of the reasons why periurban parks are chosen as places for environmental education.



Educational activities at Mt. Hymettus Aesthetic Forest

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Because there is easy access to these areas, problems arise, such as heavy overcrowding from educational institutions combined with general visitors and even non-compliance with operating regulations in some cases. Consequently, at this point, the need arises for a framework of cooperation between educational institutions and the institutions managing peri-urban green spaces.



Initially, it is important that all the educational institutions active in a specific periurban park come to an agreement with the management bodies and declare their presence. This is important for the manager to know how many groups of people are in the park so that, for example, in the case of a fire, he can inform them to evacuate the area.

Still, many times happen that there is overcrowding in the area, especially if the area is small, and that is a problem for the education programs because they cannot be carried out properly.

In this case, the manager must evaluate the carrying capacity of the space and come to a corresponding agreement with the educational institutions.



An overcrowding day in the central area of the Mt. Hymettus Aesthetic Forest

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The periurban green spaces are in many cases protected areas, for this reason some specific operating regulations apply that must be observed by all visitors to the space.

The management body is responsible for the protection of the green space and must be aware of any activity that occurs in the area.

Unfortunately, in many cases, educational institutions are not up to date with the operating regulations and how to behave in protected areas.

In this case, they should come in contact with the organization that is responsible for the management of the park and be informed about the operation regulation with the aim of the correct and smooth operation of the park and the protection of the natural environment.



Regulation signs in Cap de Creus Natural Park, Catalonia



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It is important that when the educational groups visit such a place, they find a clean and well-kept environment where all the necessary actions have been taken (cleaning, pruning, etc.) that ensure the safety of the visitors. This is the responsibility of the park managers and therefore in this way they further encourage nature education.

Despite this, the park managers will be asked to clean the area of a lot of garbage left behind by careless visitors. This is a very common phenomenon that prevails in crowded places as well as periurban parks.

In this part, environmental education can contribute by raising awareness and learning the right way to behave in a natural environment. So with their visit to the area, when leaving, they should have taken all their garbage with them and not have caused damage to the facilities of the area.



Cleaning and maintenance work at Mt. Hymettus Aesthetic Forest



Did you know that?

As it is difficult to decompose, the accumulation of inorganic waste potentially makes the soil layer impenetrable by plant roots. In addition, the inorganic waste that covers the forest soil will retain the water for penetrating into the soil, thus inhibiting the absorption of minerals that fertilize the soil.



Conclusions

Lastly, the cooperation steps are simple and the most essential is for educational institutes to have information about where they are. In addition, to be informed about the needs of the specific natural environment and how they should behave in it. It is very significant that periurban park managers encourage every act of environmental education and contribute to it in every possible way.



The children's direct contact with the natural environment.

Source: Parea tou Dasous,
Mt. Hymettus Aesthetic
Forest

