

An overview of Friends of Parks initiatives in Italy: best practices, lessons learned and ways to strengthen partnerships

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1. An overview of existing and long lasting partnerships in Italy

In Italy, "Friends of Parks" initiatives developed as volunteering activities in order to strengthen relationships between protected areas and the general public.

Italy's strong overall background in volunteer activities was highlighted in a national survey that was carried out by the National Institute ISTAT in 2014, where the number of volunteers was estimated to almost 5 million. 6,3 million individuals, at least 14 years old had done volunteering work in Italy in 2013, defined as "activity provided free of charge and without any obligation," at least once a month. Most of them, over 4 million, did so within organizations (associations, committees, movements, informal groups), while the remaining did so for other people, the community or the environment. The volunteer rate, according to the ISTAT survey, is 12.6 per cent of the population: 1 Italian out of 8. It was 6.9 percent in 1993 and 10 percent in 2011. The trend is growing.

In Italy, environmental volunteering was born in the 60s, together with the "historical" associations (WWF, Italy Nostra etc.) in order to guard the environmental Italian heritage. At this point in time, the environment was still under the effects of World War II, with the post-war economic boom that deeply transformed the Italian peninsula. Traditional farming and activities with low environmental impact, such as pastoralism and non-mechanized agriculture, were all replaced by an industrial boom - chemical and metalworking - intensive and mechanized agriculture that severely damaged the environment.

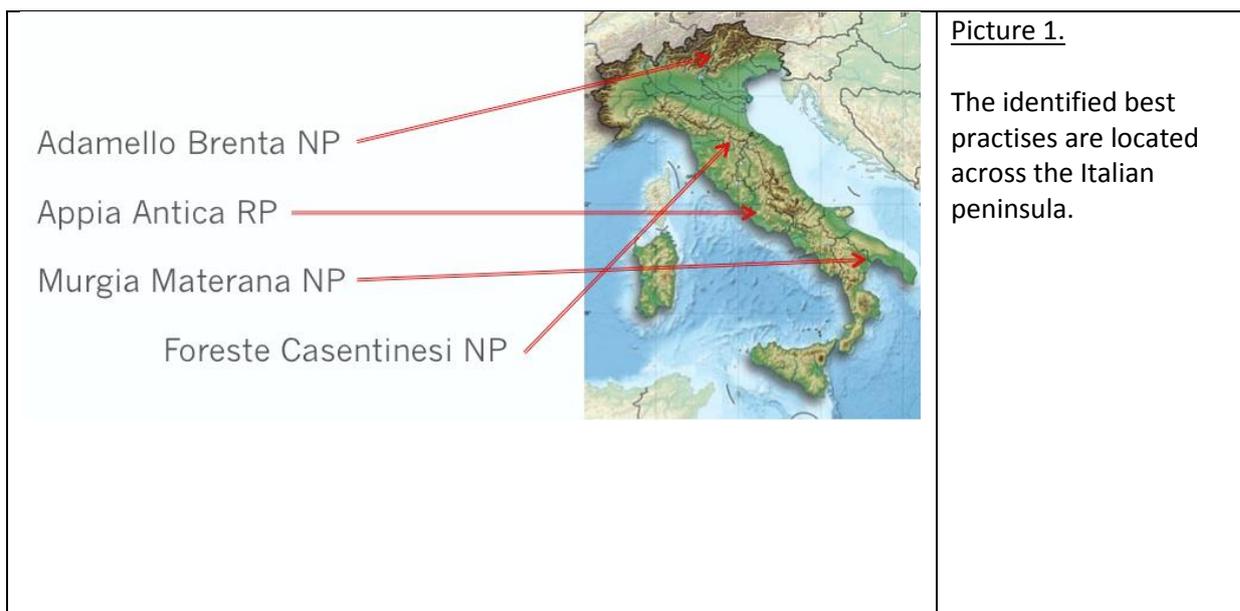
Volunteering activities within National Parks started particularly in the Abruzzi National Park and in the Gran Paradiso National Park. Since then, volunteering activities have developed and spread throughout numerous parks all over the Italian peninsula, where they are organized and coordinated in many different ways. In numerous areas in Italy, such volunteering activities have explicitly organized and identified themselves as "Friends of Parks", with a clear and direct link with the Protected Area.

2. The selected Italian best practices

The best practices were selected by identifying the initiatives and associations that specifically named themselves as "Friends of Parks" and that are proven to have been successful and long-lasting throughout the years. All the contact persons of the highlighted best practices have given their consensus to publish their contact details. The Italian "Friends of Parks" examined here show great differences in their organizational structures (e.g. internal or external to the Park authority, directly or non directly controlled by the Park), funding systems (public and/or private), as well as their activities and means (research, monitoring, guiding, cleaning, raising awareness, etc.).

The following initiatives have been chosen as best practices:

- The Friends of Adamello Brenta National Park
- The Friends of the Appia Antica Regional Park
- The Friends of Murgia Materana Archeological Historical and Natural Park
- The Friends of the Foreste Casentinesi National Park



3. The Friends of Adamello Brenta Natural Park

The Adamello Brenta Natural Park, was established in 1967, and it is the largest protected area of Trentino (618 sq km). It includes Adamello and Brenta mountainous groups, divided by Rendena Valley and bordered by Non Valley, Sole Valley and Giudicarie Valley. There are about 80 lakes and the Adamello Glacier. Its fauna is among the richest of the Alps. Tovel Lake and the waterfalls of Val Genova are major tourist attractions in the summer months. The Park hosts an important population of brown bear, and many projects are related to this species.

The initiative Friends of Adamello Brenta Natural Park started in the early 2000s from a direct action of the Park Authority that decided to activate an online subscription to liaise with friends, fans and supporters of the Park. It is interesting to note that there is no fee or other money involved; also there is no formal association created outside the Park authority. But it is rather a set of activities that the Park directly manages and coordinates through a dedicated person within its staff (contact details here below).

The activities are all accessible via the main webpage, in a special section called “Amici del Parco” (Friends of the Park). There is a newsletter, games, educational charts and cartoons to colour (for children), photo contests, and access to the historical archive in pdf. All the means and tools are available after logging in, by registering into the website of the Park. The interested people fill in the online form and they automatically become friends of the Park that, in return, can count on a direct and updated link with about 2,000 members. Currently, it appears as a well established, stable and successful initiative.

Web-site: <http://www.pnab.it>

Contact: Dott.ssa Chiara Grassi; Tel: +39 0465 806616; chiara.grassi@pnab.it



Picture 2. An example of the educational cartoon to colour “Osvaldo l’Orso” that can be downloaded from the web site of the Park (photocredits: Adamello Brenta Natural Park, <http://www.pnab.it>)

4. The Friends of the Appia Antica Regional Park

The Park of the Appia Antica was protected in 1988. Thanks to decades of battles waged by citizens and environmentalists, this territorial system - extraordinary in terms of its historical-archaeological and landscape value - was placed under a single integrated protection system.

A green wedge, the Park reaches to the city centre of Rome, and, being contiguous with the Alban Hills, it represents a biological corridor for numerous animal species; moreover, the Park has preserved parts of Roman countryside and coppices and groves.

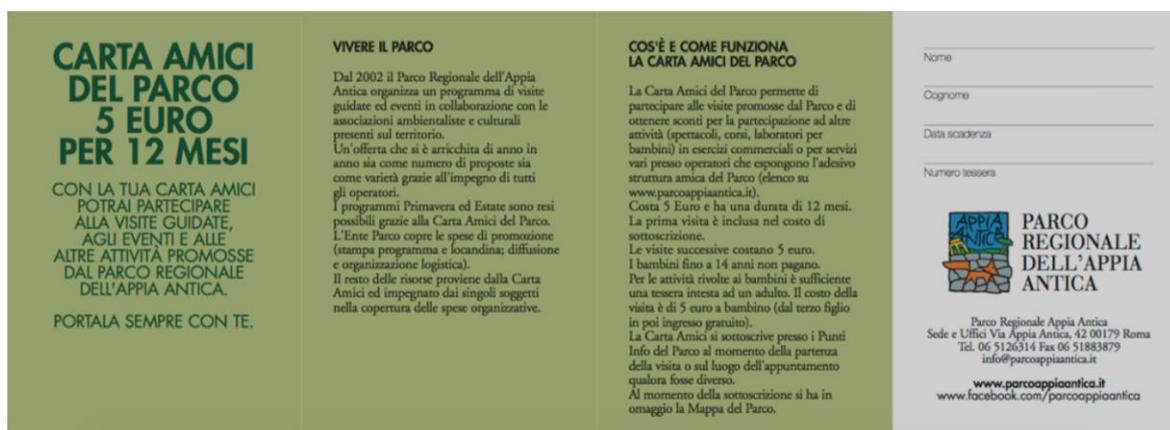
In addition to these values, the Park contains historical and archaeological remains of great importance (e.g. Tombs of the Via Latina, remains of seven Roman aqueducts, the two large rural estates of Tormarancia and Farnesiana, etc). The Park therefore serves the purpose of preserving a

set of general values resulting from the complex and unique relationship between nature and man, between the cultural heritage and landscape.

The Park was established with a strong bottom-up approach; it is a Park wanted from the very beginning by the people and by the environmental associations now active in various activities in support of the Park. Currently the Park can count on about 100 individuals active in various activities on behalf of various local associations.

In practice, the Park coordinates a network of local associations through the “tavolo delle associazioni”, an association committee within the Park that coordinates various activities such as management of the Info Points, seasonal program of activities (e.g. on the home page “follow the fox!”), management of a network of bicycle rentals (with repairs), maintenance of the green areas of the roman aqueducts and of the herbal / vegetable gardens, information/welcoming activities, guided visits, educational activities.

The initiative of the Friends of the Appia Antica Regional Park has developed since the early 2000s and the first Info Points of the Park were established in 2002. Of particular interest and originality is the “Friendship Card” initiative (i.e. CARTA AMICI), which was initiated in 2006/7.



Picture 3. The “Friendship Card” initiative (i.e. CARTA AMICI).

The “Friendship Card” initiative is a financial instrument in favour of the associations that collaborate with the Appia Antica Regional Park for the organization of seasonal programs for guided tours and other events.

People wishing to become friends of the Park can purchase the card for 5 Euros and it is valid for 12 months. If the card is purchased on the occasion of a guided tour, the contribution of 5 euro covers also the 2 Euro contribution for the first guided tour. For participation in subsequent tours (with the card) it requires a contribution of € 2. After the 5th guided tour, card owners will participate for free. (Rules can be downloaded at

<http://www.parcoappiaantica.it/it/docum/Regolamento%20Carta%20Amici%20del%20Parco%202012.pdf>).

The CARTA AMICI allows visits and activities included in the Spring and Autumn programs. Plus discounts on events, courses, workshops for children, etc.; discounts in stores displaying the logo Friends of the Park. The “CARTA AMICI” can be purchased at the Info Point (a map of the Park is included). Approximately 5,000 cards are sold yearly and the revenue goes directly to the associations. The Park is responsible only for the promotion.

Amongst the strengths of this initiative is the high level of commitment and engagement of the major associations that have been involved from the beginning of the process; also notable is the high participation and strong support from the citizens, favoured by the close vicinity to the Italian capital.

The future perspectives are positive: the network is solid and their next goal is to make Appia Antica a pedestrian. Hence, the various associations together with the Park are running a big campaign:

https://www.change.org/p/niente-più-auto-sull-appia-antica-solo-a-piedi-e-in-bici-dal-colosseo-alla-regina-viarum?recruiter=187975826&utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=facebook&utm_campaign=share_page&utm_term=des-lg-no_src-custom_msg&fb_ref=Default

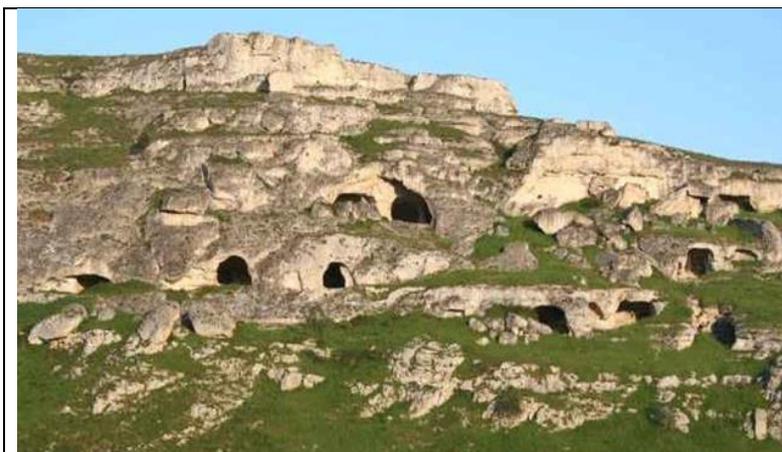
Web-site: <http://www.parcoappiaantica.it>

Contact: Dott.ssa Francesca Mazzà, Tel: +39 06 512 6314, f.mazza@parcoappiaantica.it

5. The Friends of Murgia Materana Archeological Historical and Natural Park

The Basilicata Region established the Murgia Materana Archeological Historical and Natural Park in 1990 with the aim to protect, restore and enhance the area of the Murgia Materana, which is characterized by the presence of prehistoric and historic archaeology, and to protect and enhance the natural habitats and rock churches.

The Park is located in the eastern part of the Basilicata Region, near the border with Puglia. Within its territory one finds the so called “Gravina of Matera”, which is a deep limestone canyon, on the bottom of which flows the river with the same name. It is a tributary to the River Bradano. The area is covered by typical Mediterranean vegetation.



Picture 4.

Murgia Materana area has been inhabited since prehistoric times and there are traces of the Palaeolithic and remains of villages from the Neolithic Age (e.g.). One of the most important features of the Park is the presence of about 150 rock churches scattered along the rivers and canyons.

Photo: Murgia Materana Park Archive.

The association Friends of Murgia Materana Park started in 2004 by a group of motivated people of the Park, and can count on about 30 founding members (i.e. motivated guides), of which 10 are very active. The main activities include support to the Park activities, management of Info Point, environmental education activities, and international multicultural camps.

The future perspective is positive and the trend is stable; there are no conflicts and the association is part of a regional network for environmental education and volunteering. Future goals include the development at international level with EVS and Erasmus +. In particular, the multicultural activities implemented within the international camps were rather successful, as well as the various activities carried out within the local schools. In this respect, they serve as an inspirational example to others favouring social cohesion and integration.

Web-site: <http://www.parcomurgia.it>

Contact: Raffaele Lamacchia, Tel: +39 338 4481352, amicidelparco@alice.it

6. The association Friends of the Foreste Casentinesi National Park

In terms of support for research activities is notable to mention the association Friends of the Foreste Casentinesi National Park. It was founded in 2011 and is mainly involved in research activities including research on the genetics of wolves. The Park recognizes the association through a formal agreement.



Crinali di Legno

Associazione Amici del Parco Nazionale delle Foreste
Casentinesi, Monte Falterona e Campigna

Contact: info@crinalidilegno.it – www.criminalidilegno.it.

7. Considerations

It is very important to be aware why and by whom the initiative of Friends of Parks were established. In this regard, “**energy – passion – skills – support**” are recurrent (and important) key words.

The long lasting initiatives seem to favour pro-campaigns rather than against-campaigns.

In the Italian context, it seems very important and strategic to establish good relations and links with large national ENV NGOs* already at an early stage.

The pivotal role of the coordination of volunteers is fundamental and must not be underestimated. Here, the important key words are: **reliable – trustworthy – empathetic – committed**.

Contents vs. Communication: communication, despite being a buzz word in recent times, is not as important as the contents of the activities proposed, which must be interesting and appealing as well as the locations to attract volunteers. The long lasting experiences show the importance of the contents, design of the activities, attitude and professionalism of the coordinator and attractiveness of the locations. Therefore, while communication is important, the content is key.

Lessons learned

- It is about building a relationship with your audience: people feel closer to the Park.
- Various scattered initiatives; few associations lasted over the years.
- It is important to establish good relationship with national NGOs.
- Have the right coordinators in place.
- Be pro-active.
- It is not about the money.

Future perspectives

- It is likely that, in the forthcoming years and for various reasons (budget cuts, lack of political support, lack of personnel, etc.), we will see an increasing need for support for Parks.
- It is likely that (in the forthcoming years) we will see a greater involvement of volunteers in key activities (research, management, monitoring, interpretation, etc).
- It is likely that (in the forthcoming years) we will see more Parks having formalized agreements with volunteers associations.
- It is not clear if a network at national level is needed (to coordinate whose partnership at national level); this remains an open question.
- A new collaboration platform at EU level should be established.
- There are good opportunities to develop various joint EU projects (various supporting programmes).

Appendix 1. Presentation with powerpoint slides in PDF format; see the next file on the list in <http://www.ukko-kolinystavat.fi/pages/in-english.php>.

See more of the main Italian associations promoting environmental volunteering:

1 - ItaliaNostra - <http://www.italianostra.org>

Born in 1955 in Rome to preserve the Italian architectural, historical and environmental heritage, "within the rural and urban landscape". ItaliaNostra has the important feature of combining the protection of the historical and architectural heritage with the protection of environment: a key task in a country such as Italy rich in history.

2 - WWF ITALY - <http://www.wwf.it>

Founded in Italy in 1966, it has certainly been the greatest Italian association in defence of environment with various branch offices and subscribers. Along with thousands of members who finance fundraising for specific campaigns (safeguard protected species such as the Wolf, the Otter, Lynx, cetaceans, marine turtles, the Chamois d 'Abruzzo, the bear, the Monk Seal), has developed various voluntary environmental actions.

3 - LIPU - <http://www.lipu.it>

LIPU (Italian Bird Protection League) founded in 1965 and adhering to BirdLife International has worked for years in defence of Italian birds managing oases and recovery centres for birds.

4 - LEGAMBIENTE - <http://www.legambiente.com>

Born later, in 1980, LEGAMBIENTE has developed regional committees and more than thousands local groups. The organisation is a member of the 'EEB European Environment Bureau and the IUCN and C.CI.VS. Born from 'ARCI association of leisure and cultural recreation and sports of the Italian Left, LEGAMBIENTE has in recent decades a leading role in environmental protection activities.

5 - LAV - League antivivisection <http://www.infolav.org>

Born in the 80's to report animal abuse, it acts with national campaigns and has several local branches. The main campaigns promoted are: against vivisection, dog fighting for betting, farms in battery chickens and other animals for food, use of fur in fashion, using animals in circuses and zoos.

6 - ENPA - National Animal <http://www.enpa.it/enpa.html>

Founded in 1871 by an initiative of Giuseppe Garibaldi, it became public entity in 1939 and again in 1979, a private association. The main activity concerns the protection of animals using also volunteers for vigilance against the mistreatment of animals. It is present throughout the national territory and is actively involved in the defence of animals and their rights as well as the supervision of the hunt.

7- FEDERATION PRO NATURE <http://www.pro-natura.it>

One of the oldest associations founded in 1959 promoted by the Director of the National Park Grand Paradiso, it brings together many naturalistic groups engaged not only on scientific aspects (zoology, botany, geology, natural history museums, etc.) but also on a wider ecological approach.