

# Pedagogical workshops for preschool & school age children, teachers and parents in nature in Mt. Hymettus Aesthetic Forest

Ηλεκτρονικό περιοδικό [Europarc Federation](#)

## Summary

“Parea tou dasous” is an original pedagogical approach, using nature, the most ancient workshop in the world, as a field for developing abilities, for learning and discovery. It is inspired by and based on modern pedagogical theories such as experiential learning & “Forest school”, according to which, contact with nature plays a crucial role in holistic (physical, spiritual, mental, psychological and social) and healthy development of children. The workshops aim to help children -as well as teachers and parents- reconnect with nature physically, emotionally and mentally, by developing their environmental friendly conscience in a pleasant way, through play, movement and contact with natural materials, in an open-air setting.



## Background of the project

Even though in Greece weather permits spending time outdoors, especially in rural areas, parents & teachers do not encourage enough open air visits and children are restricted indoors, a fact which affects their physical, emotional & mental state. Mount Hymettus Aesthetic Forest in Athens, a periurban man-made forest close to the city center, while visited by numerous citizens, is not generally regarded by the local community as a learning place, but used only for family weekend recreation.

Restricted contact with nature, lack of movement, space, free play time and fresh air, as a result of a stress-

ful way of life, full of numerous indoor activities and excessive use of electronic devices, has led -according to international observations & studies- to serious child health issues, poorly developed gross & fine motor skills and learning difficulties, as well as to complete ignorance of common local flora (e.g. cypress) and fauna (e.g. turtle) sp Lessons learned



## Solution and actions taken

Outdoors education is the first step to be taken in order to help people (children, parents & teachers) reconnect with nature in a simple, natural, free and informal way, aiming to create responsible human behaviour attitudes, with knowledge and respect for the natural environment, our home. Nature should not be approached strictly for environmental education purposes, or as a recreation area, but used as a great open-air school for all ages, in which one can learn about literally everything!

We organize different workshops for school groups, mixed age children and families, that give the opportunity to familiarize with nature by playing, working, discovering and creating together in a beautiful natural setting, on a frequent basis, under all weather conditions. Helped by trained pedagogues and natural stimuli, following local traditions of changing seasons, children & adults cooperate, relax, enjoy and learn how to care about their natural environment and its fellow inhabitants.



## Other institutions or parties involved

Europarc member, Philodassiki Enossi Athinon is the creator, owner and manager of Mt. Hymettus Aesthetic Forest and we have therefore worked together in order to organize the workshops in the most convenient way, by carefully following restrictions and limitations of the forest and by helping to maintain flora & fauna, (e.g. by planting, watering and weeding).

## Results

Related surveys we conduct with teachers and parents participating in our workshops are very encouraging, showing that frequent outdoor education practices have very therapeutic and positive results on people's connection with nature, in rural areas. In Mt. Hymettus Aesthetic Forest, we are happy to already see that other institutions such as kindergartens and schools are progressively using nature as a learning field by incorporating a day in the forest, in their weekly schedule and curriculum.

## Challenges

Our main difficulties in the process are external ones, such as exceptional weather conditions or overcrowding of the area followed by common periurban park problems (e.g. garbage, cyclists, unleashed dogs), as well as internal ones, such as personal fear –in children & adults- of contact with flora & fauna, due to lack of natural experience in everyday life.

## Lessons learned

We still have a long way to go as a modern society in order to fully and respectfully reconnect with our birthplace, nature, but it is a worthwhile journey towards achieving biodiversity preservation, establishing sustainability and ensuring a future for our planet. Presently, apart from developing our practice, we aim to inspire other institutions to follow our example in their local areas, by organizing similar seminars and workshops.

