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GAMIFICATION AS AN EDUCATIONAL TOOL  
FOR UPPER SCHOOLS ON PARKS  
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# CENTO LAGHI REGIONAL PARK

## Video Interview transcription

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ENTE DI GESTIONE PER I PARCHI E LA BIODIVERSITA'  
EMILIA OCCIDENTALE

Management Body for Parks and Biodiversity –  
Western Emilia

# CENTO LAGHI REGIONAL PARK

*Video interview transcription*

## ALESSANDRA MAESTRI

**Administrative Manager of the *Parchi del Ducato***

### **Q: What annual budget does the Cento Laghi Park have available?**

A: We have to make a premise. Up until 2012 the Cento Laghi Park was managed by a consortium and therefore had its own budget. However, from 2012 onwards, these management consortiums for regional parks were abolished and a new managing body took over which manages all five regional parks, i.e. the Cento Laghi Park, Stirone Park, Taro Park, Carrega Park and Trebbia Park. Since then, from 2012 onwards, there has been one budget for all five parks. So, within this single budget, we have separate a portion specifically for the Cento Laghi Park. We can therefore say that the sum that the Park has at its disposal for all of its activities is around €500,000 per year.

### **Q: What expenses do you have, for example, staff, projects, communication?**

A: The Cento Laghi Park has various categories of expenses. There are the current expenses, i.e. those that are repetitive and that we have every year. A portion of these €500,000 goes toward staff expenses. This is the largest amount at about half of the budget, €250,000. Meanwhile, another portion goes toward administration, i.e. those expenses that ensure computers are working, copy machines are working, that cover cleaning, insurance, and car maintenance. A whole series of fixed expenses that come to about €100,000. Then there are other current expenses which finance the parks' activities, i.e. the cost of surveillance, activities that safeguard biodiversity and environmental education activities on sustainability, as well as normal technical activities, like granting permits, expert opinions and authorisations, totalling about €150,000. Then there's another portion that covers investments and grants related to assets, which are extraordinary expenses. Two important projects are currently underway at the Cento Laghi Park: maintenance of the bike path network and of the hiking trails. This means maintenance, improved signage, and the creation of structures which allow visitors to take advantage of this network of trails. This is happening within the Cento Laghi Park and Monte Fuso Park and is the primary grant related activity that's taking place in the Park this year.

### **Q: Where do the economic resources that are available to the Park come from?**

A: The Park has a statute which states that the Park's revenue comes mainly from transfers. The main transfer comes from the Emilia Romagna region which transfers about 50% of all our resources. The other transfers come from part of the provinces of Parma and Piacenza, as well as from the municipalities located within the Park. For the Cento Laghi Park, this means four municipalities: those of Tizzano, Monchio, Corniglio, and Neviano. Each municipality earmarks €20,000 per year for the Park's needs. We also have another type of revenue which isn't tax related. This is income that the Park earns from its activities. For example, we have income that comes from the sale of hunting permits, mushroom permits, and fishing permits; activities that allow us to monetise entry tickets to museums, and school activities. And so on.

**Q: How many employees manage the Cento Laghi Park?**

A: We have employees that oversee all the activities of all the parks. So, again, there's a selection of staff that's only in charge of the Cento Laghi Park. This selection of staff is made up of five employees, each of which carry out activities in different sectors of the Cento Laghi Park.

**ENRICA MONTANINI**

**Head of the sustainability education and museology of the *Parchi del Ducato***

**Q: How many classes does the Cento Laghi Park work with on environmental education initiatives each year? Where are they from?**

A: On average the Park works with 12-15 classes per year in various activities. They're mainly kindergarten and elementary school classes from the municipalities which are affected by the presence of the Park, i.e. Tizzano, Monchio, and Corniglio, and their hamlets.

**Q: Is the Cento Laghi Park currently involved in any projects?**

A: Yes, we offer specific projects for classes and teachers to participate in. One of the most popular is the one on wolves, as the species has become a very important presence in all protected areas, but particularly in the parks of the Apennines, like the Cento Laghi Park. Most classes choose this kind of programme, with in-school activities and class trips. We also have two other popular educational programmes, one on climate change, which is currently one of the most important topics and critical issues, and therefore frequently requested, and another related to soil use and consumption in the Apennine mountains area.

**Q: What kinds of projects and topics are explored with the schools?**

A: The topics are basically those that I described. We generally approach them with methods that are adjusted to the type of class we're working with. So for the youngest, regardless of the topic, we choose an approach that's focused more on play and entertainment. Meanwhile, for older classes we prefer class trips, explorations, and activities that push children to ask questions about the topics that we're exploring. The topics are basically the ones I described. But in general, classes are most interested in flora, fauna, and the landscape. When we explore a topic we expand it to include everything that could be of interest within the Park.

**MARCO ROSSI**

**Head of Tourism, culture and communication area of the *Parchi del Ducato***

**Q: How many people visit and stay overnight in the Park per year?**

A: It's very difficult, if not impossible, for us to determine the number of people who come to the Park, especially those who stay overnight, because the number of people who stay overnight in tourist lodgings is determined on the grounds of public safety and communicated only to the police, not to organisations like ours. We can only deduce presence based on how many people access the visitors' centres and infopoints situated along the trails.

We can't obtain a precise number, though obviously tourist traffic is determined by the season, meaning that during the warm season there are many more people than there are during transitional seasons or winter.

**Q: What are the main tourist activities that take place in the Park? Do they have a significant impact?**

A: The main tourist activities that take place in the Park are, obviously, those connected to enjoying the natural environment. Individuals, families, groups of varying sizes, choose the Park as a natural destination for participating in outdoor activities like hiking and cycling. In general these activities don't have a negative impact on the environment. They actually have a significant positive impact, which is that of livening up the local economy and ensuring that these places are frequented and enjoyed.

**Q: Are there forms of tourism, perhaps motorised, that aren't permitted in the Park?**

A: Yes, there are. There still are. Especially because the system of permits for motorised vehicles is complex. It depends on ownership of the road. Meaning that on municipal roads and paved roads, as well as former municipal roads that have been downgraded, motorised vehicles are permitted and sometimes these roads pass through both natural environments and developed areas. This is a problem. Meanwhile, on joint access roads, rather than public roads, the use of motorised vehicles is prohibited to all but those who have reason to go into the woods or fields, like direct farmers or agricultural producers. There's still some motorised traffic in vulnerable areas, which we monitor and try to avoid and sanction when possible.

**What are the tourist resorts in the area?**

There are two or three main districts that are of interest to tourists in the Cento Laghi Park. One is definitely that of Schia and Mount Caio. This is also a winter resort, so there are still some chair lifts and downhill ski slopes. It's very well located, just 40-45 minutes from Parma and at an altitude of between 1200 and 1500 meters, which, from a logistical point of view, is certainly the closest for those coming from the Parma area.

Then there are other important resorts, other districts, i.e. the lake resorts, such as upper Val Cedra and Val Parma, where the only downhill ski slopes are at Prato Spilla in the municipality of Monchio delle Corti. Monte Fuso, in the municipality of Neviano degli Arduini, is another beautiful district, with a faunal enclosure where one can see wild animals that are hard to see in nature.

**Is tourism very seasonal and, if so, is this a problem?**

Yes, tourism is very seasonal, but it's not a problem, because the greatest pressure is felt in the summer, when people escape the heat in the lowlands by coming to the mountains where they find not only a natural environment, but also a more welcoming climate.

So there's definitely greater tourist traffic in the summer months, but this doesn't put particular pressure on the environment.

**Are there any tourist events organised directly by the Park?**

Yes, as a Park authority we organise many initiatives, activities, and events throughout the season and the year, obviously with greater frequency in seasons of good weather, i.e. from spring to autumn.

We also collaborate with local organisations, like tourist offices and volunteer associations, in order to organise and support their activities, both financially and promotionally. We usually promote one of the most well-established yearly initiatives which are guided hikes for groups, approximately 150 excursions per year, plus other laboratory activities and workshops, especially for families with children, and other less conventional environmental projects, perhaps more entertainment based, like outdoor concerts or activities that aren't exclusively related to environmental awareness.

### **How is the Cento Laghi Park' communication managed?**

From an institutional perspective, the communication has two main objectives. One is to let people know who and what we are and what we represent in the context of environmental governance in the provinces of Parma and Piacenza. This means communicating what our mission and objectives are and how we seek to achieve them.

The second is to communicate what we do each day, including initiatives, activities, events, and projects that promote and preserve the environment.

These are our two areas of communication and we use the same channels as all public organisations, though we may be more dynamic than others, maintaining relationships with local press and media, both in printed form and online.

A website with a newsletter and pages on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. These are our main sources for providing information to the public.

### **Does the Park integrate its own regulations with the directives and norms from the EU?**

Yes, it absolutely does. We could also say that in some way they're the result of them, meaning that the EU, even prior to the regional and national legislation, imposed very important and stringent norms with regard to the environment and natural sites.

Those regulations, made up of directives and statutes, then led to more local planning and management tools, which are clearly based on national and regional laws as well as the planning tools of the Park, which are essentially the Park's local plan and the general regulations for access.

### **What are the main agricultural activities?**

The main agricultural activities in our Park, whose elevation ranges from 400-500 meters all the way to 1400-1500 meters, are those which characterise the Parmigiano Reggiano region.

The production of Parmigiano Reggiano has shaped and continues to shape the environment, natural landscape, and production activities.

The production line truly represents the concept of field to table, strongly characterised by this typical product and by another typical product, which is also P.D.O.: Prosciutto di Parma, a world-famous product of outstanding quality, that has important production sites in this area as well as within the Park.

### **Are there any agricultural activities that aren't allowed in the Park, activities with a strong environmental impact?**

We don't have specific regulations that prohibit agricultural activities that would potentially be allowed in other places. We're particularly careful that all agricultural activities respect the norms, which are already quite stringent and extensive in the P.D.O. guidelines. Even from a sanitary

perspective, we don't add additional restrictions, but we're careful to make sure that the existing norms are respected.

### **Do different rules apply for managing intensive animal farming within the Park?**

No, as I said, intensive breeders don't exist within the Park.

The only animals that are bred are dairy cows which are raised in stables.

The impact on the environment is due to the diet of these cows, meaning the scything of grasslands and the sowing which are all elements that contribute positively to preserving biodiversity. Permanent pastures, for example, are very important for protecting environments and habitats, because they don't require phytosanitary treatments and, above all, they keep spaces open which, especially in the mountains, would otherwise be completely taken over by woods, thus reducing the level of diversity and biodiversity.

Among the main production activities are those related to prosciutto and cheese.

### **Do these have an impact on the area?**

There are both prosciutto and cheese producers. The impact of these two industries is limited to the specific site and not to the entire production line. It's obvious that these facilities require energy in order to heat and cool the spaces and for the production process. However, the impact is limited to the process taking place at that specific site and, as they're bound by P.D.O. requirements, they're closely monitored. In recent years the agricultural world has been very committed to the development of alternative and renewable energy sources in order to reduce the ecological footprint and, ultimately, the dependency on fossil fuels.

### **Does the Park collaborate directly with any producers?**

There are certain producers with which we have a closer collaborative relationship, especially those situated within the Park and in adjacent areas, meaning the area around the Park.

We clearly have a privileged relationship with them.

In general, the agricultural activities which take place within the Park are well-regarded by us, and we often organise initiatives that revolve around them, like educational farms, open farms, workshops that raise awareness about the activities that take place there. So for us they're definitely a positive partner.

### **Is there a quality trademark for products produced in the Park?**

Not at the moment, also because our region is characterised by products that are already subject to stringent regulations, like the P.D.O. and P.G.I. standards.

Like the cheeses, Parmigiano Reggiano, Prosciutto di Parma, as well as the wine industry, which is really more present in other parks, not so much in the Cento Laghi Park, and is also highly regulated. These are very strong trademarks so it's unlikely that an additional trademark from the Park would add any commercial value.

### **Does the Park help farms to develop through tenders that finance work which would improve them?**

In recent years tools for earmarking primarily European funds, but also regional ones, almost always guarantee priority access to farms that are located within a protected area.

So, all else being equal, those who conduct their activities within a protected natural area,

have greater access to grants and loans. This is definitely important when one seeks to develop, strengthen, or renovate.

## **RENATO CARINI**

**Natural Resources Conservation, Research and Monitoring Area Technician**

### **Is picking flowers allowed or are they protected?**

In the parks, the flora is generally protected because damaging flora and fauna is forbidden according to the regulations in force.

In particular, certain species of flowers are especially protected, so picking them is prohibited even outside of protected areas, like for example wild orchids.

This regulation is from 1977, but it's still in force.

### **Are the woods protected?**

Yes, of course. The wooded areas, also those on private property, are governed by regulations and norms that specify and allow their use in accordance with certain rules.

### **What species of trees are found in the Park's forests?**

The wooded areas found within the Park of the 100 Lakes vary depending on the altitude.

From an altitude of several hundred meters in the municipalities of Neviano and Tizzano, until almost reaching the ridge, where the Ballano and Verde lakes are located at 1300 meters.

This ample difference in altitude determines the various species of trees. Oak forests dominate the lower area, while the upper area is dominated by beechwood.

### **Are there forests of non-native trees and projects aimed at managing and replacing these trees?**

There are management projects, but not for non-native species, given that the medium and upper hills, the Apennine mountains, haven't yet been colonised by large stretches of non-native plant species. This phenomenon is more common in the lowlands.

Large stretches of ailanthus or locust or similar species are uncommon as the altitude slowly increases.

So there aren't any large non-native wooded areas in the Cento Laghi Park.

### **What animals in the Park are the most numerous and significant?**

There are a lot of animals, ranging from insects to mammals.

The most striking component is that of the larger animals, i.e. mammals, and in this case that means ungulates, stags, deer, wild boar, and even wolves. This component is definitely the most visible and also the most interesting to the public because they're large animals.

The bird component, for example, is also represented because throughout this wooded and agricultural area, all those species that live among the trees and nest in the bushes are present, e.g. the red-backed shrike and the woodlark, as well as the blackcap and all those species that are specific to this type of environment.

### **Do the animals cause any damage? Which animals cause the most damage?**

Yes, when wild animals venture onto private property they can be a problem, especially where there are activities that earn an income.

In this case, agricultural activities often suffer damage to crops, especially from wild boar, which are the most common and the most problematic species, because they have the habit of digging into the soil to find roots and small invertebrates.

Therefore they do quite a lot of damage in agricultural areas.

### **Do farmers receive compensation for the damage?**

Yes, they receive compensation or so-called reparations as foreseen by the regional legislation for agricultural activities or any income-related activity that suffers damage from a wild animal.

### **How is hunting regulated in the area around the Park?**

The area around the Cento Laghi Park is enormous and hunting is permitted in accordance with certain rules governed by a regulation.

The number of huntable species is reduced depending on regional regulations and certain, more respectful, methods of hunting are allowed, especially compared to the more general regulations.

### **Are there species which can be hunted and others that are protected?**

Yes, independently from the institution of the Park. The regulations regarding hunting include a series of protected species, which therefore cannot be hunted.

In particular, the Park has allowed a much smaller number of species to be hunted than what regional laws normally allow.

So there are relatively few huntable species and they are wild boar, deer, pheasant, and hare, which are nonmigratory, and very few that are migratory, like mallards and woodcocks.

### **Are there specific rules and a calendar for fishing in the Park?**

Yes, in the Park fishing is normally permitted according to regulations that specify the method.

There are also regional norms that take precedence, but the Park has further limited these norms to give additional protection to water animals.

### **Are the fish in streams and rivers managed, and if so, which ones?**

The Cento Laghi Park there are two trout breeders, in particular two farms that capture wild trout, breed them in a controlled environment, and then free both the young and adult trout in rivers and lakes.

Trout is the species that's specifically managed in this very controlled manner which provides fishermen with animals to be fished, but also ensures their survival.

### **Is pollution a problem in the rivers?**

The upper part of the rivers, located within the Cento Laghi Park, has the highest quality water because there are few human activities. The closer you get to the valley, the more problems resulting from human activities there are, which affect the quality of the water and can be seen where there are breeding, industrial, or human activities, like, for example, the purification of municipal water.



When these activities interfere with rivers, when they dump material, they inevitably create a disturbance. In general, however, the quality of the water is good. As one gradually approaches the valley it tends to worsen.

### **Are there any non-native species that threaten the native fauna in the rivers?**

Unfortunately yes. We're currently developing a project intended to safeguard the European crayfish, *Austropotamobius pallipes*, and we've specified the fact that one of the primary causes of this species' decline is the presence of the Louisiana crawfish, *Procambarus clarkii*, which not only occupies the habitat, but is unfortunately a healthy carrier of a disease that's wiping out the population of native crayfish.

### **What are the most relevant aspects for your Park from a naturalistic and conservationist point of view? And what are the biggest issues in its management?**

The most interesting aspects from a naturalistic point of view are the high altitude, so the highest parts of the Park, those nearest the ridge, where there are lakes, bogs, and woods.

The environments and habitats that we need to preserve are those that are still largely unexploited. As we gradually descend, to where the human impact is greater, due to agricultural and industrial activities, clearly there tends to be less naturalistic importance.

Our management is aimed at keeping, as much as possible, these habitats and environments intact, because only by maintaining these environments can we maintain the species that live in them. A significant aspect is the considerable increase in recent years of visitors within the Park. Though well-intentioned, they still have an impact, especially on the fauna, but also on the trails, because we've seen that the management of large numbers of people wishing to use the Park all at the same time can cause some problems.

### **Is climate change affecting the nature of the Park?**

Yes, unfortunately we've already seen some signs, but we're afraid that the worst is yet to come. The upper part of the Park, which is cooler, could suffer serious damage from the rising temperature. We're talking about areas where the snow remains for longer, therefore replenishing the aquifers, but also, for example, the beechwood and all the plant species that are used to, and have evolved to live in, very cool environments. A hypothetical and substantial increase in temperature could cause truly severe damage.

### **Are there regulations regarding the picking of mushrooms?**

Mushrooms are of enormous interest in the province of Parma and therefore also in the Cento Laghi Park, in particular the porcino, because other species often aren't considered. Many people who visit the Park want to pick them. Obviously there are regional regulations that require a license and adherence to a whole set of rules. Determining whether the rules are respected or not is complicated. In a year where the mushrooms are particularly abundant, unfortunately many people get carried away and pick more than they're allowed.

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