

RURALAND

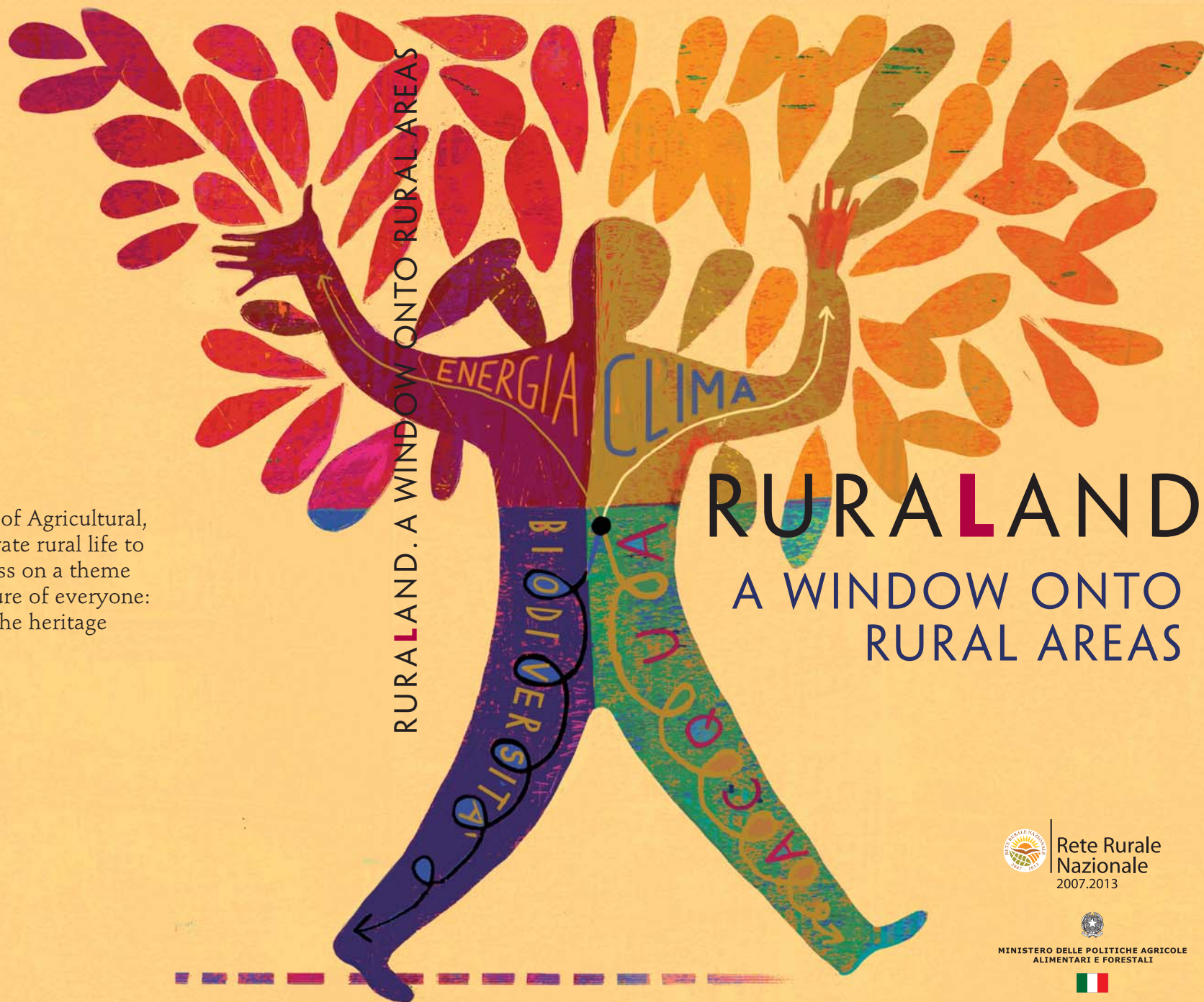
Rural4kids

Rural4teens

Rural4youth

Projects promoted by the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies to illustrate rural life to young people; to increase awareness on a theme which is very important to the future of everyone: protection of the countryside and the heritage of forestry and agriculture.

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GIUNTI
Progetti Educativi



Rete Rurale
Nazionale
2007.2013



MINISTERO DELLE POLITICHE AGRICOLE
ALIMENTARI E FORESTALI



The communication campaign presented in this booklet, aimed at encouraging an increased awareness in future generations of the effects of their actions and habits on society and the environment, is an ambitious and demanding project activated by the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies, finalised at sustaining conscious use of collective resources in our rural areas.

For this reason the RURALand project (which includes the Rural4kids, Rural4teens and Rural4youth initiatives, designed for primary school children, secondary school children and young university students respectively) acquires innovative characteristics: its target – children and school; and its identity as a tool for growth and development, through the use of computers to encourage dialogue and share knowledge, experience and good practice.

Based on European guidance, the Ministry has begun to provide information aimed at strengthening relations between schools and institutions. This relationship lies at the base of modern policies for rural development and will, in time, lead to greater commitment, as the preservation of our natural heritage clearly represents the whole relationship between society and the countryside.

It is with particular satisfaction that I support the success of these initiatives and hope that the same success accompanies those planned for the future.

The Minister for Agricultural Food and Forestry Policies

On.le Aw. Saverio Romano

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Saverio Romano', is positioned below the printed name.

LAND TO DISCOVER AND LOVE

Opening a window onto a beautiful view does not simply mean admiring well-kept fields; it also means glancing at history. The thing which distinguishes the Italian landscape is the layering of prints left behind by many different civilisations: plants, cultivation and sowing techniques, ways of using water, settlements and artefacts.

Historically, agriculture and forest management are the two activities which have had most influence on the territory; today it is agriculture that has to face four great challenges for the environment: valorisation of biodiversity, proper management of water resources, adjustment to climatic change and energy saving.

Our objective is to spread knowledge of these topics and encourage a new culture, “Agri-Cultura”, so it might favour knowledge of the land and its environmental heritage, leading teachers and children to reflect on themes such as the quality of life and sustainable development, going beyond dichotomies between humanistic and scientific disciplines to a vision of united knowledge.

Reflection on the correct use of natural resources and the essential role of the countryside in Italy’s cultural identity appears particularly opportune in consideration of the significance that such themes take on in institutional policies and the fact that the valorisation of biodiversity, climatic change, renewable energy and water resource management, is one of the main objectives of Common Agricultural Policy in its Health Check.



For this reason, in order to contribute to the process of cultural and environmental growth, in addition to creating a link between institutions and schools across the country, the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies (Direzione generale della competitività per lo sviluppo rurale – Headquarters for rural competitiveness and development) has devised initiatives to arouse public opinion and give information to the younger age groups. The objective is to give these a more central role in a change aimed at preserving rural heritage, which belongs to all of us.

Environmental communication, in a wide sense, as awareness of a patrimony of values, traditions and rural community culture, education of sustainability and respect for the environment was a topic of experimentation in schools for the school year 2009/2010.

Results of the work carried out by the Rete Rurale Nazionale (Natural Rural Network) with the Rural4kids project for primary school children, and the orientation which emerged during the starting phase of the Rural4teens project for the secondary lower school, highlighted the fundamental role played by educational processes in the development of sustainability.

This booklet illustrates the reasons, the methodological approach and the innovative nature of our project, explaining it in depth through practical information and considerations which will offer opportunities of applicability to other contexts.

RURALAND: KIDS EXPLORING THE COUNTRYSIDE



“GROWTH IS NOT A MECHANICAL PROCESS; IT’S A NATURAL PROCESS. YOU CAN NOT FORESEE HOW CHILDREN WILL GROW UP; YOU, LIKE FARMERS, CAN ONLY CREATE THE IDEAL CONDITIONS FOR THEM TO BLOSSOM.”

SIR KEN ROBINSON

What are the most important messages to give to 21st century children and teachers? How can we strengthen education, through educational activities that are directly linked to the land and its values? How can we bring city children closer to agricultural and rural environments?

The RURALand project, which contains the **Rural4kids**, **Rural4teens** and **Rural4youth** projects, connected like Chinese boxes, endeavours to answer these questions, in addition to expanding scientific and environmental aspects connected to valorisation of biodiversity, adaptation to climatic change, management of water resources and energy saving.

The objective was vitally important: making young people more aware that their behaviour can bear consequences for the environment and society.

A significant move was needed, which would give children a leading part in telling their experiences and participating actively in learning about and protecting the natural heritage.

INTERNATIONAL POLICY AND PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Development of young people, particularly in cultivating an increased sense of responsibility towards the environment, has long since been a strategic objective for policy makers.

An extensive process of reform has been unleashed from this orientation, based on a consciousness of edu-

cation’s fundamental role not just as a tool for human, civil and cultural growth, but also globally as an element of development.

Over recent years on an international level there has been a succession of guidance documents which highlight processes for social and economic growth.

UN recommendations in environmental conservation indicate a strategy of access to basic education built on sustainable development.

The Decade of education for sustainable development (DESD), adopted for the decade 2005-2014 by the United Nations General Assembly, aims to inform society and governments across the globe about the need for a future of increased consideration for people and for the Planet’s resources, by emphasising the role of education.

As far as the European Union is concerned, the treaties of Lisbon and Göteborg outline priorities; looking to the future, in 2010 the EU published the European Strategy for 2020 for promoting intelligent, inclusive and sustainable growth.

Furthermore, priority objectives such as valorisation of biodiversity, climatic change, management of water resources and energy saving have been included in the common agricultural policy’s Health Check.

Key references are the European Strategy for Biodiversity and the European Landscape Convention, which no longer see the landscape and its biodiversity as a passive backdrop to man, but as a place that – through integrating social, economic and environmental elements – is qualified to interpret and govern “our” rural areas.

POLICIES MEET SCHOOLS

RURALand is an initiative that easily marries the dimensions of the European Strategy 2020, and can be defined good practice within this policy. For the first time, the policy of rural development addresses schools, activating communication directed at kids.

RURALand proposes didactic and pedagogical methods to transfer the contents of the policy; a group of actions which can:

- inform and train project users (students and teachers);
- provide information concerning the challenges faced by the countryside;
- clarify how the reaction of rural areas has concrete effects on those inhabiting urban areas;
- encourage attentive behaviour to sustainability by encouraging a sense of responsibility in even the youngest.

Indeed, the project transmits and explains concepts of the rural world by making its numerous implications clear: it is the place where raw materials are produced for our food but it is also a producer of other things such as environment, air, water, landscape. It is therefore important to keep it healthy and clean.

This objective can only be reached with the efforts of everyone, from top world politicians to children. Indeed, the theme of the RURALand project is “we are all linked”, which highlights how the four challenges of rural areas involve everyone and how they demand a sense of responsibility in each one of us, even the youngest.



RURAL4KIDS 4 THINGS TO DO AND MANY TO DISCOVER

CONTEXT



Rural4kids is a project for environmental education and communication which comes at a crucial moment, when humanity is facing unprecedented changes, which make the formation of a collective conscience a necessity, for adults and children alike.

FUNDING



The project, promoted by the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies, is supported by the European Union (implemented with contributions from EAFRD – European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development) and realised within the sphere of the Rete Rurale Nazionale.

TARGET



Primary school children. The pilot project involved 3 schools and an NPO in Rome: G. Mazzini school, G. Ronconi school, Borsi-Saffi Comprehensive Institute, NPO “Il Piccolo Principe”.

OBJECTIVES



- Knowledge, information and experience on a positive externality of Italy, natural values which together give rural territory a specific identity.
- Transformation of this knowledge into responsible behaviour.
- Creation of a network of relations through the web.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES



- To inform the youngest age groups of the different aspects and values of the countryside, paying particular attention to the four main challenges that rural areas find themselves up against today: the valorisation of biodiversity, proper management of water resources, climatic change and energy saving. The project is also an opportunity to integrate a range of themes relating to agriculture, supporting rural landscape heritage and natural wealth.
- To represent the huge wealth of our country in terms of agricultural production, landscapes, species, ecosystems, languages, traditions, artistic expression and cultural identity and the role that agriculture can play in guaranteeing territorial biodiversity, through appropriate use of the soil and proper agricultural practices.
- To involve children in understanding relations between man and his environment, provide information on criticality and identify action to be taken to develop more responsible behaviour and increase understanding of one's own daily actions.
- To strengthen the link between agriculture and society, stimulating in the very young important considerations on collective heritage belonging to rural areas and making them the subject of a change intended to preserve them.
- To contribute to the development of a new “Culture” which goes beyond dichotomies between humanistic and scientific disciplines, for a systematic vision of knowledge.
- To give value to natural resources such as intercultural and interdisciplinary fields.
- To promote didactics which favour comprehension of cause and effect on a global level and encourage personal commitment and collective coordinated action.

INSTRUMENTS



To support activities a web site www.rural4kids.it has been set up; rich in multimedia content and materials for teachers, educators and students. A blog is also part of the tool box which permits different classes to compare activities.

INTERVIEW WITH...

PAOLA LIONETTI

(COORDINATOR OF THE RURAL4KIDS AND RURAL4TEENS PROJECTS)

CAN YOU TELL US HOW THE IDEA FOR THE PROJECT CAME ABOUT?

“ In two different moments: the first was when, at the Horse Fair in Verona, we saw a space dedicated to kids, designed to bring them closer to the theme of the fair.

It was then that we realised that we had no instruments to transfer topics of discussion of our work to the younger age groups. So we thought we would create them. We thought of the blog as an ideal tool for talking with children and teachers; a “place” where they could find visual material representing their experiences and share opinions, experience and impressions.

A second moment of reflection was when – and I say this as a geologist – we considered how the land has so many beauty spots, which are quite clearly in a state of neglect. We asked ourselves how we could bring about a change: the answer was to “cultivate” awareness in children; build a bridge with them because it is they who will create the basis for the future.

ONCE THE PROJECT HAD BEEN CREATED WAS IT EASY TO IMPLEMENT? WHAT WERE YOUR DIFFICULTIES?

“ The difficulties appeared whilst the project was transferred to reality: if creating the blog was simple,

thanks to a tried and tested work group, actually activating a dialogue with children was more difficult. Proposed themes were not always immediately clear, and we didn’t have a person working purely on this, who might be able to involve and educate the kids using child friendly language.

Other difficulties were of a more bureaucratic nature: coordinating administrative requirements for institutions and schools often took more time than predicted often just to get a signature.

WHAT HAVE THE POSITIVE ASPECTS BEEN?

“ Really, offering kids something a little unusual; stimulating their creativity. When a child can make space for imagination he is more reactive, more involved, We noticed this as soon as we met the classes: the children made a big effort to get their classrooms ready or sit in the front row, showing enthusiasm and involvement.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT FROM THE PROJECT?

“ The importance of finding the right key to telling people about rural development, to make it an interesting topic. The systematic approach – adopted by researchers – which begins from a premise and slowly arrives at a conclusion, is not effective with children. Their interest can only be aroused when beginning from something that is already in their imagination. In a nutshell, a style of communication needs to be used that is not based on a model we have in mind but on what corresponds effectively to what children expect.

GETTING **THE** PROJECT ACROSS: ROUTES **AND** EVENTS



(MILLET) "DEPICTS THE RURAL LANDSCAPE IN SUCH A WAY THAT YOU CONTINUE FEELING IT EVEN WHEN YOU RETURN TO THE CITY".

VINCENT VAN GOGH

THE PILOT STAGE: **INFORM TO EDUCATE**

In 2009-2010, Rural4kids went to school. To primary schools, where it was devised, and to secondary lowers, where it is known as Rural4teens. For each age group specific learning pathways were activated, with a common objective: informing teachers and students of the wealth of our land and the importance of preserving this. The second mission was to let the educational process seep through to companions in different schools and other classes, creating a process of interaction "between peers", and even including adults: teachers, families, institutions and internet communities, through articles published on the blog.

MEETINGS IN SCHOOLS AND EVENTS

The socialisation aspects of the project saw the organisation of three meetings:

- The first, at the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies to illustrate to teachers the objectives of the Rural4kids project within the wider Rete Rurale Nazionale programme; this meeting represented a moment of exchange of ideas and the identification of possible synergy with other ministry initiatives for nutrition education.
- The second, in participating schools and NPO, with in-depth theory and computer experts, to help teachers to use the blog; thanks to the presence of a method coordinator, teachers were able to measure efficacy of the tools identified and correspondence to the final aims of the pilot project.

- The third, in which each class, thanks also to the assistance of a professional clown, analysed the research path adopted in comparison to the challenge chosen. This last appointment was a further opportunity to create a network between teachers students and institutions promoting the initiatives, and stimulate synergies aimed at valorising experiences in each single school, making them become a model for teachers who adhered to the programme for school year 2010-2011.

Rural4kids was born and bred in school but has, over time, found new homes and new target groups, such as organisations under regional administration and specialised newspapers (Sole24Ore Scuola, Vita Scolastica). From school it has now moved out, into town centres, during events and rallies. So, R4K is an investment for everyone, adults and young people: inexpensive, environmental, social and cultural, and it has economic repercussions too.



PROJECT ACTIVITIES

- Elaboration of the themes which form each of the 4 challenges that the project tackles and their insertion in the site www.rural4kids.it.
- Organisation for coordination of the image, design and creation of blog and materials: instant picture, gadgets for distribution during events and exhibitions.
- Socialisation of the project through meetings with teachers and students.
- Participation and organisation of events in theme.



RURAL4KIDS AT THE AUDITORIUM PARCO DELLA MUSICA / ROME, 21 MAY 2010

A workshop-event, “Kids explain biodiversity”, with classes that had worked on the theme in the context of Rural4kids and people operating in the sector (environmental association representatives, regional administration and local groups).

Children were able to chat with experts and technicians and participate in a play-educational workshop with professional clowns. By means of a blog created especially for them, children were also able to share and discuss their chosen learning pathway between classes.

RURAL4KIDS AT THE BIOPARCO / ROME, 26 MAY 2010

At the end of the pilot phase, work generated by the children involved was put on show at the Sala Elefanti in the Bioparco, for a final award event.

The show became an opportunity to thank all those who had participated and helped to make the project more concrete.

After the award giving ceremony, a guided tour around the Bioparco gave the kids a chance to appreciate first-hand the wealth of animal biodiversity.

The pilot phase of the project concluded therefore with a practical and thrilling experience.



RURAL4KIDS AT THE SALONE DEL GUSTO / TURIN, 22 OCTOBER 2010

The Salone del Gusto was the ideal occasion to illustrate the final aims of the project to teachers, institutional representatives, promote the national competition and distribute information materials.

MATERIALS PRODUCED

- **A brochure** about Rural4kids, which also promotes the national competition for primary schools.
- **A series**, “Quaderni Rural4kids”: 4 volumes about biodiversity, climate, energy and water for primary school teachers involved in Rural4kids projects and regional administration who adhered to the initiative.
- **A kit** for the national competition entitled “The Fantastic Four: Water, Climate, Biodiversity and Energy together for rural development”: a notebook for students, a brochure for teachers, and album of masks for children, a CD Rom with indications and support for participating in the competition.
- **Promotional material** including posters, stickers, postcards, t-shirts, pencils, notebooks, backpacks.

PHASE 2010-2011: THE COMPETITION

The project for 2010-2011 anticipates reaching the largest possible number of classes in the final three years of Italian primary school who choose to include it in their curricula and participate in a competition. Widespread diffusion across the country of 50.000 copies of the competition kit has been possible thanks to the network of Giunti agents.

Each participating class will receive a didactic kit with notebooks for the children, a brochure for the teacher, an album with 5 masks and a cd-rom. The competition consists in completing the story of the 4 superheroes, which has been purposefully left with no ending. Children, with the support of their teachers, must come up with a conclusion, transform the text into a play (with dialogues, scenes etc.) and dramatise it, with the help of the masks in the kit.

From this script a video or photo story must be produced. By means of an application on the cd-rom in the kit, the class will be able to embellish their work with special effects. Finally, the file will be viewable on www.rural4kids.it.

The best work will be chosen by a jury of experts and ministry representatives who will choose 5 winning classes, which will be awarded a two-day trip to Rome.

THE PARTICIPATION OF REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

The project has also involved regional administrations, from social-economical and environmental analysis of the initial situation, to providing information on measures taken for water and energy saving, adjustment to climatic change, protection of biodiversity and monitoring these resources and distribution of the Rural4kids notebooks.

Another important repercussion concerns the involvement of members of regional administration and local institutions in workshops aimed at those interested in including the Rural4kids project in their own communication programmes. One of the

objectives of the initiative is to give regional administrations an active role in education / communication on a local level. On one hand, regional activity will aim to increase awareness in young citizens and their families, on the other hand it will strengthen a sense of belonging to the local area, creating a network of schools which are attentive to the subject of sustainability. In support of these initiatives, the distribution of information material and gadgets is planned during events and press conferences.



FOCUS GROUP: RURAL4KIDS AND THE CHILDREN

Within Rural4kids research was carried out by the University of Rome "La Sapienza". This research brought to light passages occurring between participation in the pilot phase of the campaign, and behaviour and attitude changes.

Results were obtained through elaboration of data collected in a focus group with 8 children from schools involved in the pilot phase of the Rural4kids campaign. In consideration of the participants' age, photolanguage was felt to be the most suitable technique in focus groups. Considerations and associative pathways which emerged show high levels of competence, awareness and commitment, with moments of critical opinion which prove a positive outcome of the process of appropriation of numerous and complex information.

The contents and structure of the two representations which emerge, biodiversity and agriculture, articulated in accordance to a polarity of *Generous and Vital Nature* versus *Man's Abuse and Exploitation*, show signs of a recent transformation of these two representations, which, thanks to the acquisition of new information, higher levels of awareness, social-emotional involvement, has brought intensification of a dichotomy already present in common sense and in the adult mind, but which tends to be exacerbated in the infantile mind.

INTERVIEW WITH...

ROSA BIANCO FINOCCHIARO

(METHOD COORDINATOR)

WHY IS THIS PROJECT AN OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH?

“Adults often believe that children learn more in non scholastic situations: they almost always learn and collect information from the places they visit.

This project deals with children's subconscious or undeclared needs in a constructive way, like entering into contact with nature, recognising rhythms, learning diversity and the origins of living beings, satisfying curiosity towards animals and plants. The project also puts into practice a pedagogy of being and doing and not one of merely knowing, thanks to first-hand experience for children and their acquisition of understanding how the simplest of actions can be important to nature.

In other words, theoretical knowledge is not the only thing needed to speak of the countryside; real knowledge is also necessary. A painting makes sense if it can be seen not just discussed; music makes sense if you listen to it not just read it on manuscript. Similarly the rural world needs to be experimented, observed, manipulated; the small and big things that nature offers allow complex learning which engage deeply and simultaneously all our spheres, including the emotional one.

HOW CAN THIS PROJECT BE EXPORTED INTO DIFFERENT CONTEXTS?

“The methodology adopted, that is research-action, makes protagonists of training staff, teachers and children, and can be used for all themes, satisfying educational needs. Indeed it is based not on notional or encyclopaedic knowledge, but on the ability to identify problems and procedures for solving them, in a process of continuous discovery. In a phrase “learning to learn from practice”.

HOW MUCH CAN WE SAY THAT CHILDREN HAVE BEEN INVOLVED, TAKING A LEADING ROLE?

“Children replied to questions concerning appreciation of the pilot scheme using words such as good, pleasant, fun; when asked to represent their experiences in images, they used bright colours like green, sky blue, yellow. The rural world always appears as positive; their wish to protect it transpires. Using the language of emotional intelligence we might say there was involvement therefore there was learning; there was motivation therefore there was involvement.

It is not enough to teach useful and interesting things to promote learning, fusion of knowledge is always a blend of mind and affection, an intertwining of subject and object, emotions and reason. We might say therefore that the project involved the children, and effectively touched their rational sphere.

THE PROJECT **PATHWAY:** RESULTS AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS



... "NATURE IMITATES ITSELF. A SEED TOSSED ONTO GOOD SOIL BRINGS GOOD FRUIT; A PRINCIPLE TOSSED TO A GOOD MIND ALSO BRINGS GOOD FRUIT".

BLAISE PASCAL

In the national strategy for rural development 2007-2013, the landscape with its cultural, social-economic and environmental values, took on an essential role, so much so that it has been added as strategic objective, for defining a new model of development for rural territories.

As it had for biodiversity in 2010, the UN declared 2011 "International year of the forests" to move public opinion on forest issues.

With reference to the forestry component of the rural landscape, in March 2010 the European Commission presented the green book on protection of and information about forests in the EU, aimed at outlining a European approach to reducing the impact of climatic change on forests and woods and, as a result, on our landscape.

The greatest information on the rural landscape is, therefore, a challenge of topical interest; in view of this and following the success of Rural4kids, the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies became promoter of initiatives of public information and knowledge, the "Rural4teens" project. This addressed secondary lower schools, which were strongly orientated towards raising awareness and transmitting the great cultural, social-economic and environmental value of the Italian rural landscape as an important resource available to us, as well as a tight bond between agriculture, rural development and conservation of agricultural and forestry landscapes.

THE "RURAL4TEENS" PROJECT

The initiative aims to introduce secondary school kids to the 4 challenges of the rural landscape and the forests thanks to methodology of research-action which contemplates participation and significant collaboration of all involved. .

An evaluation phase is also planned, both during and at the end of the project. Instruments used will measure knowledge and attitude.

PROJECT COMMUNICATION: MEETINGS IN SCHOOLS

5 meetings were organised to socialise, share and train teachers, in schools that joined the project.

The 1st meeting to illustrate the project, its objectives and means of realisation.

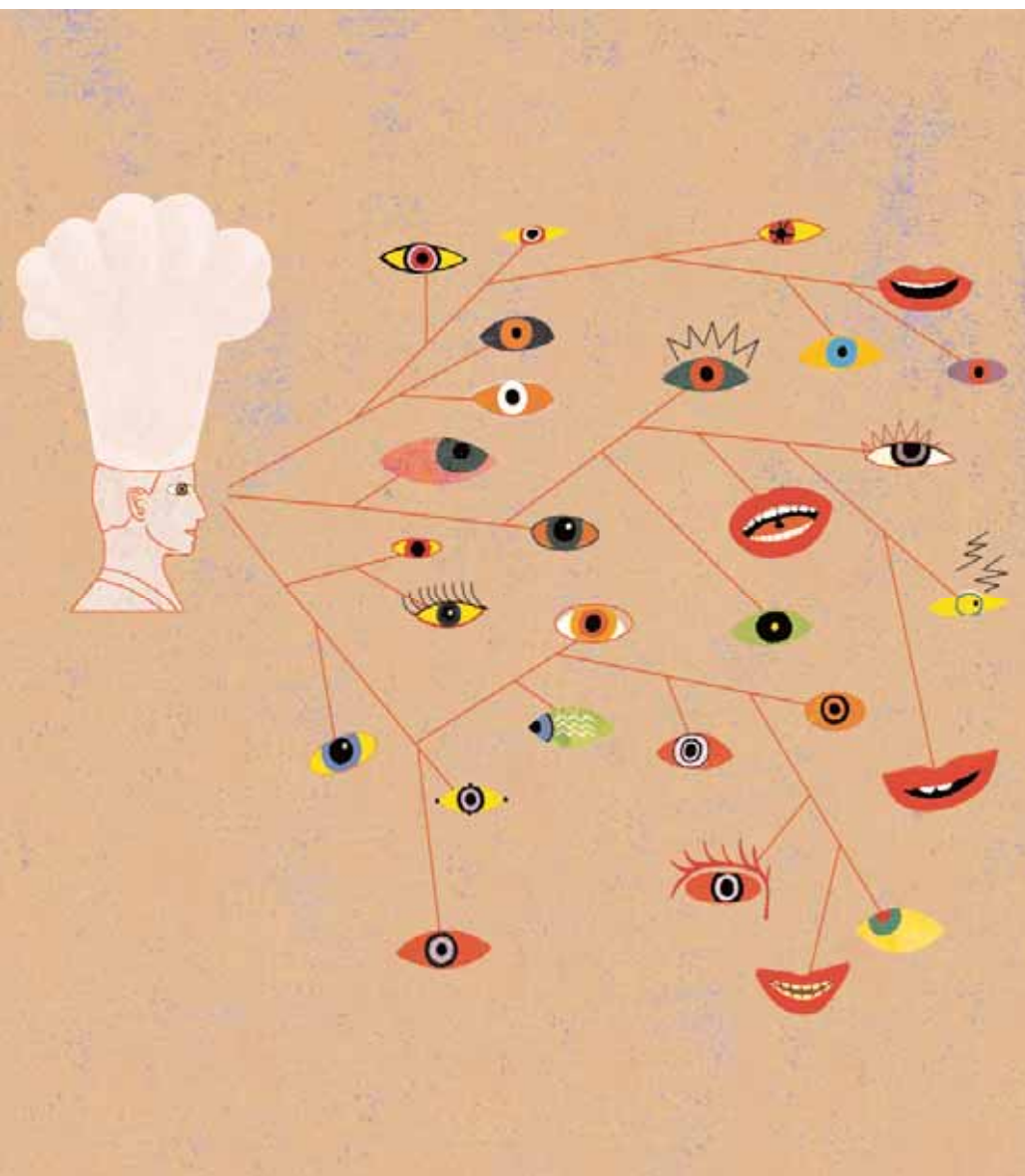
The 2nd meeting to define the contents and build interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary.

The 3rd meeting: play activities for involvement and in-depth exploration for classes, with the presence of expert animators; also illustrated the use of the blog to promote interactive teaching.

The 4th meeting, "The rural landscape. Experience on the territory: students observe a rural landscape with the support of experts from the Rete Rurale Nazionale, to explore chosen themes through concrete experimentation and acquire ability and skills to then be shared.

The 5th meeting. Conclusive moment in which students become protagonists, illustrating to other schools the journey experimented and sharing experiences in a public event.

THE COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN



The communication campaign is articulated over a wide range of activities:

- Participation at exhibitions with workshops to present the project and distribute material (Fiera del gusto in Turin, Fiera di Verona, Exporuralia in Florence, Convegno Arsa in Abruzzo, Settimana della Biodiversità Auditorium).
- A radio campaign with interviews taken in 9 schools selected across Italy and representative of different contexts. The interviews will feature exploration of interest in the project, ability to understand its contents and the impact of the initiative.
- Presentation of the project in TV programmes for kids (Gt ragazzi, Geo & Geo) and in specialised magazines for children (ex. Focus Junior).
- Itinerant final exhibition, to show the best school projects produced, involving target groups (teachers, students) as actors/testimonials.
- Creation of an area for dialogue between the world of research, National and local institutions and associations, on the topic of information, participation of schools in policies concerning water, energy, climate and biodiversity.

This involves a series of synergic actions:

_Organisation of an event where regional authorities and other bodies are confronted by elements which limit or slow down policies in conserving natural resources to then be followed by the development of a section of the web space to share experiences on line.

_Organisation of a forum to spread information on the aims and methods of Rural4kids as an example of good practice which can be repeated in other fields, from public authorities to touristic-accommodation structures.

_Spreading and sharing the project so it can become a driving force and catalyser compared to pre-existing initiatives on National and local levels.

RURAL4TEENS A PATHWAY THROUGH 4 CHALLENGES

CONTEXT



The aim of the project is to develop in children, particularly those who live in an urban context, a culture for the countryside, to understand the importance of diversity and the role that each one of us can play through being aware and behaving respectfully towards all forms of life.

The pilot project respects the general objectives of lower secondary school, particularly when it states that “school must place a child in his world so he may become able to change it”. It contemplates operations which cross all sectors and systematic planning, through which children can develop attitudes and learn about, understand, analyse and choose consciously.

The chosen theme, “The rural landscape”, flows harmoniously through a number of disciplines. In Italian the land is considered in its evolution, on the pages of books; in History it favours past consciousness; in Maths it permits calculations, representations and designs of the countryside; in Science it helps understanding how nature works; in Art it allows interpretation of works of art and appreciation of the environment from an aesthetic point of view; in technology and in other disciplines it favours understanding the reality that surrounds us.

FUNDING



The project, promoted by the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies, is supported by the European Union (the initiative is funded with contributions from EAFRD – European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development) and realised within the sphere of the Rete Rurale Nazionale.

TARGET



Kids in lower secondary school. Three schools and an NPO in Rome have been involved: E. Majorana school, Giuseppe Sinopoli school, Carlo Levi Comprehensive Institute, “Il piccolo principe” NPO.

OBJECTIVES



- To strengthen the connection between agriculture and society, helping young people to discover the values of rural areas.
- To promote attitudes and life styles of increased awareness and responsibility towards resources of rural areas and the environment.
- To promote policies of landscape preservation, based on the development of a better quality relationship between man and nature on a local and global level.
- To place the landscape in relation with the challenges of the rural world: water, energy, biodiversity and climate.
- To create a communication network which will interest young people, teachers and rural communities and put different experiences online, surpassing fragmentariness of works completed.

INSTRUMENTS



- **Didactic material**, including forms for students and teachers, which are suitable for personalisation, adaptation to the class and to use in a variety of disciplines.
 - **A kit** for each class with books about the four challenges of the rural world, created by the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies.
 - **A blog**, which permits active participation in the experience, thanks also to the creation of an App for online socialising and sharing.
- The project develops in three main directions: lessons in class, real life experience and online sharing.

RURAL4YOUTH

THE COUNTRYSIDE IS PARTICIPATION

To extend initiatives to young people a project has been devised which addresses universities: Rural4youth, inviting kids to present a video (max. duration 3 minutes) or photos accompanied by brief texts.

At the end of the project, kids will receive a copy of their video after editing, music and production by the Rete Rurale Nazionale; the video will also be presented on the international forum created by the Rete Rurale Nazionale in collaboration with the European network and the Lombardy regional authorities.

FUNDING



The project, promoted by the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies, is supported by the European Union (the initiative is funded with contributions from EAFRD – European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development) and realised within the sphere of the Rete Rurale Nazionale.

TARGET



University students between the ages of 18 and 26. The project contemplates participation of universities with study programmes involving the land, environment or communication.

OBJECTIVES



- Emphasis of the wealth of the countryside in Italy, valourising natural heritage and the land's resources, the environmental value of an area, a city or region or the overcoming of

situations of degradation. Increased awareness and responsibility towards resources of rural areas and the environment.

- Show how the landscape, through integration of the 4 elements, can respond the challenges it has to face.

INSTRUMENTS



- Realisation of a computer platform with Wiki language to present texts and images of the story, and blog for sharing opinions on crucial topics for rural areas and our future.
- Realisation of a practice, **You Rural Net**.
- Realisation of a workshop at the pilot universities, to raise awareness among students.
- Creation of a video, to be done by students, containing images, photos and texts, in which explanations are given about why choices made in rural areas are successful.
- Realisation of a collage, to be done by the rural network, of contributions received for a narration of the environment on topics: biodiversity, energy, water, climate.

YOU RURAL NET

This is a web community for sharing knowledge, experience and good practice. Inspired by the concept of “collective intelligence” and for many aspects similar to social networks like *facebook*, *twitter*, *quora*, etc., devised particularly for young farmers (but not only for them), *You Rural Net* stems from lengthy in situ observations and research that has confirmed how for young people today, in addition to information that is available on the most institutional of channels, comparing experiences, best practices, foreign innovation with peers is crucial. For this reason *You Rural Net* offers the chance to participate in work groups, share experiences through a blog, ask questions and receive answers and remain constantly in touch with the community.



INTERVIEW WITH...

FEDERICA D'APRILE

(COORDINATOR OF THE COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN)

ON FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF INITIATIVES UNDERTAKEN SO FAR, WHAT CAN YOU UNDERLINE POSITIVELY?

“ Without doubt, teacher participation, who reacted with enthusiasm from the moment they became involved in an innovative project, which provided moments of play and interaction. At a time when schools can count on ever dwindling resources the thing that struck me the most was the positivity of teachers and the creativity of their project proposals. I was also surprised by the preparation of the children involved, particularly for Rural4teens: they knew complex concepts, such as that of renewable energy, and they were even able to give explanation of the Greek origins of the word biodiversity! This is without doubt thanks to the sensitivity and commitment of families and teachers.

WHAT HAVE THE DIFFICULTIES BEEN?

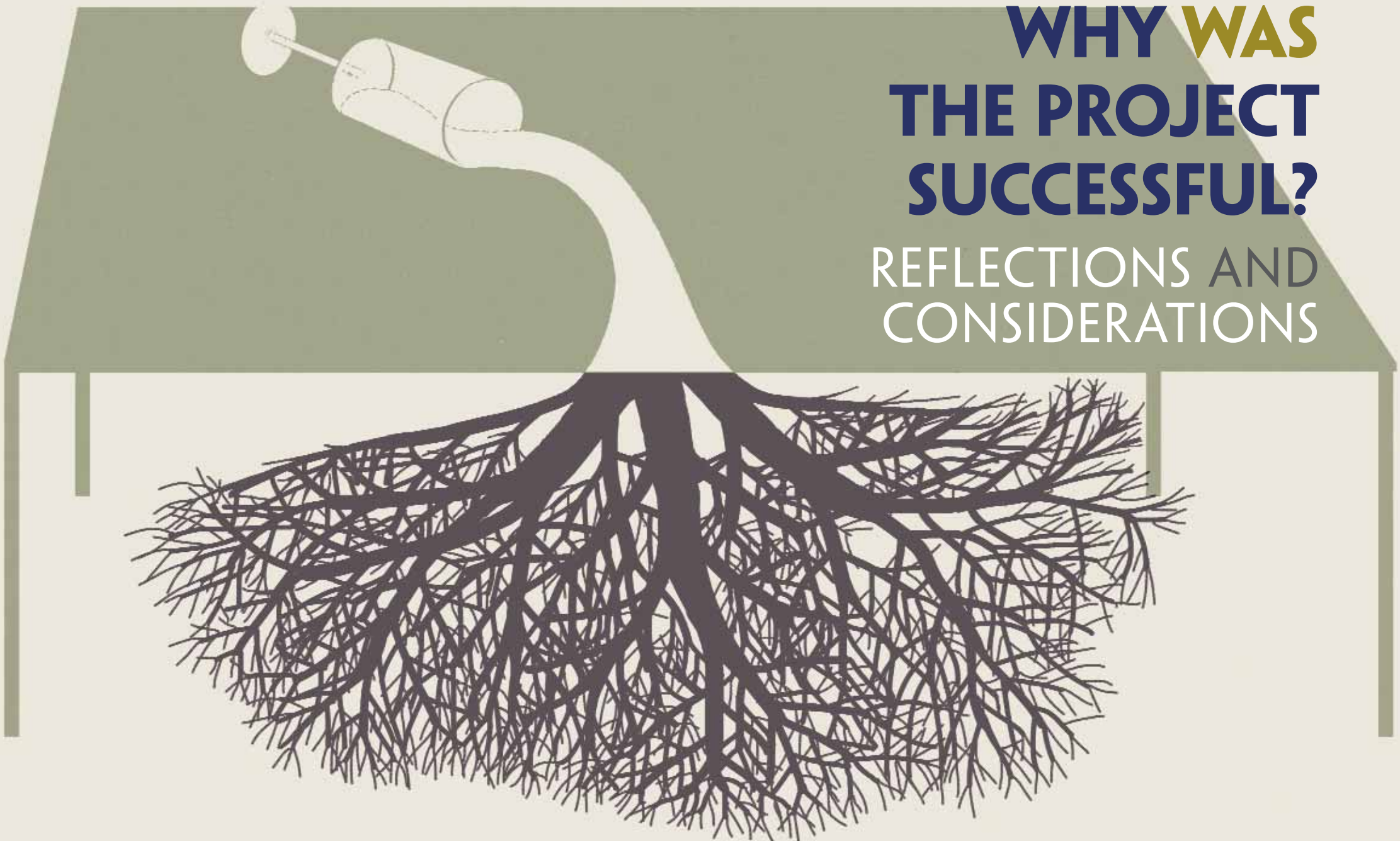
“ Entering schools after the school year has already begun with topics that are not easy to tackle, which required an innovative approach. We also found ourselves up against widespread lack of equipment – computers, internet connection – in primary schools.

THE PROJECT BROUGHT YOU INTO DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE FINAL USER OF YOUR ENTERPRISES: WHAT CAN YOU SAY ABOUT THIS EXPERIENCE?

“ Shifting from office work, more structured and procedure orientated, to direct contact was an extraordinary way of translating a job, which may seem abstract, into everyday life. In addition we have been able to observe approval and applicability of our proposal: the initial idea, as great as it was, might quite easily have proved impracticable. Fortunately, however, that didn't happen. Contact with the children on one hand represented our “litmus paper” for a methodological approach that will favour learning through study and play, thanks also to the use of an innovative means such as internet, on the other hand an incredible opportunity to reap from this direct contact new ideas to continue the project.

FINALLY, WHAT WOULD YOU ADVISE THOSE WHO WISH TO EMBARK ON A SIMILAR ENTERPRISE?

“ Not to come to a halt at the first hurdle. Contrarily to what one may think, we began with very few available material resources. We did have many project resources, though; many thoughts and creative ideas. And a strong desire to put them into practice, to transfer these thoughts to the kids effectively, finding the right way to get the message over so they would feel involved and excited. I think we can say we succeeded.



WHY WAS THE PROJECT SUCCESSFUL?

REFLECTIONS AND
CONSIDERATIONS

UBUNTU IS AN ANCIENT AFRICAN WORD WHICH MEANS “I AM WHAT I AM THANKS TO WHAT WE ALL ARE”. OUR LIVES ARE MADE OF ACTIONS AND THOUGHTS. IF WE WEREN'T ABLE TO SHARE THEM WITH OTHERS WHAT REASON WOULD THEY HAVE TO EXIST?

No academic theory can be detached from practice; for this reason our project has aimed at speaking about the countryside translating the topic in to specific fields and disciplines.

We have tried to transmit the idea of transversal comprehension in relation to the different scholastic disciplines, to prove how each subject can approach the 4 challenges of the rural world: climate, biodiversity, water and energy. The country touches all areas of study and involves knowing, knowing how to be and knowing how to do, in children and in adults.

Topics proposed have been managed by taking ideas from children's experiences; teachers have therefore been able to contribute to increasing in students a sense of responsibility, awareness of what surrounds them.

An approach was proposed that would be more than just fact-finding, aimed at mere understanding of problems associated with the environment, but also guiding, realised through activities that develop cognitive, functional and relational abilities, so that students would become builders of their own knowledge and aware of their own behaviour.

Beside traditional tools for formal education, a kind of informal education has developed that favours direct knowledge and functional and concrete approach to problems associated to environmental development.

SHARING

“Sharing” a project that was formed within an institution such as the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies and then applied to primary schools has been perhaps the greatest challenge.

Sharing has been developed on a number of levels:

- **methodologically:** a shared method was identified and discussed with the teachers with the purpose of personalising the individual reality of each school involved;
- **professionally:** the rural network made experts available for the schools, both from a technical point of view and the more topical part;
- **in content:** the Rural4kids site presents complex issues clearly and simply;
- **in results:** these were published by the students themselves on the two blogs www.rural4kids.it and www.rural4teens.it, areas which can be used and accessed by the general public.

So through sharing experience and ideas, the gap between schools and public institutions has reduced, as have the differences between technical language and practical language.

The schools involved accepted the “4 challenges”, including them in a learning pathway that, whilst flexible, had already been put in place. They were open to accepting new content and presentation methods; teachers contributed to a continual exchange of methodology and considerations, which represents the true added value to the project.

TESTS AND RESULTS

Evaluation material produced during the pilot phase of the project permitted analysis of the construction process of the change which represented the objective of the initiative. Tests focussed particularly on considerations stimulated among students, and the connections between these and existing behaviour.

Results were encouraging in relation to the efficacy of an educational event, which, although limited to the school context, made use of articulated planning, succeeding in integrating aspects of play, cognitive and social-affection.

The children's experience as early as the initial phase carried great value and registered notable involvement.

EVALUATION

In October 2010, Società Ecosfera evaluated the Rural4kids site and it emerged that the web platform *Rural4kid* is very well articulated and is fully able to meet preset objectives.

The structure corresponds to that of a blog which is organised into main areas, open to user comments. The applicative also presents additional functions compared to the ones usually found in the blogosphere. The top menu contains items which link to descriptive pages, with information on the project, or downloadables and utilities (links and contacts). The graphics are appropriate and suited to the purpose of the project, making it more powerful within the limits of its field of action (especially identity and visual identification) with a minimalist approach suited to infantile imaginary.

The evaluation had a positive outcome also in relation to the materials chosen for downloading, which include drawings to print and colour, personalised screens, ring tones, photo and video archives.



For this initial activation to transform into a stable situation of new generation values and objectives, it is fundamental to support the project by extending it further into the school environment and investing in teacher training.

Accessing the blog on Rural4kids (www.rural4kids.it) and Rural4teens (www.rural4teens.it) users may read the comments posted by children and kids involved and learn about the first results of the project.

STRONG POINTS IN THE RURAL4KIDS PROJECT:

- It involves a number of expressive keys: emotions, reason, persuasion etc.
- It raises awareness on territorial problems through incisive messages; not only does it illustrate criticality but solutions too (ex. exploitation of the ecosystem threatens man, but there are several things that can be done: recycle refuse, use energy saving light bulbs etc.)
- Transmit concepts which can be easily applied to the daily life of the children and their families, as well as to school life;
- Offer web space, a spot for sharing experiences, comments and ideas.
- Strengthen students' transversal abilities through interactive learning.

One criticality for the project must be mentioned which concerns a total lack in some schools of technological equipment and facilities: computers, rooms, internet connection and broad band.



DEVELOPING KNOWLEDGE AND PROMOTING INNOVATION: R4K BECOMES GOOD PRACTICE

An element of great interest in the project is communicating with a new target group for rural development policy – school children – contributing to their involvement on topics of great interest for the future.

Rural4kids raises awareness in new generations, promotes global vision of sustainability, which can only be obtained by acting organically: protecting biodiversity, using water resources rationally, limiting pollution through use of green energy which in turn contributes to reducing climatic change. To sum up, interpreting and understanding the four challenges of the countryside.

Another aspect which corresponds to the concept of good practice is the introduction of telematics to learning, with innovative methods of dialogue and exchanges through the blog and transfer of material and work on the web. Instruments which are finding familiarity with children and which are taught from a point of view of correct use of the web with didactic/pedagogical aims and not just play/recreational.

Finally the project, with methods and contents structured as they are, contains elements which can also be transferred and replicated to different fields and with different topics: this has determined the choice of giving continuity to the project by extending it to Teenagers (lower secondary school) with the **Rural4teens** project.



WHICH ONE THING HAVE YOU LEARNT FROM THE PROJECT?

“ Interaction with children, quality of comparison with them, the attention that they paid to the contents of the project, the creativity they expressed in codifying, according to their personal interpretation, the contents that we gave them. An incredibly motivating experience! (*Milena Verrascina*, editing and design R4K)

“ That children are never to be underestimated: not only did they understand issues dealt with in with the project, they elaborated the contents and transformed them into something new, often even more effective than what had initially been proposed to them. (*Roberta Ruberto*, graphic artist R4K)

“ [...] The way children have interacted with the project, their enthusiasm in all the activities was a great source of satisfaction for us and a stimulus to continue in our endeavours with the same enthusiasm as always. (*Noemi Serafini*, technical support R4K)

“ The incredible levels of creativity that children possess: they observe us, listen and expect great things from us. It is our responsibility to receive, listen to their needs and interpret them. It is a constant exchange of emotions and learning; project themes and methods have proved successful in this exciting challenge! (*Stefania Luzzi Conti*, editing and design R4K)

“ Kids today are much more aware of environmental issues compared to our generation. It was great to see the curiosity and enthusiasm with which they approached the blog. (*Andrea Romano*, webmaster R4K)

“ Laughing and making children laugh out loud, earning their affection and attention. Discovering that they perceived the work they produced as a part of them, admiring the surprising variety of ways in which they answered and their incredible originality and curiosity. (*Paola Gonnelli*, technical support R4K)

“ That tools such as the internet, forums, youtube are valid allies. At times it is only thanks to new technology that the best dynamics for a significantly sized educational project can be created. The most expert with new technologies are the kids themselves. We did nothing other than synchronise to their way of communicating; all the rest happened spontaneously. (*Mario Cariello*, webmaster R4K)

“ That it is possible to speak about complex issues with simple and creative language. The methodology of research-action gave unexpected results, leading children – but also teachers – to change their behaviour. (*Susanna Paradisi*, project coordinator for Ronconi School)

“ That communication with children serves as a stimulus for us adults to de-structure our technical ideas to make them more accessible to less complicated minds: This allows us to see the issues tackled from a height just a little closer to the ground and, therefore in a more immediate and genuine way. (*Margherita Federico*, editing and design R4K)

“ We valorised an approach of a global nature, that would place attention to the perceptive-sensorial dimension of the child, in the field of his diverse cognitive qualities. Uses of the territory were favoured as learning laboratories where ideas for research could blossom, reflections, experimentation, and the solutions to problems (...). Children followed all the activities proposed with enthusiasm, they put themselves to the test, picking up on the variety of messages sent by the project. They shared “educational” moments, showing a strong sense of sensitivity to issues discussed. (*Fabio Compagno*, NPO “Il Piccolo Principe”)

PRESS RELEASE

“ With Rural4kids school children meet biodiversity

Primary school children meet the rural world using Web 2.0: a guided way through the web to discuss water, climate, biodiversity and energy.

The project is called “Rural4kids” and it was presented on Friday 21 May at the Auditorium in Rome, for the event named “Settimana della Biodiversità”. The event took place as part of “children talk about biodiversity”, promoted by the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies and by the Rete Rurale Nazionale, designed to illustrate to children how, behind a well preserved natural environmental heritage, often there is man, who through work manages to maintain those collective resources in our country areas.

Il Sole 24 ore - Scuola, 27 May - 2 June 2010.

“ Good Agriculture for Children

Letting children discover how well-practiced agriculture can contribute to good management of biodiversity and water resources, to reduction of pollution and energy waste.

This is the objective of Rural4kids, the project dedicated to children of the last three years of primary school, (...) presented at the Salone Internazionale del Gusto di Torino”.

L'Espresso food&wine.

“ Galan: biodiversity universal theme to promote with the young generations

The Rural4kids project (...) represents an important opportunity to introduce rural areas to new generations and it is precious experience for valorise environmental resources, through methods of active and absorbing participation”.

Agricoltura italiana on-line. 21 May 2010.

“ Salone del Gusto: 50 thousand primary school children involved in “Rural4kids”

Following the experimental phase, which has involved four Roman schools, the project promoted by the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies is now to become effective and will be presented today at the Salone del gusto in Turin.

The objective of the competition, called ‘Rural4Kids’, aims to reveal to children how well practised agriculture can contribute to good management of biodiversity and water resources, and reduction of pollution and energy waste”.

ANSA, Turin, 22 October 2010.

“ Rural4kids An appointment for Biodiversity Week

(...) Beginning as an experimental workshop, it translates into accessible language, through appealing images, issues linked to the world of agriculture and to rural development.

The project (...) offers educational use of information technology: the site www.rural4kids.it presents in detail themes concerning the environment and countryside, but also a blog, games, experiments with winning cartoon graphics”.

Rosmarino News, 18 May 2010.

“ Environmental Education for primary school: Rural4kids

Rural 4kids also has a blog (...). A precious resource characterised by an interface which is particularly suitable to primary school children and by noteworthy attention to contents, extreme ease in navigation”.

Blog Maestro Roberto Sconocchini.

“ Rural4kids, the site designed to spread knowledge of the natural environment

Rural4Kids appears as a kind of online scientific subsidiary accessible and well structured, which contains appealing graphics suitable to child navigators”.

Scuolainfanziarogredo.



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www.reterurale.it

www.rural4kids.it

www.rural4teens.it

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