

ECOLANDIA

Environmental, Educational and Technological Park of Reggio Calabria

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**A Tool for Peace,
Local Sustainable Education
Ecosocial Regeneration in the Mediterranean**

2011



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SUMMARY

Ecolandia is a new educational, recreational and technological park specializing in the themes of environment, agro-ecology and sustainability.

Located in Reggio Calabria (Italy), in the middle of the Mediterranean, it was built in the end of the 1990s with European funds. In 2011, a 9-year agreement was signed between Reggio Calabria local government and the newly established Ecolandia s.c.a.r.l, a social enterprise consortium, for the management of the park.

The park is scheduled to open to the public in 2012.

This paper is shortly presenting the park's environment, concept ideas and scope.

For any further information, you can write to ecolandia.net@gmail.com



BACKGROUND

In the mid-90s, Tonino Perna, Professor of Economic Sociology at the University of Messina and founder of a development NGO with headquarters in Reggio Calabria, launched the idea of a new theme park to be located in the Strait of Messina area that would combine green technology and Greek mythology in a fun and engaging way.

Slowly, the concept of Ecolandia took form. With the technical contribution of the University of Reggio Calabria, the support of a wide range of civic organizations and the help of foreign experts¹ from Northern Europe, it evolved into a large and innovative project co-financed by the European Union in the framework of the URBAN I program, aimed at creating jobs and creating a culture of sustainability to merge to benefit the whole area for generations to come.

In 2002, the works were successfully completed and the key to Ecolandia were given to the final beneficiary, the City of Reggio Calabria. For various reasons, however, it was several years before the Municipality could make a call for tenders for the management of the park.

In 2011, the management of the park was finally awarded to the newly established social enterprise consortium - Ecolandia s.c.r.l.

ABOUT

Ecolandia is more than a theme park. Located in one of the most economically undeveloped areas of Europe, it gives hope for change. While it was conceived to provide visitors with a unique recreational experience, it is also part of the new generation of ecosites, or environmental demonstration centers dedicated to innovation and knowledge transfer, often combining applied sustainable R&D with education and training activities, and thereby generating economic spin-offs and contributing to local development.

In Europe, some ecosites have been operating for almost 25 years. Over the last decade, there has been a considerable spread of interest in these centers, from NGOs wishing to promote environmental protection and education, to local authorities wishing to develop a focal point for local sustainable development.

The definition of an ecosite

As adopted in the European Federation of Ecosites statutes

An ecosite is a demonstration site dedicated to innovation and knowledge transfer to promote environmental protection and equitable sustainable development. An ecosite is a centre which:

- ✓ Is a physical site (or local network of related sites),
- ✓ Actively promotes and contributes to environmental protection, sustainable development and social equity
- ✓ Develops, on site, sustainable development related innovation (such as research, experimentation, testing)
- ✓ Proactively carries out actions for knowledge transfer, such as awareness campaigns, education, training, interpretation, and where receiving visitors and demonstrating environmental technologies/systems is a regular and integral part of the site's activities

SCOPE

The main purpose of Ecolandia is to empower individuals and groups to think ecologically and act creatively in working to find solutions to local and global issues.

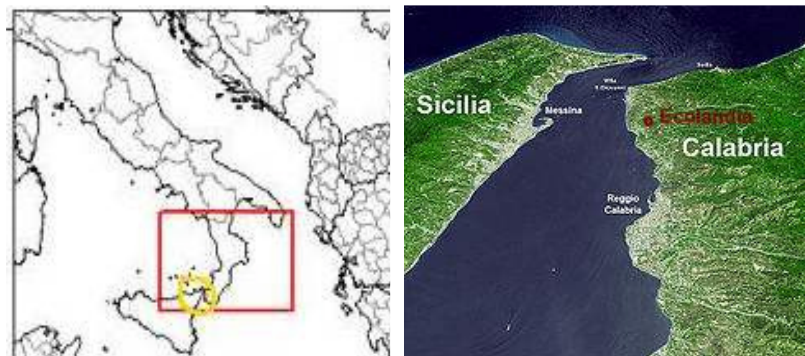
Through new technologies, the arts and interactivity, Ecolandia can reinvigorate environmental responsibility by inspiring people to make the right everyday choices, which ultimately are the ones that really matter and create change.

The park has been designed to:

- ✚ Create a learning environment where Greek mythology and green technology meet in an entertaining and engaging way;
- ✚ Demonstrate practical ways of addressing social and environmental regeneration issues;
- ✚ Create unforgettable experiences for families and students in the field of renewable energy, environmental building, energy efficiency, organic growing and alternative sewage systems;
- ✚ Conduct valuable research into local and global sustainability, new social economies, and environmental and sustainable development education;
- ✚ Put on first-rate arts, theatre and music events displaying the best of European and Mediterranean culture;
- ✚ Be self-sufficient in energy.

LOCATION

Ecolandia is located in a northern suburb of Reggio Calabria nearby Villa San Giovanni, facing the city of Messina across a narrow strait.



The area, better known as the Strait of Messina metropolitan area, is centrally located, providing a unique opportunity for understanding key aspects of the Mediterranean as a whole. Situated at the "toe" of Italy, the area is bounded to the north by the region of Calabria and to the southwest by the region of Sicily. It is nestled between the majestic *Aspromonte* (Calabria) and *Peloritani* (Sicily) mountain ranges. Mount Etna, the largest active volcano in Europe, is only a one-hour drive away, while the Aeolian Islands are easy to reach by ferry.



A beautiful green sea is ever present and characterized by strong tidal currents that have established a unique marine ecosystem. A natural whirlpool in the northern portion of the strait has been linked to the Greek legend of *Scylla* and *Charybdis*.

Considered one of the most attractive scenic points in Italy, the area is uniquely rich in history and mythological traditions, including important parts of Odysseus' voyage as well as being home to the Ancient Greek god of fire, Vulcan. It is also the background of beautiful paintings by Antonello da Messina and an inspiration for many writers and poets.

Greeks settled heavily along the coast at an early date, and *Rhegion* (Reggio Calabria), one of their first settlements, was among the leading cities of Magna Graecia¹. The city became a Roman ally and part of the Roman Republic, and, from 553 to 1071, a capital of the Byzantine Empire's possessions in southern Italy. It emerged as the capital of the Duchy of Calabria until being incorporated into the Kingdom of Sicily. Beginning with the Angevin rule, Calabria became then a part of the Kingdom of Naples. It continued to be ruled by Naples until the unification² of Italy.



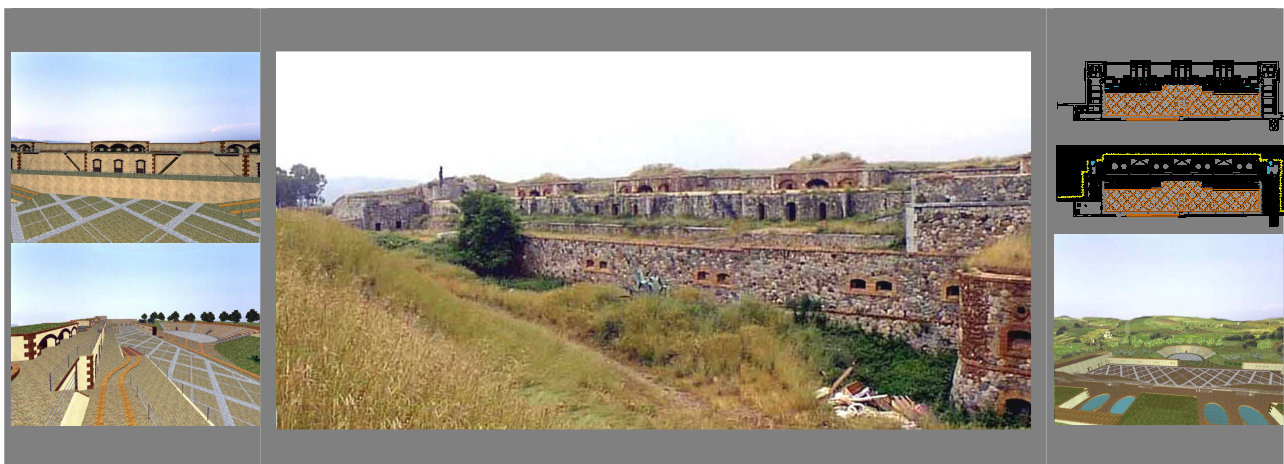
Today Reggio Calabria is the largest city of Calabria, renowned for its panoramic seaside, its old Aragonian Castle and the great National Museum of Magna Graecia. Scilla, on the Tyrrhenian Sea, "the Pearl" of the "Violet Coast" and a site of some of Homer's tales, is just a few kilometers away, as well as the mountainous pyramid of the Aspromonte with its National Park, incredible and unlimited views of the sea, rocky passes, spectacular waterfalls and fantastic wilderness.

¹ Still today the Greek speaking Calabrians constitute a large community nearby Reggio Calabria.

² The Aspromonte was the scene of a famous battle of the unification of Italy, in which Garibaldi was wounded

ECOLANDIA THEME PARK

In clear contrast to the built environment of Reggio Calabria, Ecolandia is immersed in the green and peaceful hills of Arghillà. The park comprises an area of 10 ha and includes an old fortress, which was part of an extensive 19th century defensive system of fortifications on both sides of the Strait of Messina.



Originally conceived as a 3D hypertext containing a creative interplay of elements that can constantly evolve and change, Ecolandia will engage a wide audience in ecosocial issues in new and inspiring ways, with something for everyone, from children to adults.



Ecolandia Park is organized into four thematic areas – *Air, Fire, Water, Earth*. Each area will host various attractions and exhibits, a series of workshops and art installations centered around the elemental force it represents. A large area will be dedicated to artistic and organic gardens.

The fortress, with its multimedia rooms and key services, will host a science center and commercial area, while the open theater (800 seats), built with a scenic vista of the Strait of Messina, will provide together with the fortress courtyard will be a central venue for cultural and arts events.

The restaurant, which was built according to bio-architecture criteria, will serve the best of Italian and Mediterranean cuisine and use organic products.



The target users of Ecolandia Park are families with young children residing in the area of the Strait of Messina, as well as schools groups and tourists visiting Sicily and Calabria.

ECOLANDIA SCHOOL OF LIFE

For those interested in deepening their knowledge of certain issues (renewable energy, organic growing, fair trade, green building, primary environmental care, ecosocial regeneration, etc.), Ecolandia will be a “*school of life*”, a faculty without walls, a place from where purposeful experiences capable of inspiring other people may grow.

The mission of Ecolandia School of Life will be to help individuals and organizations devote more time and energy towards the design, implementation and documentation of real-world projects that bring positive changes in people’s lives and in the environment.

For such purposes, Ecolandia will adopt an approach that combines theory and practice, offers residential courses and specialized content workshops, and provide a multi-dimensional support.

While helping participants to find jobs in the corporate marketplace, Ecolandia School of Life will more specifically focus on empowering them to build sustainable and socially responsible communities and networks.



INFRASTRUCTURES

Total area: 10 ha

Thematic areas

- **Air:** (Eolo Trail):
Sound Gate – Traditional Instrument' Workshop – Taranta Corner – Venus and Adonis Play Game - The Sundial – Spyglass towards Aspromonte Mount – Hot-Air Balloon over Ecolandia – Kite' Workshop – Icarus' Flight Game – Eolo Fountain
- **Water:** (Odyssey Water Trail)
Calypso's Cave - Cyclops Polyphemus - Witch-Goddess Circe - Land of the Sirens - Six-Headed Monster Scylla - Whirlpool Charybdis - Phaeacians' Island - Ithaca
- **Fire:** (Apollo Trail)
Apollo's Solar Cart – Telescope (towards Etna Mount) – Poets' and Painters' corner - Solar Cooker Workshop – Reuse & Recycling Workshop – Wrought Iron Workshop – Wood Workshop - Ceramics Workshop – Weaving Workshop
- **Earth:** (Gaia Trail)
Lorenz' Pond – Botanical Trail – Nursery – Small Animals' Corner – Meteorological Station – Composting Center - Agro-ecological and Farmer-managed Demonstration Plots - Stone Garden – Mediterranean Historical Gardens – Artistic Gardens – Traditional Orchard

Fortress

Atrium Square – First Aid – Toilets – Kids' Nursery – Cafeteria - Solarium – Visitor Services Office – Library & Resource Center – Bookshop - Souvenir & Gift Outlets – Fair Trade Shops - Planetarium – Meeting & Educational Rooms

Open Theater (with a panoramic view on the Strait of Messina)

Capacity of 800 seats

Services

- 1 Parking area(400 cars)
- 3 Picnic and resting places
- 4 Garden refreshment kiosks
- 1 First-Aid Point (Fortress)
- 2 Visitor Service Desks (Main entrance – Fortress)
- 1 Restaurant (260 seats)
- Toilets

Energy Production

Photovoltaic: 14 kW installed - Solar Collectors: 70 sq.meters installed - Wind: 55 kW to be installed

MANAGEMENT

Ecolandia will be managed by Ecolandia s.c.a.r.l, a social enterprise consortium, and will be staffed by park attendants and volunteers.

The three management units – *business & administration, education & entertainment, communication & development*- will work hand in hand to constantly improve customer satisfaction and park development.

The consortium will be supported by an open source network of experts and advisers selected on the basis of concrete and successful achievements in the field of global and local ecosocial change.

WHY INVEST IN ECOLANDIA ?

The new management company, Ecolandia s.c.a.r.l., is a social enterprise consortium comprising people who have been fighting for years to counter the somewhat negative image of the business in southern regions of Italy. The strong ethical values of the company can be summed up in a few words: strong rejection of corruption, clientelism and nepotism; culture of legality; social innovation; environmental sustainability; the value of human capital; correct use of public and private funds; fairness in trade.

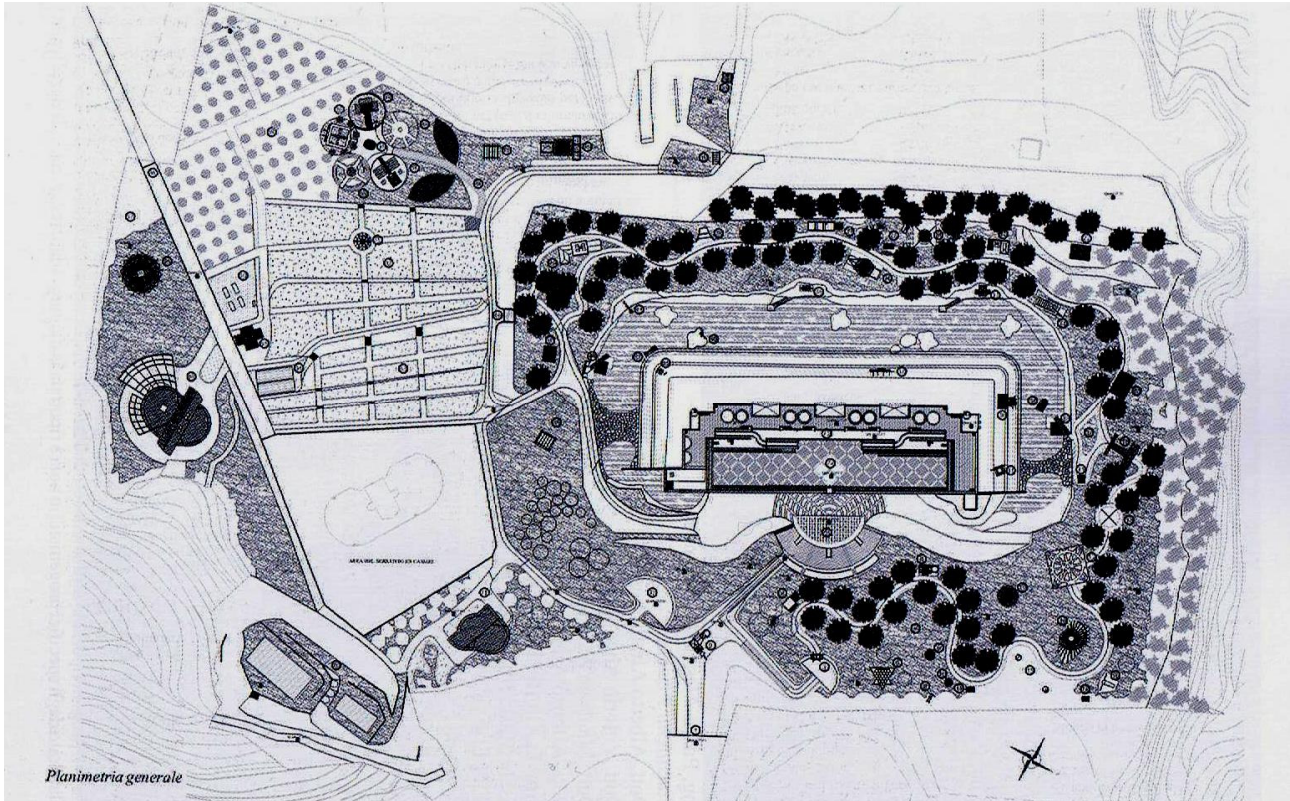
The same values apply to Ecolandia Park. You may have heard about “fair trade” coffee and “conflict-free” diamond seals of corporate responsibility. Culturally, Ecolandia can be seen as an “anti-mafia” product. It represents a great opportunity to get the best out of the local community. This means that supporting Ecolandia is to join together and support those entrepreneurial activities that aim to foster a different kind of Calabria, free from organized crime interests. Ecolandia will attract visitors, however, not just for its anti-mafia message, but because of the quality of its products and services, and its model of a “clean economy”.

Not long ago, it was taboo to speak out against the powerful Mafia, and in fact, many Italians were murdered for doing so. But that changed in 2004 when a group of young people started rallying local businesses to stop paying protection money, or *pizzo*, to the Mafia. While there still exist some risk of retaliation, a new culture of legality is slowly emerging and giving space to what the southern regions of Italy are in a best position to offer.

In that respect, Italian authorities have made a point of putting confiscated Mafia properties to good use. Under the pressure of civic organizations, they passed a law in 1996 allowing local authorities to turn seized mobster property over to cooperatives for socially beneficial projects. Very successful businesses benefitting the youth have been created on the confiscated lands, from organic food cooperatives to holiday farms. They started to make their mark in Sicily first. The movement is now expanding all over the country.

APPENDIX

Ecolandia General Layout



LEGENDA

- Limite del Parco
- Protezione con paletti e rete metallica
- Percorsi in pietrisco compatto
- Terreno allo stato naturale
- Scarpate
- Fossato
- 1. Accesso al parco
- 2. Biglietteria-ricezione

IL CIRCUITO DELL'ARIA

3. La porta del suono
4. Il laboratorio degli strumenti musicali
5. Il gazebo per l'orchestra
6. Il laboratorio degli aquiloni
7. Lo spazio per il volo degli aquiloni
8. Il chiosco-ristoro e relativi elementi d'arredo
9. Il cannocchiale verso l'aspromonte
10. La voliera
11. La casa delle api
12. La mongolfiera
13. Il gioco di Adone e Afrodite
14. Quadri di controllo e interfaccia
15. La pala eolica (aerogeneratore)
16. La meridiana
17. Il labirinto di Dedalo
18. Il volo di Icaro

IL CIRCUITO DEL FUOCO

19. Vulcano, il tubo ottico verso l'Etna (giunzione dei circuiti dell'Aria e del Fuoco)
20. La stazione di ricarica del carro di Apollo
21. Il laboratorio dei collettori solari
22. Servizi igienici per il pubblico
23. Il laboratorio del ferro battuto
24. Il punto ristoro con forno solare
25. Giochi per bambini: solar pump e wave power
26. Il laboratorio della paglia e del legno
27. Il laboratorio della ceramica
28. Il balcone dei poeti
29. Il laboratorio del riciclaggio
30. Penelope: il laboratorio della tessitura (giunzione dei circuiti dell'Acqua e del Fuoco)
31. Eolo (Confluenza dei circuiti dell'Aria e dell'Acqua)

IL CIRCUITO DELL'ACQUA

32. L'aiuola di Afrodite
33. L'imbarcadere
34. La barca di Ulisse
35. L'aeromotore
36. Calipso
37. L'isola dei Feaci
38. Polifemo
39. Gli alberi di Circe: le produzioni transgeniche
40. La sirena
41. Scilla
42. Cariddi
43. Il generat. Integr. foto-colico per la pompa di Cariddi
44. Itaca: l'approdo

IL CIRCUITO DELLA TERRA

45. Il pergolato del Belvedere
46. Lo stagno di Lorenz
47. Il sentiero botanico: la storia filogenetica delle piante
48. La tettoia per la produzione di ceppi
49. Il centro di compostaggio
50. Tettoia per ricovero asini
51. Tettoia per ricovero capre
52. Spazio per i giochi di strada: il campanaro, ecc.
53. Il giardino arcaico
54. Il giardino greco-romano
55. Il giardino arabo
56. Il giardino rinascimentale
57. Il giardino contemporaneo
58. Il chiosco per la degustazione
59. Il frutteto catalogo
60. L'allevamento dei piccoli animali
61. Il laboratorio meteo-biologico
62. Il centro per l'agroecologia
63. Il vivaio per la riproduzione delle essenze autoctone
64. Le serre per le piante ornamentali
65. Il laboratorio-deposito per il vivaio
66. Accesso carrabile di servizio
67. La fitodepurazione con vassoio assorbente

ATTREZZATURE E SERVIZI

68. Gazebo per il ristoro all'aperto
69. Ristorante- bazar
70. Area di sviluppo
71. Direzione
72. Area di sosta - belvedere
73. Fortino
74. La piazza dei Giullari
75. Teatro

ESSENZE ARBOREE E ARBUSTIVE

- Leccio
- Roverella
- Carrubbo
- Fico d'India
- Agave
- Acacia
- Olivo cipressino
- Olivo
- Genere Rosacee
- Albero da frutta del frutteto catalogo:
 - Drupacee
 - Pomacee
 - Agrumi
 - Pistacchi
 - Mandorli
 - Noccioli
 - Fichi
- Siepe di protezione:
 - Fico d'india
 - Agave
 - Ginestra
- Siepe mediterranea arbustiva alta:
 - Corbezzolo
 - Lentisco
 - Mirto
 - Lavanda
 - Olivastro
 - Rovo
 - Cisto
 - Gelsomino bianco
 - Fillirea
 - Erica
 - Alaterno
 - Liquirizia
 - Rosmarino
 - Ginestra
- Siepe mediterranea arbustiva bassa:
 - Mirto
 - Cisto
 - Lavanda
 - Rovo
 - Liquirizia
 - Ginestra

SIEPE DI VEGETAZIONE RIPARIALE:

- Cannuccia di palude
- Lauro
- Salice bianco

STEPPA PERENNE A CUSCINO

- Essenze per la fitodepurazione:
 - Lauroceraso
 - Iris
 - Tuia occidentale
 - Nepeta
 - Arnico
 - Astilbe
 - Salcerella
 - Felce
 - Farfaraccio
 - Sambuco
 - Orzo selvatico

Ecolandia Access Road & Satellite View

