

## Geoparks and international students exchanges: a window of opportunity

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Partnerships between the Rokua (Finland) and the Sesia-Val Grande (Italy) Geoparks started an exchange program for Secondary School students. The study and the visit of both territories is an opportunity for students to observe some relevant geological elements and processes that do not exist in their own country. Moreover, the hosting in families allows them to feel the culture of the area.

The visit to the Sesia-Val Grande Geopark during 2014 is described here. Students are welcomed by the community, local schools and by the staff of the Geopark. Then, field trips allow for discovering the main geological attractions of the area: the Sesia supervolcano, the deep structure of the Alps, the Insubric line and the Monte Rosa Glaciers. A cooperative learning process is offered: the Italian students guide their buddies in using an application suitable for mobiles (smartphone and tablet) that allows to track the trip and to gather georeferenced geological data and photographs. These data are later downloadable on PCs in a Google Earth format for post-field trip processing and discussion after visiting facilities and interpretation centers of the Geopark. The activity is a part of a University research project that aims to understand how the use of virtual tours and digital tools aids and stimulates the geological interpretation of an unknown territory.

During scholastic year 2014/2015, the Italian students are hosted by the Finnish families. The exchange project underlines the relevance of the educational and cultural values of the Geoparks, and it really benefits from the Network. Geoparks are the ideal destination for international study tours based on the sustainable tourism concept, in which the travel is conceived as an opportunity for sharing both scientific knowledge and intangible and tangible culture. Equally, they are the appropriate places for testing and practicing innovative educational strategies, shareable in an international context.

Presented in Theme 3