



Reale Osservatorio Vesuviano: the First Volcanological Observatory in the World

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The Reale Osservatorio Vesuviano (ROV), historic home of the Istituto Nazionale di Geofisica e Vulcanologia (INGV), is the oldest volcanological observatory in the world. It was founded in 1841 by the Bourbon king of Naples. The building is located on the western slope of Mount Vesuvius, one of the most famous and dangerous volcanoes in the world. Since its foundation, the ROV has always attracted researchers, visitors and students from many countries. The ROV site is an elegant neo-classical building which at present hosts permanent exhibitions of part of its inheritance of valuable mineral, scientific instrument and art collections.

A radical change is now under way, starting with the structural reinforcement of the building, renewal and upgrading of services, and the redefinition of exhibition itineraries so as to make visits still more enjoyable and informative. This will include the integration of outdoor footpaths and theme-based routes designed for users of differing levels of expertise.

This major transformation also involves a study and a number of operations aimed at the possibility of developing self-financed activities. To this end an analysis of tourist movements in Campania was conducted, in part so as to attract to the ROV a larger and more varied group of visitors. In an area that – despite its unique characteristics – is currently significantly degraded and underused, the creation of such a powerful tourist and cultural attraction would serve as a focus for the development of additional activities and services that would greatly enhance it and stimulate growth. These activities would, of course, be compatible with a territory that has a high risk of volcanic hazards – indeed, such growth would constitute an important component in mitigating this risk in the area. The example given illustrates how the restoration and enhancement of a piece of our historic, scientific and cultural heritage could be the driving force behind the economic revival of an area now in difficulty, stimulating tourism. Furthermore, the activity presented is an example of sustainable development, compatible with one of the most varied natural parks in the world, with its unique combination of interesting fauna and flora, striking landscape and unusual natural phenomena, together with traces of human habitation dating back thousands of years.