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*Inazio Uriguen*

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# Pampas grass, free town

*Inazio Uriguen<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>*Colegio P. Andres de Urdaneta*

## Abstract

How can we turn an invaded space into a free space? Our project focused on investigating the areas of Loiu (the town where our school is located) where the invasive species of Pampas Grass, Cortadería Selloana, grow. Following the initial investigation we indicated on a paper map where these species can be found. In order to do this, we learned how to use maps, scales, locate our position, and locate the species in the mountains. Later, we investigated how to eradicate them. For this purpose, we studied the previous studies carried out by the University of the Basque Country and the work carried out by the Provincial Council of Bizkaia, eradicating the species in some specific areas of the province. Finally, we presented a dossier in the town hall. Then, the consistory informed the neighbours about how they should deal with this species, and a treatment in public areas has been undertaken. The work of our students promoted a campaign that will benefit our village.

**Keywords:** eradication, invasive species, environment, observation

## Introduction

Our project is located in the mountains of Loiu, a small town in the Basque Country, located near Bilbao, which is where P. Andrés de Urdanetai School is located.

This project aims to raise awareness of the existence of invasive species in our environment, learn what the consequences are and how to eradicate them, and raise awareness of the importance of caring for the environment. For this purpose, we propose a project that works observation, research, search, orientation, teamwork, decision-making, resource management skills and emotional intelligence.

By locating and cutting the Pampas Grass, we have well understood how an invasive species influences our environment, and the consequences that this brings, because through field experience and direct research, students learn much better than simply explaining it in class. Before doing this activity, we did look at how many invasive species were around us and at the importance of the sciences to help. Thanks to this awareness campaign, everyone in the school community is aware of this. Thanks to this activity, we have collaborated with the city council, we have met the mayor, we have learnt about the laws related to invasive species and we have known parts of the town that we did not even know existed. We have also become a driving force for change, promoting activities for the good of our municipality and creating links of collaboration between our school and our municipality. The main objective of this activity was to explore how invasive species affect our local area. It was aimed at students of 10-12 years old and it involved 156 students. This project has made it possible to create partnerships between the school and the Town Hall of Loiu, the Provincial Council of Bizkaia, and the University of the Basque Country. This relationship of the school with agents of the environment has served to improve the position of the school, its openness to the community and to provide authentic learning experiences for the students.

## Methodology

### Concept

After reflecting on the environmental problems affecting the locality, the participating students observed that there were many Pampas Grass species in the vicinity of our school. Then they understood that they are detrimental to people, so they decided to study the invasive species and their consequences on native species, in order to help actively in a problem that concerns us all.

### Implementation

After studying the effects of the invasive species, the students proposed approaching the town hall to learn about the Pampas Grass, and to study the existing researches on the topic. After analyzing their findings, they suggested looking for all Pampas Grass specimens in the town, to investigate how to remove them and to cut them.

The students analyzed the studies carried out by the Provincial Council of Bizkaia and the University of the Basque Country on the Pampas grass and its eradication with their teachers' help, since the explanations that appeared in these studies were too technical for the age of the student body. They wrote down clear and summarized reports on the matter which were

delivered to the town hall and distributed among the neighbors. Then, using the maps that the town hall provided them, they walked through different roads of the town looking for Pampa Grass specimens, and those who found them, pointed them out on the maps. These activities carried out at different times of the year. First, we made the location in the month of June, and once analysed the obtained data, the mayor came to school and collected the maps and the information gathered after the activity. A few months later, the students went back to the tours and observed if there were more or less plants, and helped by their teachers, they cut the Pampas Grass species they found nearby.

When cutting the feather duster, we had to be very careful not to remove the plant, nor the surrounding plants, because such movement could produce the release of seeds found in the feather duster. On the other hand, the leaves surrounding the feather duster, besides being abundant and copious, are quite sharp, so we had to go inside the plants, with gloves to avoid making cuts.

### Conclusions

After doing the project, the students presented a dossier so that all the villagers could have the information about this invasive species. The mayor called the media, newspapers and television to present the project carried out by the school and the town hall to improve the quality of the local environment. They interviewed us and we made the work known so that the maximum number of people could have knowledge of it. We also published the links, photographs and writings about the activity performed by the school on the social networks. There is still a lot of work to do. However, the several congratulations we have received for the project and the pride we feel for the work done in collaboration between technicians from the municipality, students, and teachers, in favour of our municipality, encourage us to continue working this and other projects that bring us closer to Loiu and its citizens.

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