

6. Action Research in Greece

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6.1. Research context

6.1.1. Educational system

The Greek educational system is particularly complex and centralized (1), since educational policies as well as educational content are mainly the result of central and governmental decisions.

At the central level, the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs has the administrative responsibility for the education system in all areas, services and grades. It is the essential decision-maker when it comes to setting goals and regulating various issues such as defining the curriculum, appointing teaching staff and controlling funds and resources. The Institute for Educational Policy elaborates scientific and research issues on education, and suggests or issues an opinion on proposals that are determined by the political leadership. At the regional level, the Regional Education Directorates oversee the implementation of national education policy, while at the local level, the Primary and Secondary Education Directorates supervise all the schools in their area of responsibility. Meanwhile, the schools are responsible for their proper functioning through the Teachers Council and the Parents and Guardians Associations.

Educational policy ends up being strongly influenced by the personal beliefs of ministers, and the political, ideological and party directions of the respective government results in constant and spasmodic changes. In public debate in Greece, the lack of comprehensive and modernized strategic planning is often highlighted. Decentralization of the education system, school autonomy and democracy in the school community have been discussed by many governments, scientific conferences and workshops but more as theory or need, rather than being translated into practice or implementation.

Educational material and practices in Greece are characterized as knowledge-steered (passive acquisition of knowledge) while they often constrain new ideas that could be considered 'out of the box', such as practical learning and divergent thinking, cooperative teaching, or integration of specific skills or social challenges and opportunities. Teachers and students come across many barriers preventing initiative or deviation from circulars.

Recently, practices such as the 'flexible zone' have been integrated into the curriculum to encourage more student-steered and creative learning approaches based on needs and the potential of the students and school community.

At the same time, local authorities are mainly responsible for building infrastructure for schools, while educational equipment issues are often determined by central political mechanisms. Also, municipalities and other non-profit-non-governmental organizations have the opportunity to enrich their schooling experience by developing programs outside of school hours and by using the infrastructure and the people of the school who offer themselves on a voluntary basis. All initiatives and activities to be developed in this setting must be approved by the Ministry of Education and, as far as NGOs are concerned, the approval is examined by the Minister's office.

In the recent years of the country's economic recession and the influx of refugees, many large charity foundations and sponsors have supported integration and equality programmes in school communities, particularly in the central section of Athens.

However, such programmes have generally involved ‘top-down’ practices or public relations on behalf of the foundations. School communities are primarily passive recipients rather than active protagonists regarding the creation of a programme that responds to their needs, encouraging cooperation and resilience. At the same time, the programmes are usually limited to just a few schools, are discontinued when the funding period ends and usually lack sustainable or scaling-up opportunities, substantial evaluation procedures, dissemination of findings, best practices and other open data.

The LCP bottom-up approach, Research/Action Practice, Learning Community, combined with the know-how of Place Identity Clusters (PI) on participatory design methods applied to wider neighbourhoods, towns, and citizens on urban regeneration issues, as well as urban and constitutional planning, have created appropriate conditions for experimentation and learning. Place Identity Clusters, having as its established goal to develop regionally actions around urban centres and having secured independent funding, seeks cooperation in neighboring municipalities in Athens that have fewer opportunities for support, even though they face similar or even greater problems. It is also worth mentioning that in Greece, due to socio-economic conditions, corruption and resistance, especially cultivated in some party spaces, there is a kind of euro-scepticism or counter-reaction against European programmes or actions by non-governmental organizations.

With regard to the issue of refugee integration and equality of children in education, political and party confrontations have often arisen, especially targeting cities, neighbourhoods and schools. In these contexts, extreme right-wing actions establish polarized conditions and destroy every effort for harmonious coexistence and cooperation among and within the school community.

6.2.2. Collaboration with the primary schools

1st school

The first collaboration attempt for the project was with a school belonging to the municipality of Agioi Anargyroi-Kamatero. This municipality is located in north-west Athens, near an industrial and low-income area. The local authorities have been developing various programmes of solidarity and support for refugees in recent years. Meanwhile, a member of the organization PI in Greece is also a parent and an active member of the Parents and Guardians Association of the school, and has been ensuring direct connection, trust and commitment.

After an information meeting with the Teachers Committee, their assembly unanimously decided to integrate the school into the LCP programme. Two teachers, one of whom was the headmaster of the school, and two parents attended the LCP European Lab for Pilot Schools in Zadar and began planning an initial collaboration while waiting for the required approval of the project by the Ministry of Education. However, after the summer break, a new headmaster was appointed and the active attitude of support and cooperation transformed into inactive suspicion about EU programmes and the role of NGOs. It was not long before we were informed that the Teachers Association had decided to withdraw the participation of their school from the programme, justifying their decision by the absence of approval by the Ministry.

2nd school

The partner organization team therefore decided to find another school that would be willing to promptly embark on the project in the middle of the school year. This required that the new school would be willing to adjust its schedule and overcome any trust issues that occurred after obtaining information about the previous school collaboration. Given the circumstances, the partner organization team went on to contact three schools simultaneously in an attempt to assess which one would most likely commit to the project.

The new partners came from the 7th Primary School in the municipality of Ilion. The organization's personal encounters were once again helpful in order to establish a connection. However, two important factors influenced this school to collaborate: the practical benefits, i.e. the in-kind support provided by the Evens Foundation, and the reassurance that the school and the teachers involved would have absolute control over the whats and hows of their involvement in the project.

Moreover, according to the headmaster's comments, it was the relevance of the project that attracted the collaborators, as in recent years there had been attempts at approaching the topic, both in a broader context within society and the school communities in general, and in this school's particular way of being. More specifically, a Team for Preventing School Violence had already been formed; there had been incidents, albeit not deemed very serious, of aggressive behaviour among students as well as conflict between teachers and parents.

Alongside the relevance of the project's subject, the status of the project as reflected in its institutional framework and its participating partners influenced the school's decision to participate, including the fact that it was an Erasmus+ project and other partners were involved. Also, the attitude of the Parents and Guardians Association lent weight, even though some parents responded, in a particularly aggressive manner, to project practices such as the 'open agenda', which was a necessary condition to run a participatory and bottom-up process with the school community.

The above factors contributed to dealing successfully with some challenges involving the teaching staff. For example, some of the teachers objected to an NGO being involved in school affairs. It must also be noted that 50% of the teachers do not hold a permanent position in the school, which, as the headmaster pointed out, leads to detachment and lack of a sense of belonging, ownership and shared responsibility.

2nd school context

The school is located in Ilion, a north-western suburb of Athens with a population of 85,000. During the year of the deployment of the project's activities, the 7th Primary School of Ilion counted 277 students and 35 teachers. There were 6 grades, each grade had two classes, except for the third and fifth grades that had three. The school population included 15 students born in other countries and another 15 born in Greece but with foreign nationality. These 30 students, accounting for 10% of the overall school population, had the following nationalities: Albanian, Georgian, Syrian, Pakistani and Indian.

The school building, constructed in 1977, had particularly large corridors, 12 large classrooms, one large event hall, a chemistry room, a library, an artroom, a warehouse and a dining hall. The compulsory school programme lasts from 8am to 1.15pm and the optional full-time programme is from 7am to 8am and again from 1.15pm to 4pm.

6.2.3 People relevant to the research

A long-term action research project requires commitment, availability and stability, which was difficult for us due to workload, maternity reasons, and the occupational mobility of Greek organizational teams. The combination of Greek realities and the long-term processes of bureaucracy made necessary the rotation of people and responsibilities.

The LCP project coordination team consisted of:

- One scientific partner with a collaboration agreement, who specialized in the design and evaluation of educational programmes (two people in turn during the project)

- One member of the administrative staff of the organization specialized in community projects and participation methodologies (again, two persons in turn)
- One volunteer member of the organization, specialized in communication design and citizens engagement, and also an active member of the school's Parents and Guardians Association

The project team at the first school was enriched by two school teachers, one of whom was the school headmaster and the other a parent and member of the Parents and Guardians Association. The project team at the second school was enriched by two school teachers, one of whom was also the teacher leading the school's Team for Preventing School Violence, and the other the deputy headmaster of the school, while other teachers took advantage of the project's framework of peace-building, by adapting the school's cultural event.

During the project activities, various external experts with competences in rhetoric in education or life coaching and transformational thinking were also involved.



6.2 Data

The data were collected through various processes, some methodical, others organic:

- World Café harvesting: participants' notes, prioritization and categorization
- Notes from brainstorming, reflection or observation by coordination team
- Interviews with school teachers who worked closely with the programme activities
- Personal evaluation form
- Collective evaluation board
- Evaluation form before and after a workshop (recording the transposition dynamic)

Action 1: Meeting with school community 'doers'

After official procedures had been taken care of, the first meeting of the second school (Ilion) took place in an atmosphere of urgency. Given the lack of time and lack of prior framing and training of teachers from the LCP programme (Zadar) but having secured the strong support of the school's

headmaster, a meeting was coordinated at the school where the PI Project coordination team could discuss openly with active and interested teachers. The meeting took place in the school staff-room with the participation of three members of the PI and five members of the school (four teachers and the headmaster).

<p>Action 1: Meeting with school community ‘doers’</p>
<p>Aim</p> <p>Framing LCP & school reality Building common understanding Creating the framework</p>
<p>Harvest of the meeting</p> <p><i>Information was provided about the organization’s actions, the LCP programme objectives, and the philosophy behind a bottom-up and learning community. It was clarified that the school would not bear any financial burden for these actions and would receive support.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness workshops for parents regarding school bullying and methods of nonviolent communication had been initiated at the school in the past, but parents’ attendance had not been very high. • Students’ busy programme of extracurricular activities has an effect on other types of participation for them and their parents. • Within the school community, students get along better than parents in terms of harmonious coexistence and cooperation. • There is a possibility that the sixth grade will present a theatrical performance at the end of the school year, though many decisions have yet to be made. <p>Lack of equipment and resources have had a large impact on the school. For example, a new sound system that can serve a large room and a photocopy machine (to enable the circulation of material and schoolwork for the students) are needed. The principal also frankly informed us that financial support was a key incentive to take part in the LCP programme.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers were informed on how to implement participatory design methods and were offered sources and examples from previous workshops. <p><i>At this meeting we also defined the purpose and role of PI members:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PI members focus on facilitating and supporting, while teachers, along with students and parents, determine the agenda, time, place, and content. • Within this role, PI members provide support on methodologies, production, networking and addressing other practical or technical issues that the community may face. • PI members can support with design and informational applications for any activities that might emerge in order to enhance the activation and participation of the school community.

Action 2: Open school community workshop



Mapping challenges and co-creating suggestions

The PI team together with two teachers (the teacher leading the Team for Preventing School Violence, and the deputy headmaster) defined and decided on goals, time, space and duration of the first open action towards the school community.

The aim of the workshop was to help determine both conditions and suggestions from the school community members themselves, contributing to successful living together, and then attempting to incorporate the proposals into the next actions.

It was decided that the World Café method, regardless of whether participants are few or many, discussion rounds can be made, active and equal participation of all attendees is ensured, and instant mapping of the conversation topics is made possible. After discussing with the teachers, the main title of the invitation came to be: “Take part! Let’s talk about harmonious coexistence and collaboration”. The workshop revolved around two main questions and its outcomes, in the participants’ own words, were as follows:

Action 2: Open school community workshop ‘Take part! Let’s talk’ (World Café)	
Aim	
Mapping collectively needs & challenges	
Co-creating suggestions & solutions	
Harvest of the workshop	
Discussion cycle A: What are the challenges we face in our school community?	Discussion cycle B: What do we need in order to help our school community follow the path of participation, collaboration and living together in harmony?

<p>Need for better communication and collaboration</p> <p>“To have our children talk to us about what preoccupies them” “Need for communication (students <> parents <> teachers) day” “Rational communication and assessment of incidents – no overreactions” “Collaboration among parties making up the school community” “Respecting and enforcing rules”</p>	<p>Support to the school community by an expert (psychologist/social worker)</p> <p>“Teacher counselling on crisis management and group dynamics management” “Parenting school’ organized on a regular basis” “Institutional framework providing one psychologist for every five schools, so he/she can diagnose and support/help in resolving any emerging issues” “Permanent position of psychologist in every school unit” “Presence of a psychologist/social worker” “Cooperation of the school with a psychologist”</p>
<p>Troubling behaviour – Conflict</p> <p>“Parents with offensive behaviour, who influence their children” “Aggressive behaviour by students” “Need for parent counselling” “Dispute among students, among parents, between teachers and parents” “Insulting behaviour by teachers”</p>	<p>Communication / Cooperation between parents and teachers</p> <p>“Formal framework for communication between parents and teachers” “Regular (once every 3 months) afternoon meetings between teacher and parents of his/ her class for open discussion”</p>
<p>Challenges within student groups</p> <p>“Group-forming that may cause tension in the class” “Attention to children being marginalized” “Social isolation of a kid in the school” “Tension instead of collaboration”</p>	<p>Participation / Expression of the school community members</p> <p>“Participation of as many members of the school community as possible in activities like today’s” “Gathering of the children at school to discuss their ideas”</p>
<p>Quality of infrastructure – Safety and security</p> <p>“Safety for children, road safety, school facilities’ safety” “Need for better infrastructure” “Need for security – protection for students against external threats” “Cleaning – Catering for the needs of vulnerable children groups”</p>	<p>Lobbying for better infrastructure</p> <p>“Lobbying of municipal authorities for timely fulfilment of infrastructural needs” “Lobbying of responsible authorities (municipality etc) by the Teachers Council and the Parents Association on issues regarding infrastructure”</p>
<p>Lack of time and space for play</p> <p>“Lack of time and space for play”</p>	<p>Opportunities for play</p> <p>“Safety for play – Space for play / A school yard not made with concrete, and use of the yard in out-of-school hours for neighbourhood play” “Lack of free time – Changing school books that are highly demanding”</p>

Evaluation of the World Café workshop

The workshop lasted three hours. Three teachers and 25 parents, mostly women, took part.

- Most of the participants valued highly the opportunity to enter this kind of discussion and to be heard, as well as to expose their views, needs and ideas.
- It create an appetite for more participatory workshops.
- All attendees were asked if they wanted to continue afternoon meetings of this kind. All said yes.
- Oral feedback collected by the lab coordinators included:
 - “This (World Café) must be established!”
 - “When will we go again (World Café)!”
 - “A World Café should be done every week!”

Outside the meeting room, whoever wanted could answer two evaluation questions placed on a table:

1st question: How do you like the workshop?

19 persons evaluated it 9 ~ 10

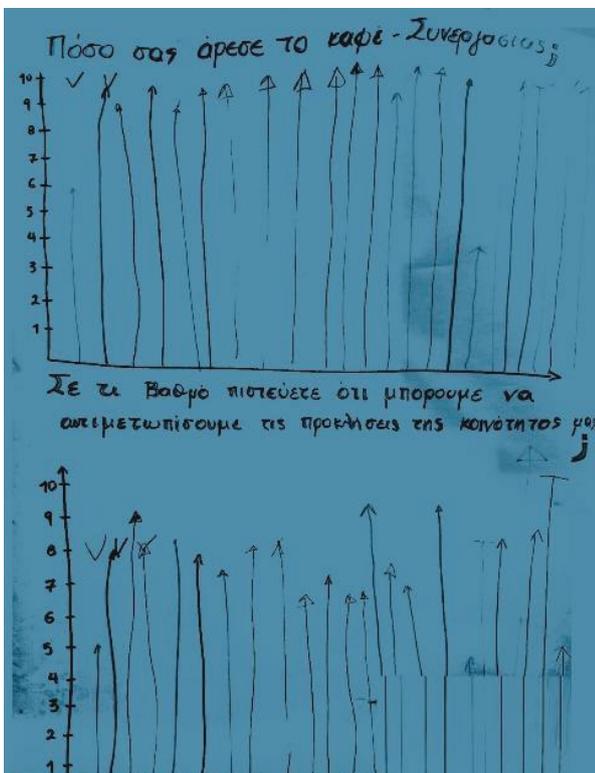
2 persons evaluated it 5 ~ 6

2nd question: To what extent do you believe we can face the challenges of our community?

2 persons evaluated it 10

3 persons evaluated it 5

16 persons evaluated it 6~8



School Activity A1: “Thinking creatively & communicating effectively”

School Activity A1: Workshop for teachers & parents

“Thinking creatively & communicating effectively” – May 2018

Aim: To focus on communication challenges and skills

Reflections on the workshop

- The participants gave some examples of challenges they face on how they communicate in their everyday life, with their children, at their work, and within the school community.
- The expert trainer coordinated the situation by using different methods that made it easier to overcome various kind of barriers.
- The participants realized the option of changing the dynamics and effectiveness of discussions and the ways of interacting.
- The participants engaged very actively and soon a playful mood prevailed.
- The analysis and deconstruction of the means of communication contributed to making everyone feel relaxed and comfortable.
- The workshop showed how everyone faces similar challenges and that the sharing was often enough to simplify the problems and reinforce communication and proximity.



Parents in circle

School Activity A2: **“Skills for making the most of our potential”**

<p>School Activity A2: Workshop for teachers & parents</p> <p>“Skills for making the most of our potential” – June 2018</p>
<p>Aim: To face our challenges collectively through new approaches</p>
<p>Reflections on the workshop</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The workshop for parents and teachers was facilitated by a psychologist/trainer in transformational coaching. • The workshop used theories and practices to showcase a ‘transformative’ approach in managing one’s relationships, perceptions and goals. • In just two hours, the flow of the lab gradually led to an unexpected result: everyone spoke openly and deeply about what concerned them in that moment and shared personal testimonies. • The workshop was just an introduction session of this training programme. However, it managed to convey the awareness that a school community could be a space where people are able to discuss together, think together, and find solutions together in both personal and common challenges. • This workshop strengthened the purpose of the project and dissipated the reserve that most of the participants showed at the beginning of the workshop. <p>Harvesting from optional participant evaluation</p> <p>After the meeting, the participants were asked for feedback from the trainer about how they experienced the workshop. Here are some comments:</p> <p><i>“A very radical but at the same time worthwhile approach to the problem I thought I had as a parent, and I do not have one. Thank you very much for this very enlightening experience”</i> – Journalist (aged 43)</p> <p><i>“I saw the issues of purpose and purpose for the future, and with today’s workshop some points stopped being blind”</i> – Planner</p> <p><i>“I left a better man, parent, companion”</i> – Employee (43)</p> <p><i>“Quite interesting speech, leaving many positive elements. A short time for so many important issues that have been raised, it would be nice to have another meeting in the future continuing this conversation”</i> – Freelancer</p> <p><i>“I got a lot of things, I’ve benefited a lot, I’ll apply them right away”</i> – Teacher (48)</p>

School Activity A3: “New skills for the future”

School Activity A3: Workshop for pupils
“New skills for the future” – November 2018
Aim: Developing constructive discussions on issues that concern or inspire the pupils
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The workshop was attended by 27 children, mainly from fifth and sixth grade, who sat in a wide circle, while 10 parents observed the process. • A special coach trained in these methodologies explained the rules. • The coach and children listed the areas of their daily lives (friends, family, homework, reading, extracurricular activities, foreign languages, health, personal life, etc). • Each child completed a chart and discussed the areas of their everyday life, evaluating them as functional or dysfunctional. • The children selected the sector they mostly focused on, worked out the facts concerning it, and how they could transform their results in the future. • The charts remained private for each student. • The parents and children discovered a way to observe, reflect on and rethink the issues that concerned them. • This gradually led to a more responsible and creative stance towards matters that would seem at first to be barriers. • In many cases the children discovered that they had to communicate better, to show more understanding, or to resolve their problems themselves.

School Activity B1: Staging the Athenian Old Comedy *Peace* of Aristophanes

School Activity B1: Staging the Athenian Old Comedy <i>Peace</i> of Aristophanes
Aim: Creating a cultural event for the whole school community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teachers of the two sixth-grade classes collaborated to produce a theatrical performance. • The teachers offered roles to all children. • The performance was based on an Athenian Old Comedy, <i>Peace</i> by Aristophanes. • The students rehearsed every day for two months. • The teachers advised the students to organize some sessions at each other’s homes in a smaller group collaborating on specific parts of the performance. • Some parents contributed by helping to make the scenery and masks. • Other teachers provided technical solutions with lighting and sound, • The municipality contributed some professional costumes. • The performance took place twice towards the end of the school year, once during school hours for the students and staff and once during evening hours for the wider school community.

Harvest from teacher interviews

The teachers pointed out:

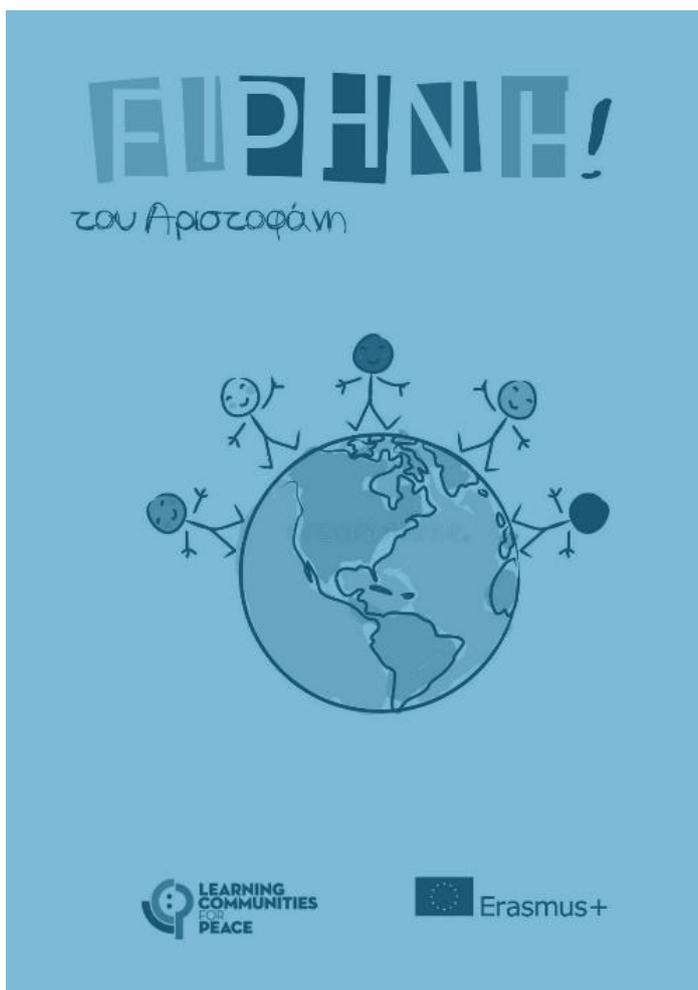
The overall preparation period was a strong experience for children and teachers as it brought everyone much closer to each other and even alleviated the competition between the two classes.

The impact of this experience on the students is illustrated by two examples. For one student, who had difficulty becoming part of a team and participating in activities that require exposure, the play was very tempting – s/he swung several times between “I want to play” and “I don’t want to play”. For another student who experiences long-term difficulties in connecting with his peers, and expresses his isolation with frustration and negativity, the play and its creation process did not have any negative effect on him.

During the premiere everyone could see the results of high commitment, exceptional teamwork, fun and passion.

The final product of the work was a success, as it was deemed of high quality, especially given the limited time available to prepare for such a demanding project.

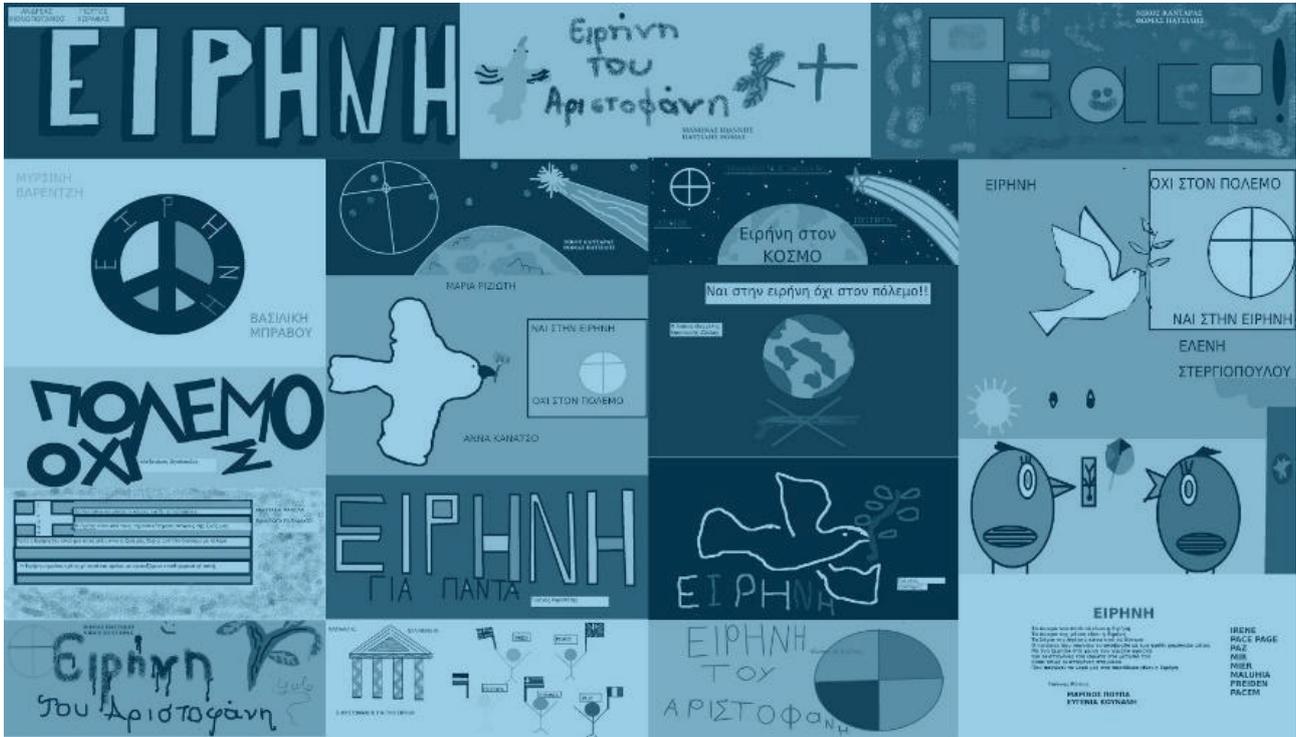
The students, by going through the pains of putting on the show, would be able to grasp the message of the play in a more direct and substantial way.



The theatre performance poster

School Activity B.2: Painting for Peace using new technologies

During computer classes, the teacher asked the sixth-grade students to prepare an essay on peace. The students were free to use information from the internet (such as texts and photos), or to create their own digital paintings using the software they were being trained in during the lesson. They responded with eagerness and created a series of mixed-technique projects that were exhibited in the school’s multi-purpose room during the year’s closing events.



Students’ drawings

School Activity B.3: A Mural for Peace

The Teachers Association collaborated with the technical department of the Municipality of Ilion in the creation of creative murals on the main facade of the school.

6.3 Interpretation – what we’ve learned

Following the completion of the LCP project actions in the Greek context, we went through several rounds of discussion and critical evaluation of the action research process while gathering insights from the diverse individuals involved. Some factors worthy of analysis are documented in this section, in terms of challenges faced, outcomes and lessons learned. These factors arise from some basic conditions that created limitations and barriers during the action research process. We also make some general recommendations for further research.

First, **various external factors influence the internal life of the school community**. In Greece, one of the basic challenges result from a closed and centralized educational system. Heavy bureaucracy, political imbalance, instability of executives, the ideological opinions of rulers and directors,

make the process of approval or implementation extremely fluid and subjective. The teaching staff have to follow the directives of circulars without deviation or motivation for trying out alternative processes. These circumstances create a lack of trust or feeling of insecurity in front of potential complaints against staff, which further discourages experimentation or activities beyond the formal educational practices.

At the same, the heavy workload of all participants seems to be another fundamental barrier. The teaching staff have to contend with reduced salaries, insufficient staff and regular relocation from one school to another every year. The parents often face financial issues that prevent them from taking part in activities outside the formal educational programme and what does not directly concern their children's grades. The students are occupied with many extracurricular activities, usually provided by the private sector (evenings and weekends). That is mostly due to limited and outdated curricula within the public education system which leads families to invest their time in chasing after formal recognitions for their children (foreign language diplomas, IT certificates, etc), which are considered necessary for third-level education and employability. Time, energy and space do not come easy, which leads to lack of investment in meaningful relationships among the school community groups, fatigue, and reluctance to take on extracurricular responsibilities.

In these conditions, it is necessary to establish more open processes in order to overcome the limitations. Methods such as 'open calls' to various schools or an 'open network' of interested schools could ensure collaboration with early adopters among the school communities – pioneers, problem-solvers, and 'doers' in the school community who are inherently restless, positive or have a willing-to-try attitude. The LCP concept in Greece can empower and facilitate 'doers' so that they do not feel alone within a discouraging system, can act within the community as a catalyst of participation and action, enrich the school programme with new experiences and breakthroughs, and the necessary processes for community and peacebuilding.

Given these conditions, it is necessary to implement a collective and participatory project such as the LCP to ensure highly open and binding processes and a clear distinction between the role of doer and the role of facilitator. There could be an open call with well-defined specifications to all schools in an area to ensure responsiveness and collaboration with teachers or parents who are curious, active and 'committed to commitment'. In practice, such work needs to identify potential pioneers, early adopters and problem-solvers, and therefore the actors who wish to see a transformation of the school community. The LCP framework helps actors not to give up in their efforts against a discouraging system, to act within the community as a factor of participation and action, and enrich the school curriculum with new community-building experiences and peace-building practices. An external organization, team or consortium can also support the 'doers' by offering new knowledge, best practices or reference materials around community engagement and facilitation, peacebuilding, etc, as well as practical or in-kind support, networking with experts according to the school's needs.

If the role of the out-of-school organization cannot be clearly limited to the role of facilitator and if it seeks to play a leading role, the school communities ultimately gain the least.

At the same time, it is essential that there be a socio-political movement in Greece to advocate for a wider, open and participatory process for major reform of the Greek education system, that would allow children, teachers and parents to be part of it.

Secondly, in the Greek school community there seems to be a **severe lack of experience and basic skills in the area of participation and collaboration** and in actually practising them. Lack of time is the easiest excuse for non-participation, but we noticed that school community members have many negative experiences in parents' assemblies, school committees, etc, which did not provide creative or productive dialogue, which leads to frustration and a sense that it is pointless to

engage in public or common matters. Furthermore, there seemed to be a difficulty in understanding the open-ended framework of bottom-up co-creation processes. Parents and teachers demanded to know in advance what exactly was going to happen, from programme start to programme closure, sometimes interpreting a bottom-up approach as not serious, not feasible – and even suspicious! In this framework, not knowing how to co-design or make co-decisions, many were reluctant to take responsibility or action. The school director seemed convinced that the parents and teachers simply don't care, and this conviction appeared to work as a self-fulfilling prophecy, with a negative ripple-effect through the school community.

Meanwhile, in Greek school communities, there are often polarized conditions coordinated by 'active' members closely connected to political parties. They are trade unionists or local government-elected people who serve small-scale interests and create conflicts that interfere with discussions of practical problems or the essence of school life, which discourages many parents from getting involved in institutionalized or scheduled processes. Recently, at the time of the refugee crisis, schools became a field of political polarization, even of extremist views, while the meetings operated as a reaction and complaint mechanism instead of a space for action and problem-solving. In our case, we came across euroscepticism and parents' aggression towards the project because of its funding from the European Commission, but also resentment about the involvement of an NGO in a school community. Some parents and teachers object to any initiative that is not governmental, and believe that NGOs are 'private initiatives' with corrupt intentions.

In the light of all the above, it is necessary to strengthen the culture of participation and collaboration, and to make the 'common ground' more visible by changing the paradigm and creating new frameworks of actions that are liberated from political parties and their clientelist relationships.

New theories, methodologies and know-how are needed in applying creative participatory practices for community information, engagement, co-creation and problem-solving to the school reality. A kind of re-invention of the notions of democracy, community, participation and self-regulation is required – an 'out-of-the-(Greek educational) box' solution. International networks such as Art of Hosting (www.artofhosting.org) could support and empower an international LCP network.

During the LCP project, we also faced a 'critical literacy' problem. From the start of the project, we encountered difficulties in both the project team and the school community in terms of linguistic translation and cultural adaptation of the title, terminology and basic notions of LCP, and in terms of common understanding between social or academic silos. This meant it was necessary to create time and processes to introduce, study or understand new concepts.

The real need was somewhat indefinable but obviously a variety of answers can be found in theories such as those of Paulo Freire and the definition of critical data literacy. The intercultural dimension or communicative learning of Freire's theory can enrich LCP-type projects and actions. Critical literacy goes beyond conventional critical thinking, "focusing on issues related to equality and social justice". The purpose of critical literacy is to engage all members of the school community in the production and negotiation of meanings that are relevant to them, proposed "as a pedagogical methodology oriented to understand reality so as to transform it" (*Contributions of Paulo Freire for a critical data literacy*).

6.4 Planning a new cycle of research

During the project, research was carried out in Greek literature and circulars, as well as in actions developed in Greece, converging on the philosophy and methodologies of the LCP project and elaborating its narrative, concepts and key words in the Greek language. In general, the research showed that in recent years many participatory, mutual learning projects have emerged in Greece,

but all of the projects need to be more practical and interactive within the school communities themselves, rather than theoretical. Also, the concept of democracy and participation is often confused with volunteering instead of being understood as active citizenship and taking part into the decision-making process. In other cases, 'Democracy & Education' programmes are implemented by visiting the Greek parliament and learning how it operates, though without incorporating the notions of active participation, democratic dialogue, integration, co-creation and collective decision-making.

In approaching the completion of the LCP programme, we realized that we were just at the beginning of the action research. Since we did not have previous experience in schools as an NGO, and had not run workshops with educators, parents and students, we evaluated the experience of LCP as an incredible start for the planning of further activities and projects. We realize even more now that, in Greek school communities, there is an immense need for programmes such as LCP, but at the same time the field, mechanisms, processes and mindsets are not yet ready for something like this. Even though the targets and range of events were limited, the challenges and behavioural patterns revealed offered us deep understanding of the challenges school communities are confronted with in Greece. From the discussions and sharing that took place, we have received calls from school principals inviting us to support them with participatory activities in Erasmus+ and related projects. We are, therefore, back to the designing process of new projects and collaborations in an attempt to succeed in the following priorities:

- Networking, discussion and brainstorming with actors of other relevant programmes or projects in Greece (e.g. *Open Schools*, *School Partnerships for Democracy in Education* by EUDEC -European Democratic Education Community) Greece, etc.
- Methodological planning of projects or actions in a way that is based on building an LCP community of practice in various schools, based on teacher initiative and commitment and allowing actions to merge with the didactic programme.
- Mapping experts, networks or platforms that could enrich or broaden school community members' skills (e.g. *Art of Hosting* -global network-, *Metamorfosis-ngo*), core team members' skills (e.g. the pedagogical team *Skasiarxeio*, platform *100 Mentors*, the initiative *Tipping Point in Education*, *The Network of Greek Libraries*, which coordinates actions in 200+ public libraries throughout Greece – which could help LCP with a scaling-up methodology).
- Facilitating development know-how and tools that support processes of information, engagement and participation by a 'whole-school-approach community', even if there are linguistic or cultural gaps.

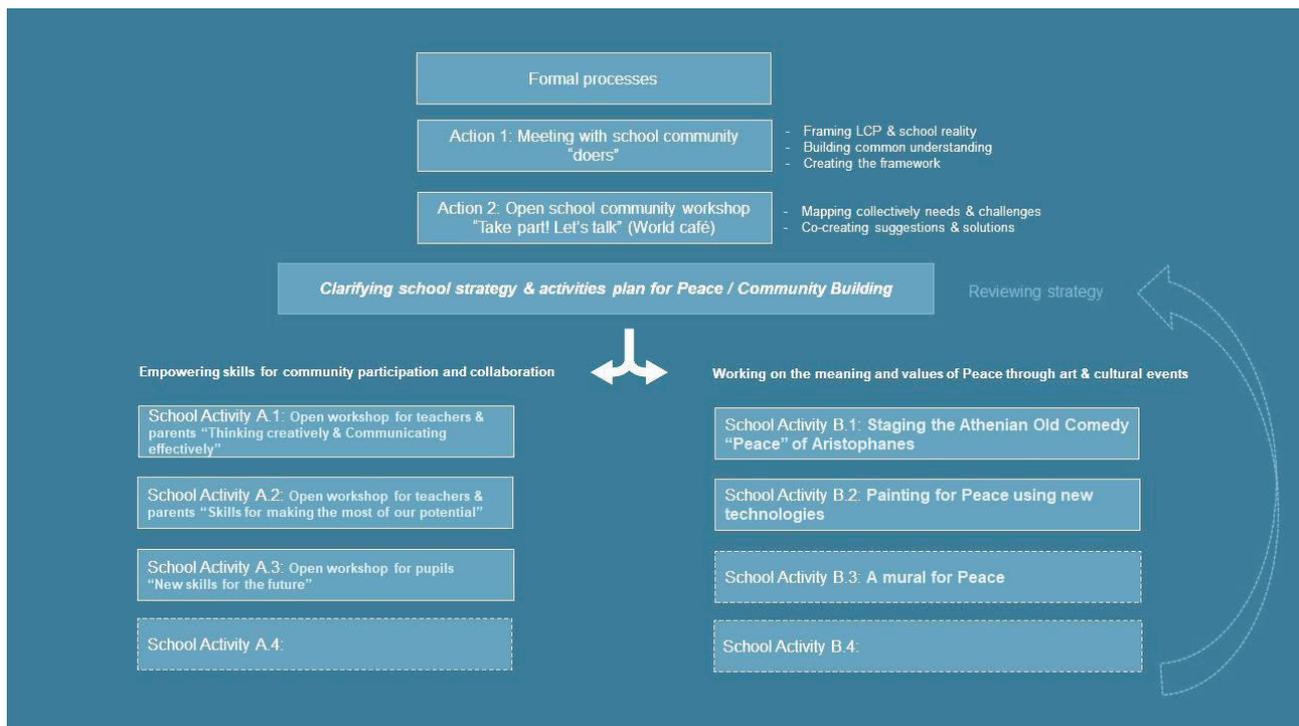


Meeting with other initiatives and programmes during LCP Multiplier Event

6.5 Conclusion

The challenges of living-together or peace-building processes in each school community may be various and complicated, but the proposals and actions that emerged, formally or more organically, give rise to a particular pattern. Following the principles of the project according to which ('++') we began with actions that were like white canvas (see Actions 1 & 2), where we identified where we were and where we wanted to go. From that point on, an activity strategy emerged that had two main axes:

- a) Participatory and collaborative activities and
- b) Artistic and cultural activities. Also, it became clear that peaceful coexistence needed to be approached both as a practice and as an ideals.



Main actions and activities

Analyzing the data of the first 'open school community' workshop (Action 2) and then the discussions that took place at the tables, we clarified some keywords, such as: Rhetoric in Education, Creative Thinking, Transformational Thinking, Participatory Leadership, Participatory Design and Decision-Making, Critical Literature, and Problem-solving. After a discussion with the teachers who attended the first workshop and members of the Parents Union, we decided to continue a series of open workshops on the topics of the Harvest Report. We began searching for networks with other organizations and experts to help us enrich the content and experiences of these meetings by approaching new theories and practices that challenge and experiment with teachers, parents and children. The school system should provide constant access to both formal and informal education, curriculum and extracurricular programmes. At the same time, the circle of the school community should not be confined to student-teacher-parent relations, but be constantly expanded within the boundaries of the neighbourhood, academics, the activist community, pioneers, and so on.

Changes occur when each member of the community can contribute to the self-determination of the school community, when each child has found a way to play a role in the school's performance, or when the members are practising values or practices that allow for balance, initiative and problem-solving.

The challenge of building peace, both within the school community and on the planet, should not be non-political or apolitical. The school community will find a way to resolve or mitigate conflicts by continually practising the most authentic forms of art and democracy.