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# Active Citizenship and Educational Museum Programs<sup>1</sup>: A Case Study

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## Abstract

*In a constantly changing world where collective values have given up to individualism, school fails to answer to the demands of society. Meanwhile, there is a crucial need of active responsible citizens via citizenship education which is associated to humanity and universal values. Due to school insufficiencies, museums seem to have undertaken the role of mediators between education and culture, heritage and history, through which pupils are more likely to develop an active citizenship. Our research stresses the question of transmitting values to children via museum education and, in particular, via an educational museum project which takes place in the Ancient Agora of Athens, Greece.*

**Key-words:** museum education, citizenship, citizenship education, values, active citizen

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## 1. Introduction

After having read the title of this paper, questions such as “Which could be the link between museums and citizenship?” are probably emerging. Above all, citizenship is considered to be directly connected to culture and history. By being in contact with their cultural heritage and values, young citizens find their place in the world and create a link with the society they belong to (Kakourou-Chroni, 2006: 12), therefore developing a social responsibility.

Nowadays, we face more than ever the necessity of keeping in touch with one’s cultural heritage, which will give the opportunity to pupils to gain the knowledge and skills needed in order to participate actively in social and political life (European Forum of Youth, 2002: 3).

If citizenship education has as goal to « create informed and responsible citizens who respond to modern conditions » (Eurydice, 2005: 23), then any possible collaboration between schools and social organisations, such as museums, is not at all absurd. Besides, any contact with culture and history reinforces a pupil’s citizenship more than a history book does in the classroom (Gould & Adler, 2005: 5). So why not “break out” from a stale school system in order to perform citizenship education in a more creative and original way?

This role can be played by the museum. Through its revolution the museum has passed from a number of different phases: from exposition of plain objects to a place of leisure, from a space of collective cultural expression to an educational area, to become most recently a social institution which encloses values and can contribute to the development of active citizenship (Légaré, n.d.).

In this paper, we will deal with the partnership between schools and museums, as well as with this partnership’s contribution to citizenship education. More precisely, for the needs of our qualitative research, we make use of a theoretical frame which allows us to link culture and citizenship. We actually focus on a specific educational museum project<sup>2</sup> which takes place in one of the most important archaeological sites of Athens, the Ancient Agora<sup>3</sup>, as well as the Museum Stoas Attalou.

## 2. The challenges of school in a post-modern world

The post-modern world, as referred to by some writers (Lyotard, 1979), is a period of constant economic, social and political changes that began in the sixties and, in fact, continue influencing the twenty first century. Rapid advancement in computer technology, globalisation of commerce and continuous

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<sup>2</sup> We consider “programs” or “projects” as those educational acts carried out in museums and archeological sites, most usually, aiming to the school public. From now on referred as EMP.

<sup>3</sup> The Ancient Agora was the political, economic and social center of Athens in the fifth century BC.

spread of new ideas have caused a passive way of thinking and consumerism (Nikolaou, 2005). Consequently, new forms of work, new types of social organisation and a brand new system of values emerge. Values such as solidarity, humanity and democracy give way to material comfort, individualism and competition. This illustrates a lack of collective social values.

Post-modern politics focus on the individuality, on one's liberties and rights, that leads to a predominant egoism and to a development of personal interests contrary to collective ones (Balas, 2008). Therefore, the degeneration of civil values and the crisis of the democracy have surfaced. However, the existence of the democracy doesn't depend only on the democratic institutions but also on the citizens. This is the main reason why it is necessary to create responsible citizens, who will contribute to the realisation of ethical goals by promoting democratic values.

In such a challenging society, school can't stay stable and unharmed. Education focuses on technical characteristics and follows the economic wave. The tremendous efforts the school system makes in order to respond to the demands of the contemporary society result in it forgetting about its humanitarian and cultural role. Consequently, interest to subjects such as history and civil education has decreased (Tautiaux-Guillon, 2007: 39). Furthermore, the nature of school nowadays, centred towards exam performance, pushes back the fundamental goal of education, that of « developing ones personality at its whole » (Greek Law 1566/85).

The answer to the problem of diminishing democratic values is expected to come from education. It is the school's job to stimulate active citizenship in order to succeed the resurrection of democracy (Balas, 2008). Citizenship education is integrated across the entire curriculum through disciplines like civic education and history, but any time of school life gives pupils the opportunity to promote their citizenship. Even, the Council of Europe sees the importance of educating to citizenship in every level of education and sets goals that all European member countries are supposed to follow (Eurydice, 2005: 7).

### **3. The crucial role of the museum**

In Greece during the last years there has been an overture of the museum to school public, since the former has become mediator between education and culture, by transmitting the values of the latter. One of its goals is to create communication links between humans and culture in order to form a generation of citizens who protect, conserve and live in harmony with the monuments surrounding them (Chryssoulaki, 1993). As a result to this effort, numerous educational projects have taken place in museums and archaeological sites. Even the Greek Ministry of Education focuses on the link between culture and education in order to increase cultural sensibility, as part of the museum's role (Eurydice, 2009).

In some countries around the world museums are already associated to civic education and offer possibilities for educating to citizenship, but in Greece this link is not really clear yet. There is still a divergence between theory and practice concerning democratic citizenship education (Karakatsani, 2008: 152).

#### **4. The objectives of our research**

Our research was carried out in the frame of a case study on an EMP of the Greek Ministry of Culture in Athens and, in particular, in the archaeological site of the Ancient Agora. The project is called “*Public life of citizens in the fifth century BC*”. How does such an educational museum project contribute to developing active citizenship of young students?

In this paper we intend to present, analyse and evaluate the project as one of the contemporary practices in Greece. More precisely, the researcher focuses on planning and realising the project by bearing on the views of the museum professionals and the teachers. After examining the effects of the project on pupils, we analyse in what way it contributes to citizenship education. Finally, by distinguishing the good practices we see to transferring them to other similar projects. The objectives of the research are the following:

- to clarify the concept of “citizenship education”,
- to check if the museum animators<sup>4</sup> are aware of the possibility to educate to citizenship via the project,
- to see if the teachers-visitors perceive the presence of a link between museum and citizenship education,
- to confirm if the methods used during the project develop active citizenship, and
- to research if the EMP is a pedagogic device that transfers collective values.

The research is based upon three elements: a) the objectives of the project, b) the pedagogic methods used, and c) its possible effects on children.

#### **5. Operative and theoretical concepts**

With the main question of the research being “*Is the EMP a device of active citizenship education?*,” a clarification of the operative (museum educational projects, pedagogic device, citizenship) and theoretical concepts (citizenship education, ethic education) is necessary.

An analysis of the literature on educational museum projects lets us view them as « organised visits in museums of any form for a homogenous group of people » (Papaioannou, 2007: 311). They totally differ from a simple personal visit or a guided one, since they include activities that give value to

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<sup>4</sup> The term “animators” includes the creators-writers of the educational museum project (EMP) and the mediators who present it.

methods such as exploring by using worksheets, role-games, group-work, narration, dialogue, empiric approach and means of creativity (Papaioannou, 2007: 312). Today, those projects are held in “post-modern” museums where the visitor becomes active and constructs the knowledge himself (Mamoura, 2005).

Citizenship as a concept is very wide, complex and multidimensional, so in such a short work it is impossible to include everything already written. Previous literature (Bäckman & Trafford, 2008; Bîrzéa, 2000; European Forum of Youth, 2002; Eurydice, 2005; Hoskins, 2006; Karakatsani, 2008; O’Shea, 2003; Pol, 2004; Sears *et al.*, 1996; Tutiaux-Guillon, 2007) has helped us to create the theoretical frame of our research. In fact, we see citizenship as an umbrella concept including four elements: knowledge, skills, values and participation. The use of the concept “citizenship” is more likely normative, meaning that we are looking towards a good, active and responsible citizen. Citizenship may also have a number of facets, for example social, political, economic and cultural.

The role of socialisation has always been in the centre of research, but most recently the interest has moved towards the concept of citizenship (Eurydice, 2005: 7). Democratic citizenship education has become a common goal in the European educative practices from the nineteen nineties in relation with the democratic values and openness to multiculturalism (Audigier, 1999). After all, even the Council of Europe has focused on this direction (Bäckman & Trafford, 2008). The Lisbon Strategy has put social cohesion and active citizenship in the heart of the European political agenda (Hoskins *et al.*, 2006: 6).

By borrowing the concept of “pedagogical device” (Talon *et al.*, 2008: 62) and that of “citizenship”, we were able to create the “device of citizenship education” and use it in our research.

## **6. Methodology and results of the research**

Ours is a qualitative research focusing on three groups of subjects: animators-writers of the project, teachers-companions and pupils-participants. The researcher used semi-structured interviews which followed the observation of the EMP. The collection of the data took place from Mars to April 2010 in Athens, Greece.

This research has shown that this particular EMP promotes active citizenship in pupils, since it includes all those traits of citizenship education previously mentioned. Fortunately, those in charge of the project acknowledge it as a device of citizenship education. Therefore, their objectives and ideas contain citizenship education; they claim it really important for young people. On the other hand, the teachers who visit the archaeological site fail to find any link between the project and citizenship education and so do not expect that it will contribute to form active citizens. They see only the cognitive effects which are put on the top of their priority list<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, values, in general, are placed low in the teachers’ scale.

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<sup>5</sup> It goes without saying that the research did not expect the project by itself to be able to create active citizens; there are lots of other elements which contribute. However, all educational museum projects

Although, some of the teachers commented that, while in the classroom, they tend to focus on values, such as diversity tolerance. To sum up, there is a divergence between how people in charge (creators) envision the project and how teachers (users) perceive it.

## 7. Previous research and future thoughts

Previous research (Raptis *et al.*, 2008) shows that in Greece the projects of non-governmental organisations are oriented towards promoting active citizenship. In the same group (of NGOs) there is space for educational museum projects. However, it is a prerequisite that museum institutions recognise this opportunity and set it as a general goal. Moreover, in a French research (Tutiaux-Guillon, 2007), the teachers who were being interviewed focused on the critical approach of historic resources. So did the creator of our project in Athens. But on the other hand, the majority of Greek teachers did not even mention that skill -which is fundamental in today's educational institutions, such as schools and museums. Plus, the creator did mention human rights and diversity tolerance by avoiding ethnocentrism, but the teachers did not notice any of those in the project. Although, she (the creator) included collective values as one of the project's goals, the teachers did not comment on those. Finally, in the French research there was barely any mention on citizenship and the same occurred in our research as far as the teachers were concerned. Even a research in Britain and Canada (Evans, 2006) on the importance of civic education among teachers has similarities to ours. For example, foreign teachers stress knowledge above all, with skills following.

Concluding, it appears that Teacher Education is the weak link in the partnership between schools and museums. Perhaps future research should focus more on that part.

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should refer and see to it. They are supposed to be activities supplementary to school work that, theoretically, already points to this direction.

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