

This profile is part of the EU Study on Supporting School Innovation Across Europe. It presents one of the 24 schools in the study, giving an overview of the changes and experiences in that school. Find the rest of the materials from the study at:

www.schooleducationgateway.eu/innovation

Promoting volunteerism and active citizenship through service learning projects at the 2nd Primary School of Aliartos



About our school

- ◆ **Location:** Aliartos, Boeotia, Greece
- ◆ **Established:** 1990
- ◆ **Status:** Public school that provides primary education (grades 1-6)
- ◆ **Number of pupils:** 169 (in 2016)
- ◆ **Website:** <http://2dimotikosxoleioaliartou.blogspot.gr/>
- ◆ **Contact person:** Kontantina Kitsou



Why did we innovate?

The school is located in a disadvantaged neighbourhood marked by high unemployment and early school leaving rates. The community environment reflected on the school climate as well, where students were disengaged and lack of collaboration between teachers and school governance staff. In this light, the innovative programmes were initiated in 2015 to tackle the existing social problems, promote collaboration and active participation, as well as strengthen the attitudes of respect to the others and to the nature. The school leader gained additional inspiration from the nation-wide programme “I Care and I Act” (“Niazome ke Dro”) and was further supported by the regional school counsellor of Primary Education.



What were our innovations?

The main ongoing goal of the school is to develop an inclusive school culture and create active citizens, who are caring and respectful human beings. To achieve this goal the school engaged in the following innovative projects.

To promote active citizenship, the school has joined the national programme “I Care and I Act” launched during 2015-2016 academic year.

It is run by a non-profit Lambrakis Foundation and the NGO “Desmos” in 10 different Greek regions and helps schools to promote volunteer work, with the aim to develop active citizenship. As part of its activities, it includes “service learning”, a programme in which pupils offer services to the community (e.g. feeding people in the church, collecting olives from trees) and learn about volunteering. This learning approach also helps to tackle social problems in the community, not only at school. Every year the programme has different focus, e.g., currently the emphasis is on environmental problems.

This initiative had begun as a project run by 3 people in the school but gradually became a collective effort in 2016. In the school year of 2016-17, 150 schools were taking part in this programme.

Innovations were put in place with careful planning from the very start. The small team responsible for the service learning was created at the school and consisted of the school leader, teacher coordinator, who was doing her PhD on educational innovations and a number of other teachers. The teacher coordinator was also in close contact with an external coordinator appointed by the programme organisers. The development of the teacher team helped to promote collaboration between teachers and sustain the innovation process.

Other innovative projects in the school included “Love of reading”, “Play” and “The Sea”, initiated by two teachers in the 1st grade. For instance, in the “Love of reading” the teachers and pupils read and worked on 7 books on the concept of “difference” on topics of autism, difference in colour, blindness, etc. The school had a workshop for creative writing with writers, as a result of which the pupils wrote and published a book. The school also promotes team teaching, where two lessons can be merged into one and delivered by two teachers simultaneously. According to the head teacher, these activities help to promote teacher collaboration and develop a team spirit. According to the school leader, the teaching staff have clear roles and responsibilities and are engaged in different programmes in their classes (e.g. literacy development, environmental sensitisation etc.). Many presentations are organised for pupils.

The school is also open beyond teaching hours and organises a variety of extra-curricular activities in the afternoons for its pupils (e.g., chess, tennis, theatre games and robotics).



What have we achieved?

Pupils

Teachers noticed that students became more positive and tolerant to others and to nature. In addition, pupils started taking more initiatives, suggesting ideas and showed social sensitivity.

School as a whole

According to the school teachers, initiatives also had an impact on the **broader community outside school**, including parents, who have become more sensitive and significantly more supportive. The volunteer work had a noticeable impact on the school relationship with the local community. The volunteering work helped to create close and collaborative environment, which provides ideas for future experiential learning projects for pupils.



The process of change: what helped us succeed?

School level

The development of collaborative and inclusive school climate, promoting team work and sense of shared goals, was an important enabler for innovative projects to thrive. School leader had intentionally undertaken all administrative work, to ease teachers' workload and help them focus explicitly on their teaching and development of new approaches. The interest and commitment of teachers (sometimes working extra hours) was also an important success factor, as school does not receive additional human or financial resources.

Financial support from the Parents' Association to support school resources needs (e.g., purchasing books, a copying machine, etc.).

National level

As the innovation is a part of a nation-wide initiative "I Care, and I Act", the guidance from an external coordinator has been a valuable contribution to the success.



The process of change: what limited us?

School level

Lack of clear understanding of the goals of the programme hindered the implementation of the initiative and its efficiency at the beginning. The participation among teachers was low. However, the Aliartos school tackled this challenge gradually, by first investing into the development of collaborative and safe school environment, in which each teacher could receive necessary support.

Lack of experience of many teachers resulted in mistakes during the initiative implementation process and its first stages.

Time constraints made it more difficult to implement an innovative project as teachers had the same amount of daily responsibilities.

National level

Limited financial resources from that state make it difficult to plan some of the service learning activities, which require additional funds for the trips and materials. The school has managed to fundraise from alternative sources (e.g., parents' association).

Inflexible rules in legal acts and circulars may hinder the implementation of new approaches (e.g., the possibility of having classes outside of the school building can be restricted by the law).

High staff turnover hinders the continuity of established teaching approaches.

Sustainability of change

Innovations and achievements in the school proved to be sustainable in the second year. School leader is determined to apply for similar programmes in the future. At the same time, the fact that pedagogical programmes had been introduced due to the individual effort of school leader, there is a concern that with the change of the school leader some innovations might not sustain.

The school has not yet created the culture of evaluation and monitoring to keep track of the effects of implemented innovations and learn from its processes. The evaluations take place on an informal ad hoc basis, through presentations to the Regional Directorate and discussions among teaching staff.

Even though there are not many mechanisms for learning and planning innovation, the members of staff are working constantly to find new ideas. The school leader is trying to promote research-based culture, encouraging teachers to undertake small research projects before designing particular approaches and programmes.

In the particular programme “Niazome ke Dro”, there is an evaluative questionnaire at the end of the school year addressed to teachers and another one addressed to pupils. The questionnaires that the pupils filled in checked their understandings of the concepts developed in the programme (e.g. “volunteering” and “solidarity”).

What did we learn in the process? Key messages

For the innovations to thrive and sustain, continuity of goals and activities is important. Key actors to ensure such a continuity in this school were the school leader, the school counsellor, teacher coordinators and external coordinators of the innovative programme.

Resistance towards innovative practices among the teaching staff is linked to the teachers’ workload and lack of training on leadership and change management. It is crucial that initial teacher education systems are modernised to develop teachers’ innovative mindset and drive for self-reflection and constant learning.

The lack of a research and evaluation culture are one of the key barriers to continuity of innovations. This needs to be reflected in the national systems of quality assurance and monitoring, professional development of school staff and overall organisation of school work, allowing sufficient time for teacher to reflect and learn from their practices.

Further reading

- **A full report** 'Supporting School Innovation across Europe' explores the conditions in the school education system that can enable or constrain positive change in schools.
- **12 case studies** explore the national approaches and individual school innovations. They include the perspectives of key national education experts and stakeholders who were interviewed and took part in workshops.
- **24 individual profiles** give a quick view of the changes and experiences in each school.

Available here:

www.schooleducationgateway.eu/innovation

- The school profiles also feature as part of the [European Toolkit for Schools](#), alongside a range of materials and many other inspiring examples of practice from European countries.

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