ENGAGED ART EDUCATION
Engaged Art Education

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Research and Praxis for Social Engaged Arts Education in Southern Europe, Balkan and Mediterranean countries

Introduction

Why did we start InSEA seminars and how did it work?

The world of art education has been concerned with the ongoing global issues such as poverty, climate change, cultural diversity, inclusion, migration, political radicalization, marginalization, artificial intelligence, digitalization, posthumanism, eco-justice and post-colonialism. Although the field has been established as important subjects of school curriculum, the advocacy endeavors continue to take place all over the world. The advocacy attempts stem from the global financial crisis that threatens the funding for education, as well as the accountability that is connected with the market jeopardize the significance of the skills that an individual may develop when they engage in art practices. Eventually along with the advocacy attempts, a new interest arises for the usage of arts as a therapeutic and integration tool in marginalized communities (e.g. poor, immigrants, refugee communities). Also, an increased need rises about how education and arts education may support the cohesion of the society over the political radicalization.

Therefore art educators and other cultural workers are seeking for alternative modes of critique and collective action through the arts. This publication is an outcome of the InSEA seminar held during 16-18 July 2018 at the School of Early Childhood Education, Aristotle University in Thessaloniki, Greece. The roots for this seminar can be traced in events and actions created by art educators, artists and researchers from countries in the peripheral western south coast of Europe: The Iberian Peninsula, where the survival kit for art education was created by the members of the activist art education group C3. The group C3, coordinated by Cristina Trigo and Mª Jesús Agra-Pardiñas is an educational and artistic resistance cell proposing alternative ways for research and praxis in art education. The survival kit presented in the European InSEA congress in Lisbon 2015 suggested a slow pace way of living, promoting pauses and the creation of spaces to think/feel, to slow down, to restrain, and to make. The idea to start InSEA seminars followed the same logic: we wanted to create a possibility for encounters where art educators can be together, share their practices, inspire each other, and initiate conversations by making things together. Spaciousness was the main flavor of the event - we tried to offer not only counter-narrative to linear and goal oriented passes of time, but to create fertile intervals that sometimes provoke confusion, but also can be a potential for play, creation and learning.

Furthermore, it became a common sense to claim that knowledge production is certainly not neutral - the process is instilled with norms and values, which are being passed on through academic action. It is based on epistemologies that seek to confirm western hegemonic structures (Thielsch, 2019). Within the European framework, knowledge production is taking place in the “centres of Europe” reflecting the existing imbalance of power between East and West, North and South. What is considered to be socially engaged art education among scholars is often based on Western European concepts such as relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2002) which is considered as a door-opener for community participation, collaboration and collective actions. The purposes of such efforts mirror the main European
values – participation, diversity, civic engagement and democracy, and socially engaged artistic practices are seeing as a possible catalyst for change, although sometimes being very costly and elitist projects. Furthermore, different events within the academic context are happening inside the logic of hegemonic knowledge production, and often they reproduce inequalities and confirm imaginary differences between European center and periphery. Not forgetting the relevance of symbolic realm, this is also a consequence of the huge disparity in available resources and support that academics and students receive within their context. Certainly, there are efforts to transcend those divisions by suggesting different conference fees for different countries depending on their GDPs, or offering bursaries for PhD students. Still, these measures did not manage to overcome inequalities and those events where discourses are produced and reproduced are still dominated by Western European institutions. As the organizations of the academic conferences is a very expensive endeavor, big events often take place in developed countries, making it even more unattainable to “the periphery”.

After the financial crisis hit Europe, austerity measures were introduced to Southern countries and their image was constructed as a kind of a teenager who was incapable of taking good care of the future, recklessly spending money guided by the principle of instant gratification. These European children were seen as “unable to organize their lives democratically without guidance from another” (Buden [2009] in Petrović, 2014, p. 10). The somewhat infantilized representational position, transforms these geographical areas into objects of knowledge production. “The role of the periphery is to supply data, and later to apply knowledge in the form of technology and method. The role of the metropole, as well as producing data, is to collate and process data, producing theory (including methodology) and developing applications which are later exported to the periphery” (Connell, 2014, p. 211). The Balkan region specifically is constructed as a field of study: Yugoslav studies, post-communist studies, post-conflict etc., thus making a geographical area into a research one without agency.

Other European countries can also be part of the peripheral map, specially when we talk about art education. Models of cultural agency, education and art education coming from North Europe and North America had been a great influence upon curriculum development, teacher training and research in art education. The global art education landscape is characterized by the centrality and certain invisibility of geographically marginal practices and knowledge mainly because of the dissemination of academic publications in English language in journals with high impact factor, texts that are largely distributed in universities. A rush for number of quotations and publications with ‘impact factor’ is undermining the universities; carrying out a multinational business model of distributing information. Maybe is time to start to react against the model.

Another interesting factor is related to the places and types of congresses and conferences art education researchers use to attend. Normally in universities of Northern countries with very traditional formats of displaying information such as lectures by keynote speakers, presentations by participants and some workshops. Even if in the InSEA European congresses from the last eight years we can observe a move to more dialogic formats, we still need to enlarge the focus, the scope and the places.

We urge to consider how academic praxis and intellectual work produces place and what kind of critical-creative endeavor is needed as a counter action. Therefore, we see the seminar Research and practice of socially engaged art education as a proactive response to hegemonic knowledge production as we tried to take into account social, political and geographical context of knowledge making, talking, and writing. The seminar took place in Thessaloniki with the
attempt to create space for gathering and sharing that was organized beyond regular conference logic that follows rigid structure. The model of the seminar was dialogical and non-hierarchical, including interactive sessions where everyone had an active role, workshops and performances reminded us the crucial role of the body interaction in communication. Making things together, walking together, performing together removed participants from their comfort zones of written and spoken languages creating spaces for emotional conversations. Due to the small size of the seminar the dialogue was fruitful and everyone got connected overcoming linguistic difficulties and cultural differences. In the difference we reached connections and constructed links. We were able to be attentive to the small details, to perceive the subtle varieties of art education in its many forms and contexts, without judging from the academic gaze, but trying to understand through the slow pace of making together the small nodes of collective actions.

‘As long Thessaloniki exists; everyone will have a homeland’ wrote the Byzantine scholar Nikiphoros Choumnos in 14th century. The majority of the participants came from Balkan and Mediterranean regions, but the seminar in Thessaloniki also welcomed people from some Northern European countries, Brazil and Japan. The InSEA seminar took place at a crossroads of social transformation throughout history. Since ancient time Thessaloniki invited and offered shelter to many different groups and communities that eventually flourished. As a consequence these circumstances gave prominence to the significance of its location. In our days, Thessaloniki is still a solidarity center even if it has suffered from the contemporary financial crisis. The topic and content of the seminar was a response to a contemporary need for collaboration and creative exchange in Balkan and Southern Europe in order to foster interdependence of the several communities and prevent hostility.

Why socially engaged art education?

Contemporary artists have been eliminating the boundaries between the arts and the audience, creating relational forms for human communication and knowledge construction. They opened up completely different perspectives on levels of interaction between things and people proposing diverse roles for the arts in the society and providing tools that can be most useful in educational settings involving image, sound and movement as ways of knowing and interconnecting people. Globalization phenomenon caused a sense of fragmentation, loss of social bonds and alienation in many population groups in the world. Engaged artists believe that close working relationships among artists, arts organizations, and the broader community enable better living conditions for all and create a more sustainable environment for the arts, claiming a return to a social function of the arts and a non compromised role of the artist in the society. Some cultural workers point out the need to merge art in collective experiences often performative and political. Activist movements are growing in all the continents, raising critical interventions, provoking situations and creating collective situations to raise urgent issues and polemical questions that are often hidden by the hegemonic media discourses. In its many variations, such as “relational art,” “participatory art,” “community art,” or “socially engaged art,” these manifestations often facilitate collective situations and promote greater participation and cultural agency (Emmelhainz, 2016).

Socially engaged arts education (SEAE) began as a pedagogical direction which purposes the civil engagement of participants. Whether it takes place in educational institutions or in the community, the evaluation of the projects depends on the ethical responsibility on the social concerns that the members of the action undertaken. In educational settings and especially in
public schools the aim is to shape the students’ civic role. Arts are seen as a means to enrich the experience of the participants with playful and creative ways. Yet, the interdisciplinary character of the SEAE is obvious in order to foster a dialogue and a direct social change. Whether this is only a short-term change, marking the difference with the goals of traditional politicized art, or a more enduring and influencing process, time will tell (Emmelhainz, 2013). The processes usually include collaborative and interdependent activities that make visible the individual perspectives and how the location affects the critical responses and thinking. As a consequence a sense of “community” is created through the elimination of conflicts that the SEAE evoked. Further, SEAE evokes a radical reappraisal of the modes, purposes and context of arts education. Schlemmer (2017) draws the pedagogical implications of Socially Engaged Art practice that foster a hybridized space beyond formal instructions. Art practice is encountered as an educational experience and vice versa. The critical and reflective actions as perquisites of an educational space become traits of art practices that are formed through an aesthetic process.

The participants

The seminar attracted many valuable contributions, also from other regions than the Balkan and the Mediterranean regions, but the majority of the articles submitted for this publication were from the latter. The focus on the Balkan and Southern European countries in this seminar gave space to certain topics to appear in the fertile intervals. Some might also appear in other places, others are site-specific.

Public space is seized by art education, stimulating energies and possibilities that sprout from the locations and, if needed, giving people alternatives to respond to a dominant way in which space is organized. In Czech Republic the grassroot art association Trafčka (2006-2014) initiated street art activities for young people and worked together with teachers to pass on techniques. This led to the new concept of ‘Public Pedagogy’, as noticed by Kamila Karagavrilidisová. In Serbia installations in the form of windows or portals were put in public space inviting people to paint their vision. Jelena Joksimovic explains that the aim is to express and then combine different feelings and understandings of educational practices. Vanja Zarić and other students of adult education at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade reveal that socially engaged art in liminal spaces has a great potential to initiate the transformation of individuals through the processes of participation and learning, as well as social practice and reality itself.

The senses play traditionally an important role in art education and in the Thessaloniki seminar the use of senses was stimulated in a specific way. They caused individuals to be more aware of the body and its surroundings. Antonio Félix Vico Prieto presents the idea of “turning vision into sound” which involves a technique of recording audio that reproduces the real conditions of human hearing, to show how a visual image may be transformed into a soundscape. María Lorena Cueva Ramírez presents ‘My hands tell you’, a practical proposal to work with hands, gestures and paint to get the message across. Her workshop has benefit from the cultural and linguistic diversity of the participants. Without oral language they are able to communicate messages, concepts or sensations to other people only using colors and hands. Another way of communicating without speech was developed by María-Isabel Moreno-Montoro, María Martínez-Morales and Nuria López-Pérez, in a system of body expressions. Ideograms that represent concepts are proposed in a performative act with a technical basis of action and documentary recording. Also Katia Pangrazi shows art as a common language in the project ‘Art
Lab x Kids'. The project was developed in Italy but the aim is to create a "travelling place" of creativity and knowledge, experimentation, discovery and learning through play. It is a place for educational meetings, training and collaboration. A space to develop the ability to observe with eyes and hands and to learn to experience reality with all the senses.

Myriam Romero Sánchez, reviews the dualism of standardized and real beauty and explores its socio-cultural consequences. She makes a distinction between divergent bodies and convergent bodies and then she explores those typologies with a large installation with an empty face in which the participants may temporarily transform. Melissa Lima Caminha uses embodied inquiry that is based on feminist and queer theories in order to uncover perspectives of the social construction of gender and sexuality. Combining video and photography with drawing made it possible for María de la Paz Barrios Mudarra to carry out artistic investigation of daily experience. With those means, sensations you have while doing routine actions in your house can be intensified as in the work ‘Invisible Woman’ is shown.

The artistic, nature, ecology and the social came together in new projects in Spain and Brazil. Carmen Andreu-Lara, and Rocío Arregui-Pradas describe a new Masters degree of Art at the University of Seville intertwining ecology, art and social contexts, as in the concept of ‘ecosophy’ by Guattari. The authors acknowledged the connections created by Spanish, Moroccan and Latin-American students in their curriculum. In Brazil Rosana Gonçalves da Silva also involves ecology in social contexts of learning - a tri-polar process of self-learning, learning from others and learning from the earth expressed in Poetic language to raise the principles of the Earth Charter. In a public elementary school located in Brasília she developed an experience of artistic ecoeducation/ecoformation and sensitive experience in school routine.

In Cyprus and Greece, socially engaged art education is also about war and refugees. Spyros Koutis started his artistic research dealing with war from a personal question: what is my responsibility as an artist in regard to war? With use of ‘Agonistic arts practice’, a form of arts based research, which explores the potential of art to have political impact through process of disruption, subversion, and participation, he developed socially engaged art projects-workshops related to Syrian war and refugees. He carried out the projects with children at a primary school and with young adults at the Birmingham City University.

Martha Christopoulou describes the project “depictions of a refugee’s journey” which aimed at (i) enabling primary school students to critically assess information provided by the mass media (ii) enhancing their understanding of empathy and (iii) increasing compassion and empathic behaviour towards distant strangers who face extreme circumstances in their lives. All the students that participated in this project managed to locate, identify and label the different facets of migrant-refugee crisis, in a way that was meaningful for them.

Cultural regional traditions often are defended in war contexts with different population groups. In this seminar very interesting art educational projects were organized concerning local community and cultural traditions. Maria Letsiou describes socially engaged art education (SEAE) in which the primary goal of art learning is students' involvement with the community's concerns and issues. She delineates how studio-oriented learning is enriched by the collaborative learning experience and by students' meaningful participation in the process and content of learning. Antonia Batzoglou describes practical applications of the praxis of Mythagogia: an interdisciplinary praxis that draws from mythology, the educational art of psychagogia, as defined by Socrates, and the therapeutic and reflective qualities of performative storytelling. Socrates describes psychagogia as the educational art of leading the psyche towards dialectical examination of the good. In mythagogia, myths are the tools that
enable an embodied experience and dialectical reflection of social and personal themes. Ismini Sakellariadi presents the results of a project carried out by 15-year old students of the Experimental School of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, who used art to research and communicate a new understanding of their cultural identity and history. They looked at the way the past permeates the present in various ways, studied the multicultural past of their city and discovered untold stories. They then proceeded to communicate their artwork and their findings with the wider community, hoping to help bring about change in attitudes and beliefs regarding history, identity, minorities, multicultural symbiosis, human rights and social justice.

Conclusions and recommendations

Some of the topics, or parts of them, that appeared in this seminar, could also be discussed in Western-European conferences. But the focus on Balkan and Southern-European countries shed a light to different aspects. This publication brings up so many voices, different tunes, different colors but the same concern: education through art, an approach to arts in education that although old - Herbert Read seminal book ‘Education Through Art’ was published in 1943 - is still relevant. More than ever we need to believe in the power of the arts as a tool for making collective actions, as a pedagogical strategy to enable cultural participatory skills. Maybe we are witnessing a recession of arts in schools, we see that art education is not as valued as it was in the twenty century. But through the voices and stories of this book we can look further and embrace the different places where education may be art and art may became education.

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“Depictions of a refugee’s journey”: Emphasizing empathy in the primary art curriculum
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Art Education and the art of breaking the silence
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Art Education and the art of breaking the silence

Abstract: This paper refers to a project carried out by 15-year old students of the Experimental School of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, who used Art to research and communicate their new understanding of their cultural identity and history. They looked at the way the past permeates the present in various ways, studied the multicultural past of their city and discovered untold stories. They then proceeded to communicate their artwork and their findings with the wider community, hoping to help bring about change in attitudes and beliefs regarding history, identity, minorities, multicultural symbiosis, human rights and social justice.

Keywords: multicultural symbiosis, Holocaust Education, human rights education, social justice art education.

"The very first demand on education is that there not be another Auschwitz"

Theodor Adorno

In a rapidly changing world, faced with unprecedented demographic changes, efforts are being made to foster values and behaviours that will facilitate the peaceful symbiosis of people with different religious and cultural backgrounds. The history of the city of Thessaloniki has a lot to offer, both as an example of multicultural symbiosis and as an example of the tragic outcome of religious intolerance. The silence and oblivion of the last few decades also serves to demonstrate how dominant narratives are created and cultural identities are constructed.

This paper is about a project where art was used as a tool for research and expression, as well as a means to bring about change. Students embarked on a process of discovery led by their surprise and curiosity, as they gradually found out more and more of the above, and by their wish to play an active role in shaping the future.

The project was realized in 2017-2018 with thirteen 15-year old students of the Experimental School of the University of Thessaloniki, and continued in 2018-2019 with a different class of 15-year olds (as Art is not part of the compulsory program of studies after the age of 16).
Through it students studied their own cultural identity and re-examined the dominant perception of identity in their community (‘us’ and ‘them’) by realizing its’ relativity in space and in time. This process helped students put their own social identity and history in perspective, and to reconsider attitudes and beliefs. They reached a new historical & social awareness, and gained new insights into questions of identity, minorities, multicultural symbiosis, human rights and social justice.

Founded in the 4th century B.C. by Cassander, one of the ‘diadochi’ of Alexander the Great, Thessaloniki later became the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia, and also came to have a prominent place (‘co-reigning’ city) in the Byzantine Empire. Through the years it became home to a number of ethnic and religious groups. In the 15th century, following a short period Venetian rule, it became part of the Ottoman Empire, until 1912, when it became part of the greek state. After the Jews were exiled from Spain and Portugal in 1492, Thessaloniki became a major refuge for Jews, who were already present in Thessaloniki at least since the 1st century.

Up until the early 20th century Thessaloniki was home to a number of ethnic and religious communities that lived peacefully side by side (always described interchangeably according to religious/ ethnic criteria): jewish (more or less half of the population), turkish (muslim, the second largest community), greek, bulgarian, armenian, roma, and various other communities. They retained their language, religion and traditions and were responsible for their own schools, hospitals, even banks and courts. The situation was far from ideal, but nevertheless offered a modus vivendi of co-existence based on tolerance.

What originally triggered the students’ interest in this project was their shock when they realized the original status and the fate of the Jewish community. In the 16th century the Jewish community had come to constitute more than half of the city’s population, and was one of the largest Jewish communities of the early modern world – hence the expression “Jerusalem of the Balkans” (Naar, 2013). Up until the 19th and early 20th century the Jewish community was still the largest one, constituting more or less half of the city’s population. It was an exceptional Jewish community in that, rather than being marginal or politically submissive, it was highly progressive and highly influential in the economic, social and cultural life the city (Μολυχο, 2014). However, during the Nazi rule, 96% of the city’s Jews were exterminated in the concentration camps. Moreover, their centuries’ old cemetery was destroyed, and about 350,000 dead were disinterred. The tombstones were used as building
materials at various sites, including Christian churches, and the space was to become what is now the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

All this was followed by decades of complete silence. It was only after I graduated with a distinction from the History(?) Department of the same University that I first heard about this past. My students at the Experimental School of the University of Thessaloniki did not know any of the above, and considered their living space as “predominantly Greek, since the beginning of time”. Once they found out, shock was followed by the will to bring about change. They have come to realize how dominant narratives are largely made up of gaps and silences, and what ignorance and the lack of tolerance can lead to. They wish to inform their fellow citizens and to contribute to a change in attitudes.

Within a critical pedagogy approach, then, students have been involved with alternative ways of knowing. They deconstructed the dominant narrative concerning their cultural identity and their living space. The also used art both as a research tool in the above process and as a tool for change.

The beginning of our project.

One of the main driving forces in this project was the profound impression upon the students’ souls of the film “Holocaust - Night will fall” (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3455822/?ref_=nv_sr_1), a documentary which includes extensive footage from the liberation of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in 1945. The Allies found 30,000 unburied bodies of emaciated Jewish people who had died either in the gas chambers or because of famine and exhaustion. We see how the Nazis, who by now were prisoners of war, were made to carry the bodies and bury them in an enormous mass grave. The film (which I showed to my class after the Greek Ministry of Education issued a permission for it to be shown in all schools) impressed the students profoundly and gave rise to pressing questions: “How could this have happened?” “What can be done so that it won’t happen again?”. This prompted students to learn more and more about the Holocaust—worldwide, and in their native city. They thus began to re-examine everything they knew about their identity and history and to commit themselves to the prevention of discrimination & racist crime.

The project was named “History, image-making: the past in the present” and was driven by the students’ interests and wishes, whatever this entailed. Consequently, it was not
unidirectional but developed over time according to students’ ever changing expressed needs.

Originally we set upon looking at the different ways in which the past is present in the present. We watched excerpts from the documentary “Forgiving Dr. Mengele”, (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0489707/), about Eva Kor, an Auschwitz and Dr. Mengele survivor who decides to forgive in order to move forward -while also preserving the memory of the Holocaust- though the past often haunts her, emerging in the present in unexpected ways. In ‘counterpoint’, we watched excerpts from the documentary “A song for Argyris”, (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0936485/?ref_=nv_sr_1), about a survivor of Distomo, the site of a Nazi atrocity in Greece, whereby the Nazis, as a ‘reprisal’ for a partisan attack, massacred all 218 civilians living in Distomo, a small village near Delphi. We watched Agyris Sfountouris, a Distomo survivor who witnessed the massacre as a small child, and who also transforms his trauma in constructive ways, while remaining celibate and focusing all his efforts on claiming german reparations.

We observed and discussed these different attitudes to trauma and forgiveness without expressing preference for one or the other.

Students later created artworks inspired by the above, such as this picture, showing the liberation of the Mengele twins in Auschwitz, and placing the present-day Eva Kor in the picture.
We also looked at artworks by artists who also focus on the Holocaust, such as the work of the painter and ceramicist Francine Mayran, or on other traumatic experiences, such as the photographs, sketches and drawings made by greek political prisoners who were exiled and tortured during the Junta. Students also watched a play whereby all the 20th century history of the city of Thessaloniki unfolded, including stories from the everyday life in the city, from an era when people of multiple ethnicities and religions lived side by side – prompting them, again, to reconsider all their preconceptions about their cultural identity.

At this stage students also started to collect and observe old photographs of Thessaloniki (end of 19th – beginning of the 20th century). We noted the city was enclosed in walls standing very close to our school, near the Rotunda. We also noted that the city was inhabited by people of various ethnicities and religions: women in burqas/hijabs, muslims kneeling in prayer on the street, men in turbans and in european hats, all walking along streets we still recognize.

The students’ first work was designed at the very beginning of this process, so it focused on the juxtaposition of the present with the past. Students also found pleasure in looking at ‘Then and Now’ photographs, digital composites juxtaposing past and present, e.g.


We decided to focus on Philippou street, a street close to our school which leads to the Rotunda, one of the city’s landmarks. We discovered and observed a painting and old photographs of the spot where Philippou street meets the Rotunda at various points in time throughout the 20th century: with wooden houses designed in the traditional macedonian architectural style, with cobblestones on the street, with a water seller, with a donkey etc.) We then visited that spot, photographed it and were photographed in it.

When the students originally tried to create an artwork combining these elements they had difficulties drawing, so we had the opportunity to study the rules of perspective with a particular goal in mind. Following that, they created their own drawing, based on the photographs from the early 20th century, and then proceeded to add photographs and drawings from our 2018 visit (today’s multistory buildings, a neon sign next to the Rotunda advertising online ordering of food, a car, themsevels etc.)
Taking the next step: breaking the silence

Following that, in our next visit we went one step further: we crossed the street behind the Rotunda and entered the University campus. By this time we had done all the background studies mentioned above. By now we knew that the vast space where the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki stands today, a space of about 300,000 square metres, used to be the biggest Jewish cemetery in the Mediterranean, and included about 350,000 graves. We had learnt that the Jewish religion does not allow the disinterment of the dead, and that in the 1940s the whole cemetery was destroyed, the grave materials were used as building materials in various parts of the city, while the Jewish community of the city, which used to be the largest community until the first World War, was exterminated at the concentration camps.
Not only had we learnt all the above, but we also wanted to make these facts known: if people are to learn about this past and to understand where discrimination can lead to, they will have taken a large step towards our ultimate goal: “never again”!

So, in order to create our visual messages, we visited the Rotunda again, crossed the street to the Faculty of Philosophy and to the University campus, while carrying with us old photographs of the Jewish cemetery. We used 2-3 landmarks (the Rotunda, the Faculty of Philosophy, which used to be the ‘Idadiye’ School during the Ottoman rule, and the White Tower) to locate the spot(s) from which the photograph(s) had been taken.

We focused on a photograph with a little girl in a black dress at the top side of the cemetery. The Faculty of Philosophy (the old ‘Idadiye’) can be seen at the bottom right. Starting from there, we walked uphill and placed ourselves on the same spot (below it and above it, as it is now a busy street) and recreated the photograph – including the silhouette of a man further down. Students then created works juxtaposing past and present (e.g. superimposing photos with the use of rice paper) in very limited time, in order to show that things are not always as they seem to be – there may be an untold story behind what we see.

![Image of the Rotunda and the Faculty of Philosophy](image)

Students created a number of artworks in this spirit, of which only a small portion is included in this paper.

This discovery of the city’s past, which was completely unknown to the students, helped them realize that the dominant narrative is made up of gaps and silences, as much as it is made up of statements. They were thus able to re-examine their stereotypic perception of history and of their cultural identity and to study the transition from the multi-religious and multilingual Ottoman world… to the role of Thessaloniki as a ‘bastion’ of the linguistically and ethnically homogeneous Greek 20th-century nation state (Mazower, 2006). This homogeneous city of Thessaloniki of the late 20th century, which they hitherto perceived as a ‘natural continuation’ of ancient Greek civilization, and its hitherto perceived relation with the
past, began to be re-examined in terms of an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1983). Students became aware of the omissions, the silences and the selective ‘arrangement’ of facts and events which such a construction of the past entails (Friedman, 2009).

The next step was to communicate this new understanding to the wider community, and to contribute to the effort to bring about changes in attitudes and values. Students were planning to create a documentary (and win a trip to Auschwitz!). This has proved to be difficult, as they are no longer my students (Art is not part of the compulsory program of studies for students over 15).

So, students from younger classes are taking over.

The first step was to participate in the “march of remembrance”, which takes place every March in Thessaloniki. People march silently from the Square (Plateia Eleftherias, “Freedom Square”) where the jews were gathered by the Nazis in July 1942 and subjected to degrading exercises, to the old train station from where they were deported to the concentration camps. The only slogan is “Never again” («ΠΩΤΕ ΞΑΝΑ»), written on white balloons which participants hold. Student participation was limited, for reasons concerning the school, but heartfelt.

The 2018-2019 15 year olds then visited the University campus, and filmed interviews with passers-by. They asked them if they knew what the site used to be before the University was built, and only two people knew. The students then gave the interviewees all the information
regarding the Jewish cemetery, and showed them old photographs of the site. They did this with enthusiasm and they wish to repeat it, even though they have already gathered the material they need for their documentary.

The same class also “adopted” the Holocaust memorial which now stands in the University campus. After 70 years of silence and oblivion, in 2014 a small monument was erected to preserve the memory of the existence and destruction of the old Jewish cemetery. In the five years of its’ existence, the monument has been repeatedly vandalized by strangers. The same holds true for a small monument—a piece of sculpture—which stands on the above mentioned ‘Freedom Square’.

The students “adopted” the University Holocaust memorial within the framework of a cross-city educational project called “CLIC – protect it!” whereby students ‘adopt’ and photograph a monument or other subject of interest. In this context, they photographed the Holocaust memorial, and wish to make their presence felt in case it is ever vandalized again in the future.
They are also hoping to photograph the few remaining spots in the city where one can still see the old Jewish tombstones which were used as building materials in the 40s and 50s, and use them for the documentary or whatever other artwork they create with the material they are collecting.

These activities are a small step in the direction of socially engaged art (Helguera, 2011). They are a move in the direction of social practice, though the involvement of the community is not extensive and it is still 'geared' to the production of an artwork in the traditional sense (such as a documentary or other short film).

They do, however, promote the connections between art and life through interactions in public spaces, and can be utilized to engage youth to develop an active citizenry. Also, they do involve a broader conception of both art and education that allows us to consider art in terms of social purpose rather than visual style. Socially Engaged Art Education ‘opens up’ to a new terrain of consciousness that is socially responsible and ethically sound, and goes beyond mere promotion of aesthetic quality to contribute to improved quality of life. (Schlemmer, 2017). Such activities also act as catalysts for dialogue about individual and group identity, local and national concerns, and ultimately the pursuit of democracy (Congdon et. al., 2001, quoted in Schlemmer, 2017). Focus shifts from art as a goal per se to art as a way of learning.
Together, socially engaged art and education can become transformative in nature and develop engaged citizens working for social change by integrating elements of critical consciousness development (Cipolle, 2010, quoted in Schlemmer, 2017).

Students participating in this project gained a new awareness not only of the past of their city and of their own national and cultural identity, but also of the way power operates in the construction various identities and dominant narratives, involving omissions and silences. In the spirit of critical pedagogy, they have experienced alternative ways of knowing and they are bound to be more inquisitive and critical of any official representation and to be alert to the existence of untold stories. They also have a drive to protect the rights of those who do not have a voice – the minorities/ the under-represented/ the ‘invisible’, and to act as agents for social justice and for the respect of human rights in a change-oriented framework. They have thus taken a step in the direction of transformative citizenship education, helps students to develop reflective cultural, national, regional, and global identifications and to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote social justice in communities, nations, and the world (Banks, 2008).

They have also become familiar with the inner workings of racism and religious intolerance, and are aware of the importance and the role of bystanders – hence they are more likely to take action and to encourage their fellow students and fellow citizens to take action. The USHMM (2001) states that, for secondary school students, the Holocaust is one of the most effective subjects for understanding the dynamic nature of democratic institutions, and what it means to be a responsible citizen.
It is in this sense that Education about the Holocaust (EH) may function effectively as a pillar of Global Citizenship Education (GCED) (UNESCO, 2017). GCED is a pillar of the Education 2030 Agenda and Framework for Action, notably Target 4.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals on Education, which seeks to develop students to be informed and critically literate, socially connected, respectful of diversity, and ethically responsible and engaged. An understanding of the principles of citizenship and the extreme manifestations of the abject failure of those principles may reinforce each other, as fixed points on a moral compass. (Stevick, 2018)

Education about the Holocaust is promoted throughout the world with the support of national governments and global organizations such as UNESCO and the United Nations, whose General Assembly resolution on Holocaust remembrance (60/7) encourages Member States ‘...to develop educational programmes that will inculcate future generations with the lessons of the Holocaust in order to help prevent future acts of genocide.’ (UNESCO, 2017).

Cultural globalization, as well as the scope and scale of the atrocity, help explain why we find EH in countries worldwide, as well as the global shift towards teaching about the Holocaust in human rights terms (rather than in historical terms) (Bromley & Garnett Russell, 2015). The authors summarize the bibliography on EH as a universal symbol of human rights, which can help foster civic and democratic values in society, or be a means to promote tolerance, peace, and justice and help secure the future against further violations of human rights whether based on ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability. Various studies provide evidence that EH can have both an immediate and a lasting impact on pupils’ values: students who had studied the Holocaust had stronger positive values, were more tolerant, and were more disposed to active citizenship because of their understanding of individual responsibility for racism (Maitles, 2008).
The Holocaust can be viewed as the ‘paradigmatic genocide’. It has been argued that Holocaust Education focusing on empathy for the victims may ultimately result in complacency. In line with Bertolt Brecht’s approach to empathy and action, his rejection of identification with the sufferings of the characters and focus on the understanding of their interaction with broader socioeconomic and ideological conditions, Wogenstein argues that focus should be on understanding underlying structures. ‘Perhaps the best strategy for preventing future genocides, the goal emphasized by many Holocaust education programs, is to encourage what Hannah Arendt, herself a refugee from Nazi Germany, calls “the activity of thinking,” or “the habit of examining whatever happens to come to pass or to attract attention, regardless of results and specific content”’ (Wogenstein, 2017).

Education about the Holocaust, then, can generate a profound change by cultivating critical consciousness and supporting critical reflection and a fundamental shift in students’ worldviews and/or identity, thus constituting transformative learning. A more manageable goal would be to generate small-scale transformation in the form of transformative experience, involving micro changes in students’ perspectives. An accumulation of small changes can lead to the type of transformative learning that influences student identity (Heddy & Pugh, 2015).
In the case of the city of Thessaloniki, the study of the Holocaust of the greek jews lends itself to all the above goals in multiple ways. Apart from the issues it raises regarding religious tolerance or human rights, it also poses questions regarding the very nature of national and cultural identity.

What does it mean to be greek? Is it the language? The christian orthodox religion? For the popular collective imagination, ‘greek’ and ‘jew’ are incompatible concepts, while greek collective memory seems to have obliterated the jewish presence, thus rendering jews ‘people without identity’ ‘inexistent’ members of an ‘inexistent’ community (Μόλυβο, 2014).

The 56.000 jews who perished were greek citizens, who identified themselves as greek. Questions begin to arise: why were the Thessaloniki jews “less greek” than the student’s own great grandparents, most of whom didn’t even speak greek when they arrived as refugees from Asia Minor? (Naar, 2017 & 2018).

Approaching the subject through visual arts was highly appropriate in our case, as it helped students realize this relativity in space and time. The Rotunda, a landmark of our greek city, is a Roman construction with an added minaret. Collecting, studying and drawing from paintings and photographs of its’ entrance through the years helped students understand the
present day situation (Thessaloniki as a predominantly greek, christian orthodox city) as a moment in time, which followed after a varied, ever changing past. Portraying this ‘palimpsesto’, these various moments in time in a single artwork helped students conceptualize, visualize, consolidate and communicate this new understanding.

In their artworks focusing on the destroyed jewish cemetery – now the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, they took this a step further, in the direction of activism. By juxtaposing the various temporal ‘layers’ in one artwork, the students wish to make a statement. They wish to sensitise the community to this historical reality and to the silences that surround us and that are an integral part of the dominant ‘myth’. Students are hoping not only to render the invisible (stories/ voices/ experiences) visible, but also to help reconfigure the relations that made it invisible in the first place, and thus re-conceptualize their own cultural identity and their relation to others (Bell & Desai, 2011). They hope to make the untold stories heard and to make us alert to all omissions and silences. In this way, they wish to raise critical consciousness and to help prevent similar crimes in the future.

Researchers (cf. Clyde, 1994) have emphasised the role of visual arts in providing opportunities for students to express and construct meanings that would be difficult to accomplish through writing alone. Thus, opportunities to respond through visual media are recommended for secondary students as well (Jennings, 2015).

A walk in the University campus, or the neighboring greek christian cemetery –which remained intact- will never feel the same. Having realized the role of silence and oblivion, students are hoping to play an active role in the wider community, to inform and to sensitise their fellow citizens, to raise consciousness and help bring about change in attitudes and preconceptions, to promote social justice and to help prevent such atrocities from happening again. In this process, art was used as a tool of discovery and also as a means to communicate ideas in order to bring about change.

Visual Arts Education has an important role to “raise critical consciousness, foster empathy and respect for others, build community, and motivate people to promote positive social change” (cf. N.A.E.A. Position Statement on Visual Arts Education and Social Justice [Adopted March 2015; Reviewed and Revised March 2018]). Hopefully, through this project we managed to make a small move in that direction, and managed to “enhance awareness, prompt debate, and promote social responsibility and activism” (Smilan, 2017).
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