

***ACTIVE Citizenship Projects to Enhance Pupils' Social and Civic Competences***

---

**QUALITATIVE EVALUATION  
NATIONAL REPORT  
GRECE**

Fotini Kouyoumtzaki, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki  
Aimilia Fakou, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

**Contents**

1. Introduction
2. The baseline scenario
  - 2.1. Reality and perception of civic education in the national curriculum
  - 2.1. School climate and main citizenship problems in the schools
  - 2.3. How civic education usually took place before the intervention
  - 2.4. Teachers' and pupils' real participation in school governance and other activities related to civic participation: field of active citizenship learning
3. The intervention: teacher training and the application of the toolkits and protocols – teachers' and pupils' views
  - 3.1. Training program
  - 3.2. Teachers' views on the implementation of the ACT program
  - 3.3. Pupils' views on the implementation of the ACT program
  - 3.4. Class observations
4. Conclusions

## 1. Introduction

As stated in the main documents of the program, “The qualitative investigation aims at understanding the processes at play in the construction of and changes in teachers’ behavior and strategies as well as pupils’ levels of engagement, their attitudes and their skill sets. It will complement the quantitative evaluation and provide clarification regarding the mechanisms at work in creating differences between pupils, classes and schools.” Within this scope eight schools<sup>1</sup> have been chosen to be part of the qualitative investigation (Table 1). In three schools, the program was implemented by two teachers; therefore the total number of teachers participated was 11. At first, we interviewed the principals and the teachers of the schools prior to the implementation of the program, on issues regarding citizenship education. The results of this analysis are presenting presented in section 2. In section 3, we present the results of the qualitative evaluation that conducted after the implementation of the program. In particular, teachers were asked to evaluate the training program (subsection 3a), and their experience and role during the implementation of the program (subsection 3b); focus groups with pupils have also took taken place with the purpose to evaluate pupil’s views on the program (subsection 3c), as well as, class observations (subsection 3d). The report concludes with the final section 4 where the main outcomes of the program are presented.

**Table 1. The phases of the qualitative investigation**

Qualitative investigation	Number	Period contacted
Interviews prior to the implementation	8 principals – 11 teachers	December 2018
Teachers’ evaluation of the training program	11 teachers	January 2019
Interviews after the implementation	11 teachers	May 2019
Focus groups	9 groups of pupils	May 2019
Class observations	9 class observations	March - April 2019

## 2. The baseline scenario

In this section we present principals’ and teachers’ views on citizenship education prior to the implementation of the ACT program. In particular, the individual interviews aimed to explore participants’ views regarding, among other things, school social climate, teaching practices, pupils’ engagement in the classroom and school and pupils’ relations with the community. Below we present the main results of the interviews’ analysis, which describe the “baseline scenario” before the intervention. More specifically, we deal with the following issues:

- i. Reality and perception of civic education in the national curriculum
- ii. School climate and main citizenship problems in the schools
- iii. How civic education usually took place before the intervention
- iv. Teachers’ and pupils’ real participation in school governance and other activities related to civic participation: field of active citizenship learning.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ten schools were initially planned to participate to the qualitative evaluation. However two schools withdraw during the implementation of the program. The reasons, according to the teachers, are related to time restrictions and unprecedented other school obligations.

This 'baseline scenario' will be used as a benchmark for the potential changes in pupils' citizenship competencies after the implementation of the ACT program.

### 2.1. Reality and perception of civic education in the national curriculum

**Principals' and teachers' professional profile.** Both groups of participants reported several years of experience in education; in particular, the principals had two to eight years of experience in administration and the teachers more than ten years in education. Two of the principals had taught citizenship education albeit several years earlier. Most of the teachers had studied History and Literature, Science of Home Economics and Psychology; therefore there was a variety of specialties. The majority of the participants reported limited participation in voluntary organizations or other activities related to citizenship.

**School-level perception of citizenship education.** Both the principals and the teachers believe that the **status of the civics course in the curriculum** is low. More specifically, the course is not of high importance because it is taught very few hours per week and only in the third year of high school. They also stress the importance of teaching citizenship concepts as part of other courses like literature, history, sociology etc., or that civics should be taught as an interdisciplinary course – in other words, that **citizenship education could and should be part of the school curriculum in general**. They also believe that the teaching of civics should be based more on pupils' everyday experiences and less on theories. They all agree that the knowledge derived from the course is extremely important and this should be acknowledged by everyone involved in the curriculum planning and implementation. Moreover, some teachers commented on the textbook considering it to be inappropriate and outdated. Finally, according to most of the participants, much depends on teachers' willingness to overcome the problematic content of the course and most importantly, to overcome pupils' indifference to citizenship in general.

The importance of citizenship education was also highlighted when the principals and the teachers were asked about **the school's role in the cultivation of citizenship competencies**. They believe that compared to other educational systems, Greece lags far behind concerning citizenship education; the educational legislation and system function as obstacles. To them, citizenship education is a critical goal of pedagogy in general and one of the most significant elements of children's education, especially taking into account their age. Citizenship education should be understood as lifelong learning and it should be provided through the whole school experience. It is the school's responsibility to cultivate citizenship principles and values, to prepare pupils by informing them about their rights and obligations, and to function as mediator between pupils and society; the participation in relevant programs could enhance school's potential in this respect. School is regarded as a principal agent for creating active citizens as it is the most structured *social place* and the pupils are at the proper age to acquire this kind of knowledge.

According to the participants, **citizenship education** means active engagement, cooperation, participation, communication, and sensitization to certain matters. It also means the cultivation of democratic values, attitudes, and behaviors that will make children become 'the good citizens of tomorrow'. Through this knowledge pupils should be informed, acquire the necessary skills and learn the values of responsibility, hard work and endurance. They should also learn to take initiatives, to acknowledge and respect difference, to be informed on political, legal, social, environmental and other crucial issues, to acquire knowledge and understanding of people of different cultures, different views and/or different abilities, to respect different views and

opinions, to learn that everyone has equal opportunities, to use dialogue and debate to exercise their right of free speech, to cultivate critical thinking, to find out their own limits. Citizenship education cultivates open-minded citizens and active members of the society; according to one of the teachers: “...a good citizen is the one that listens, cares, and tries hard”.

Overall the **perception** of citizenship education on school level and according to the respondents' views could be articulated as follows: *citizenship education transforms young people into 'social volunteers' who really care about other social beings, with genuine interest in society matters, who are actively engaged and who are capable and willing to be part of the society. Being a good citizen is something to be learned and this is what school is all about.* However, the **reality** of citizenship education is full of problems and obstacles due to the structure and philosophy of the Greek educational system. More specifically, the emphasis in the curriculum is put on courses that are going to be part of the national exams (like math, physics, literature etc.). This results in the low status of courses like civics (they are taught a few hours per week only to third-year high school students and by a variety of teachers' specialties). Another major obstacle, as mentioned above, is the indifference and ignorance of pupils about social and political issues. The latter is the most crucial challenge teachers and principals have to face. According to most of the respondents, children of this age need guidance and systematic work as they are considered immature, unprepared by their families, indifferent to and unaware of social and political matters; moreover, pupils do not seem to realize the significance of citizenship as a concept, and they do not have a clear understanding of the respective values. The above situation is related to the influence of family, media and other agents of socialization. In particular, as reported, parents play a key role in the cultivation of citizenship values and attitudes, as family is the first and most crucial socialization agent. Teachers stressed, however, that parents nowadays have difficulties controlling their children and their children's companions, and fail to cultivate citizenship values. This is attributed to parents' indifference, incapability, limited time and low educational level. The same is true for mass and social media, as all participants regarded them as a bad influence in this respect. In particular, the use of social media has multiple harmful effects as they turn children into passive human beings who become inured to images of violence and who do not really communicate and/or participate at any level, even though users have the illusion of communication and participation. In this sense social media endanger citizenship values and attitudes. Finally, a positive effect of children's relationships with friends and peers is considered to be the collaboration and communication opportunities they offer to children.

Even though the reality is full of obstacles, the majority of the respondents believe that children **are able to gradually build** citizenship competencies. What is needed is for these competencies to be cultivated in an appropriate environment and at the appropriate time. More specifically, in order for citizenship education to have real and long-lasting results in pupils' attitudes and behavior, several things should be done and/or change: the teaching hours per week should be increased, the course should be part of the school curriculum at all educational levels and at all grades, more programs like ACT should be running each year, along with more out-of-school activities. Pupils' participation in school decision-making processes is also considered to be an important and crucial parameter towards the cultivation of citizenship competencies. The teachers also need to attend relevant training programs and seminars, to be properly informed and to lay the basis for a better relationship with the parents of their pupils. Additionally, teachers should act as role models for their pupils; they ought to cooperate with each other, promote teamwork, and show respect for their colleagues. Several of the above changes and

actions depend on formal agents –in other words, besides the efforts of the educational staff, more work needs to be done by the official bodies as well.

### 2.1. School climate and main citizenship problems in the schools

**School environment.** The *socio-economic background* of the pupils of the participating schools, varied in terms of the social scale, meaning that most of the schools are located in middle status areas where many of the parents are educated and white-collar workers (employees in the public and private sectors). There are also schools located in low status areas where the parents are blue-collar workers or unemployed. Very few schools seem to be at the other edge of the socio-economic scale where pupils' parents possess high financial and cultural capital, are well educated and invest a lot in their children's education. Generally, the parents care about their children's education and show respect for teachers' work although there are cases occasionally where the relationship between teachers and parents seems to be difficult. Principals and teachers describe the schools' climate as generally very good: the teaching staff is well educated, active and efficient, the principals try to manage the school based on democratic principles, and almost every school has some programs running which are aimed at building children's awareness as regards various social issues.

Most of the schools have a multicultural population although the number of non-Greek pupils is not particularly high; most of these pupils are second-generation immigrants meaning that there are no serious language issues. None of the participants reported any problems concerning religious matters or any serious racist behavior from the pupils. The very few racist cases (mostly verbal) are interpreted more as humorous incidents than as clear racist violence. It seems therefore that over the course of the years Greek society has learned to co-exist with people of different cultures, nationalities, etc. and this is apparent in pupils' attitudes. And even though extreme views emerged during the Greek economic crisis, these do not seem to have reversed this process. Participants -mostly the teachers- also mention that the multicultural synthesis of the pupil population is seen as a good arena for children to exercise their communication skills with people of different cultures, nationalities and religions. It is worth mentioning that it is not the multiculturalism of the school population that seems to create problems or challenges for the teachers; on the contrary, this environment is viewed as a good opportunity for pupils to be trained in how to coexist, cooperate and work together with others regardless of differences. What mainly causes problems is the socio-economic situation of the pupils and their families – in many cases, teachers reported the low level of expectations and experiences of pupils in low-income areas and how hard it is for them to engage and motivate their pupils.

**Teaching and learning issues, as well as issues of discipline,** are not very serious, according to the participants, and they are considered manageable. In particular as regards teaching and learning problems, they reported that there are some children with learning disabilities and other forms of disorders like attention distraction. However, they believe that these issues are usually managed very well by applying the principles of inclusive education and through the cooperation of the teachers; nevertheless, they stressed the importance of school psychologists and the need for more teacher training on the specific issues. Other issues that are reported by the teachers as teaching obstacles although, as mentioned above, not very serious ones – are related to space limitations and problems with the use of technology (e.g. no internet connection, inadequate number of PCs, etc.).

Discipline problems are also not very serious – in many cases they are described as “childish” behavior. However some teachers from low economic area schools report more serious incidents. Generally, such children are very few in each school and the respondents consider their attitude to be the result of a dysfunctional family environment or, for the seventh graders, of the passage from elementary to high school. What these children seem to have in common is that they are all bad pupils, mostly boys, and again come from families that have not brought up their children properly. Generally, schools deal with all these mild problems using mediation, lenience, and punishment when necessary; they also try to put limits on pupils’ behavior and teach them to respect the school rules, and to inform and cooperate with the parents – *in short, discussion and dialogue with all parties involved.*

The **relationship** between the teachers is characterized as good; they show each other respect, they cooperate when necessary, and they encourage any initiative (e.g. school programs). As regards the relationship between teachers and pupils, they are also seen as good; obviously, there are teachers who are strict and others who have a more close relationship with their pupils. The vast majority of them, though, care about the pupils and act in their best interests.

### 2.3. How civic education usually took place before the intervention

Within the environment described above, with all the problems and limitations, teachers are called on to teach civics. How prepared do they feel they are and what kind of teaching methods and techniques are they using in order to enhance pupil’s interest and cultivate citizenship competencies? As regards the first question, most of the principals believe that teachers are adequately prepared, mainly because they are already sensitive to social and political issues rather than due to any help from the Ministry; the latter is the main reason given by the rest of the principals who claimed that teachers are not very well prepared. As far as the teachers are concerned, they express their insecurity. Most of them believe that it is more their personal effort, study and dedication to the subject than the guidance or help they get from the Ministry of Education. Moreover, while they feel qualified in theoretical terms, they also believe that it is important not to rest on previous knowledge and experience but to constantly work on new things, be updated and informed, detect pupils’ needs and work on them. Within this context teachers use various teaching practices, methods and techniques which are considered useful (i.e. dialogue, presentations, projects, active participation, learning through adults, contests). Emphasis was put on: dialogue, sharing of personal experiences and everyday examples with the purpose of making theory understandable, and on activities. Other practices mentioned were lectures, the use of technology, movies, and educational trips so as to have at first hand experience on political procedures. Group projects and presentations are also used as teaching techniques. According to a teacher: “... *I want to communicate with my pupils... For example, when I teach social problems I ask them to form teams and choose one subject that they are interested in (...), to cooperate and work on it (...) and finally to present their work in the class or in the entire school. I do this every year*”.

### 2.4. Teachers’ and pupils’ real participation in school governance and other activities related to civic participation: field of active citizenship learning

**School’s contribution to citizenship –besides the course.** In addition to the course and the pupil school committees that function as a field of active citizenship learning, there are also other activities that could contribute to the cultivation of citizenship values. Most of the schools are relatively active as regard activities related to civic participation. Most particularly, the principals

mention the various programs their schools are implementing (environmental, cultural, and other programs). They also mention that they try to cultivate the participation of teachers and pupils in school processes and activities so as to create a 'commutative spirit'. Generally, all respondents refer to various school activities: participation in programs, school celebrations, visits to out-of-school social and political structures (e.g. Parliament, municipality), volunteer activities, and theatrical productions. The above help pupils get involved with situations that go beyond the typical context of school work, help them realize their responsibilities and rights, and cultivate citizenship attitudes and behaviors. Nevertheless, all participants stress the need for more such activities. However none of the schools runs a program on citizenship education besides the ACT project. One major issue for the teachers is that their job is so overwhelming that they cannot afford to spare more time or effort for a project. They all reported limited teacher training seminars and programs on citizenship education.

Moreover, *participating schools cooperate with various other official bodies and associations*, like municipalities, NGOs, refugee hosting centers, churches, the Greek Ombudsman, the International Network for Environmental Education, the Therapy Center for Dependent Individuals, and various social welfare structures and organizations related to the rights of people with disabilities, older people or young people at risk. Schools also cooperate with other educational institutions: Universities, primary and secondary schools, schools in Greece and abroad. More or less, all teachers and principals *participate voluntarily* in various associations and/or organizations; they make donations and some offer free tutoring to poor children. Besides the above activities and collaborations, what seems to be important in the school context in terms of citizenship education is that the whole school community works in this direction. As mentioned above, the teaching staff and the principals need to act in a way that promotes active citizenship, to be responsible, collaborative, creative, informed, sensitized and open to 'otherness'. Teachers should also be trained systematically, be informed by other experts, and be provided with proper material. Indicative of the above climate schools are trying to cultivate as regards citizenship education is that all the participants, when asked, mentioned that their colleagues are always supportive of any such initiative the school undertakes; the same is true of the specific ACT program.

### **3. The intervention: teacher training and the application of the toolkits and protocols – teachers' and pupils' views**

#### **3.1. Training program**

The training program was conducted on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> of December 2018. During the two days of training the participants were introduced to the rationale of the ACT project, its framework and objectives and also to the implementation procedure. Below we will present a brief description of the training program especially in terms of the pedagogical strategies followed, the contents taught, and the type and degree of participation and involvement of the teachers receiving training.

More precisely, on day one focus was on the presentation and clarification of citizenship education and the context of the ACT program. Therefore in the first part of day 1 emphasis was placed on the program's rationale, the description of its purpose and objectives and its connection to the national curriculum. The content and rationale were specified and satisfactorily clarified and positioned in the European context. Moreover, there was extensive reference to the concept of citizenship, the skills and values that are connected with active and

democratic engagement and the need for educational interventions and changes. The technical means used were mainly PowerPoint presentations, web pages and videos. At that point teachers seemed motivated and posed questions; however, discussion was not encouraged and time given to promote teachers' inputs was limited. Moreover, a difference from module 1 was that time was not given for teachers to introduce themselves as proposed in Activity 2.

The second part was devoted to workshops. According to "Creating a trusting learning environment" the participants were randomly assigned to small groups using the steps provided in Activity 1. After that, trainers asked each member of the group to write down three ground rules and then asked the group to think and suggest three common rules for establishing a safe environment. During this activity teachers seemed motivated and engaged in the discussion. Each group announced the rules and the trainer wrote down their ideas on a chart paper. However at that point it came out that it wasn't clear what the rules were for. As it turned out, the aim was to present ground rules for discussion but this was not clarified and teachers seemed quite puzzled and some of them complained.

The next part (What a good ACT project might look like and the role of teachers and students) was held according to Module 1. Teachers viewed the proposed video ([www.ted.com/talks/kiran\\_bir\\_sethi\\_teaches\\_kids\\_to\\_take\\_charge](http://www.ted.com/talks/kiran_bir_sethi_teaches_kids_to_take_charge)) and they were asked to discuss in pairs the process of the project and the role of teachers and students. Next, trainers pose the suggested questions. Teachers are willing to participate, they express their opinions and ideas, make suggestions and remarkable comments especially on what seemed to have motivated students to participate. However, once more due to time limitations debate is not encouraged and some inputs are overlooked.

The next step, "understand citizenship as status, feeling and practice", was presented mainly with the use of PowerPoint and the proposed activities are skipped, probably due to time limitations. According to Module 1 the purpose of the next workshop ("exploring the three themes of the ACT project: social inclusion, discrimination, diversity") was to provide knowledge about the three themes so that teachers could understand their nature and implications. Participants watched the related video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AuuDQSchMZg&feature=youtu.be>) and they filled in the suggested handouts. The specific video motivated teachers to participate in dialogue and open discussion on the issue of discrimination. After that, participants are split into groups and asked to discuss a definition of social inclusion that is given to them and think to what extent they agree and what they would like to add. The next activity includes Milton J. Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. Teachers are asked to match the first four stages of Milton Bennett's schematic outline of the stages between ethno-centrism and ethno-relativism with example scenarios. The last activities are the ones suggested in the section "Identifying the citizenship dimension". According to the schedule the aim is for participants to explore some example projects. They were given handouts of two scenarios and asked to think and discuss in small groups whether they are citizenship projects, why, why not, if they would make changes and what is the teacher's role in each case. Participants seem engaged and motivated since they exchange thoughts and ideas, make proposals, listen each other and express their opinions. Activity 2 was also implemented as suggested and so participants in small groups sorted the example statements into personal, social and citizenship education and matched them with the relevant ACT theme.

The aim of the second day of the training program was to familiarize teachers with the

pedagogical techniques proposed in the ACT program in order to be able to co-construct a project with their students. The first part of the day included workshops while the second consisted mainly of presentations regarding the suggested material (such as portfolios and self-assessment boards) and the technical means such as Moodle etc.

The day started with a brief, consistent and precise presentation of the ACT program suggested for the students. After that participants were again assigned to small groups and worked basically on Lesson Plans 1 and 2. Firstly they were given the list of ten propositions / statements regarding citizenship and they were asked to sort them out depending on whether they more or less endorsed them. Teachers made some useful remarks. All groups commented that the meaning of the propositions was not clear and easy to understand and some others suggested the propositions be linked with the content of the school book. After that the trainers followed the steps of Lesson Plan 1. Teachers posed questions and asked for clarifications while some complaints about the time pressure were persistent. In our opinion teachers were given too many handouts and the activities were rapidly changing. As a result there was not enough time given to comprehension and elaboration of the content and the notion of active citizenship. Focus was mainly on the procedure and the material (mainly handouts) and not on understanding, debating and elaborating on controversial issues such as active citizenship, social inclusion, etc. and how to work on them in the classroom. This was also evident in Lesson Plan 2. Time was devoted to the explication and clarification of the handouts, with the teachers expressing difficulties and obstacles and a sense of bewilderment.

Overall, the content of the training was adequate and most of the suggested materials (presentations, videos, handouts) were used. The rationale and background of the ACT program were clarified and well displayed. The information given and material used (mainly handouts) was rich, thick and detailed. However, some of the activities that could have provided a safe environment and promoted expression and elaboration on different perspectives and ideas were skipped. Moreover the themes were rapidly changing, and time dedicated to discussion and elaboration was limited. Inputs from the teachers were not always employed, discussions on real-life examples was limited and debates were not adequately promoted and encouraged.

Below we present teachers' evaluations of the training program, and more specifically whether the sessions proceeded as expected and to what extent. This is a crucial question, as the main intervention under study is the training of teachers, which should lead to the expected changes in citizenship education and in the pupils' views and capabilities.

Before proceeding to the presentation of teachers' views on the training program, let us first present their motivations and expectations regarding participation in the ACT program and the training sessions. According to the respondents, the ACT program could be a significant supplement to the citizenship education that school offers, and could help children develop citizenship competencies; they also believe that it was significant for the pupils to be sensitized on social and political matters. The European dimension of the program (ERASMUS) has been a significant criterion for schools' involvement with the project. The teachers in particular were all willing to be part of the ACT program and they expected to improve and update their knowledge on citizenship education. As regards pupils, the teachers' goal was to make them realize that they were part of a larger community, and responsible for what happens around them, as well as to activate and motivate children towards teamwork, democratic decision-making and awareness-building in social matters.

Regarding the training program, teachers' expectations revolved around the following: to be informed about the scope and aims of the ACT program, to get new teaching techniques, methods and material, to acquire new knowledge, to update legal knowledge, to learn about innovative, participatory teaching processes, and to improve themselves as teachers of citizenship education. According to a teacher *"Firstly, I would like to understand ACT's rationale; I would like the program to provide me with practical, usable and effective tools. I imagine that the program's scope is to make a generation of people, or at least a group of children, better citizens of tomorrow. Give me the tools to accomplish it and I would be happy to contribute"*. Below we present their opinions on whether the training program fulfilled their expectations.

Generally, the teachers express positive views on the training program which they described in the following terms: *very good, well organized, sufficient, informative, necessary, (extremely) useful, inspired, significant, comprehensible, and adequate in time*. More specifically, the **positive characteristics** of the training program mentioned by the teachers are the following: the experiential dimension of the program, the detailed work on the lesson plans, the fact that it cultivated collaboration among teachers which has been considered a necessary skill if one wants to teach civics; they also learned the importance of being open-minded and tolerant. According to a teacher, *"The most positive is that it helps a teacher to see other ways to do her work as an educator. That is, to see other dimensions and at the same time to be familiarized with practices which she has never been in touch with during university studies or school experiences. And this is very important to me"*. The trainers had their own mode of presentation, and their own views which were insightful for some teachers and made them realize that they too have the right to use their own particularities to teach a subject. The training program also offered the opportunity for different people to come together, work and cooperate with each other - *"...if we can do that, so can our pupils"*. Finally, one significant dimension of the program that teachers highlighted was that in the training program there were also teachers who had already implemented the program (during its pilot phase) and that their experience had been extremely helpful to them.

However, there are some teachers who express their skepticism and insecurity on the effectiveness of the training program and the ACT program in general. To their mind, *"...it was too good to be true"*, meaning that it was difficult to implement all the theories, proposals and directions of the trainers, mostly due to time limitations and the nature of the project. According to a teacher: *"these programs are good, actually they are very good but only in words; (it is difficult) to implement them in a real school, within an actual timetable, with all these (problems)...!"*. Another teacher mentions that *"we've only got a clue"*, as the two-day training was not enough for them to be familiar with the material: mainly it was the material they received which was more helpful. According to another teacher the training made her feel anxious, stressed and insecure because she realized that the ACT program was demanding, that the time given for its implementation was not going to be enough and that it would be difficult to accomplish some of the activities. Issues that also came out and troubled teachers concerned: the structure of the training sessions. In particular one teacher claimed that there was a vast amount of information and knowledge at the beginning of the training (first day); however, without any directions on what to do with it. In other words the goals hadn't been clear from the start, so the teachers were confused during the sessions; it was only clarified by the end of the training. Other suggestions made involved the improvement of some activities, and the usage of more videos; moreover, that the teachers should be more flexible in the implementation of the program, that the program should last longer so as to have more time for analysis, and finally that it should be scheduled during school time.

### 3.2. Teachers' views on the implementation of the ACT program

In this section we present teachers' views on the implementation of the ACT program as they emerged from the final interviews.

The first question concerned the **degree** to which teachers believe that they have followed the instructions and techniques of the training. As it came out, two teachers completed all the activities; the rest of the respondents replied that they did so to a high degree. In particular they mentioned that they completed all the activities with one or two exceptions because time was extremely pressing. Some of the activities that had not been completed or implemented were the following: the out-of-school activities, the peer assessment, the use of the leaflets and the painting. Finally one teacher mentioned that she implemented the philosophy of the program as she did everything but in different order. In her own words: *"I believe that it should be implemented as it is and that we must follow the instructions and ideas of those who created the program... But we should always put ourselves in it"*.

Teachers describe their **role** during the implementation of the program, as informative, coordinative, advisory, and supplementary; they worked mostly as supervisors and less as instructors; however, they intervened whenever they judged it was necessary to do. For example, one teacher mentioned that at the beginning of each course she reviewed the material of the previous one and gave instructions on what they were going to do next. Pupils worked in groups and the teacher advised them each time she was asked to. At the end of the course the class summed up the daily work and discussed their goal for the next class. Another teacher said that at first she organized the teams and worked very closely with them, and occasionally she scheduled meetings to discuss the results of the teamwork. A different teacher mentioned that she gave her pupils plenty of instructions, material and work to do so they were too busy and involved to ask for her guidance. Finally, according to another participant, at first she informed her pupils and answered all their questions but her aim was not to intervene much (sometimes though she had to intervene and explain to them that what they had in mind was not easily implemented or that it had some unanticipated consequences). Overall, the teacher's role according to their view was mainly supplementary since most of the work had to be done by the children.

As regards the **pupils' role**, most of the teachers claimed that it was very active. In particular, some teachers characterized it as extremely significant and essential in the implementation of the program; as teachers put it: *"... the children did it all"*, *"...the pupils were the soul of the program"*. Most of the activities were pupils' ideas while in cases where more ideas were expressed, children voted. Naturally, not all children showed the same degree of involvement. Some children took it very seriously; others were somehow indifferent and suspicious. Some pupils did not like the idea of the program at first so the teacher had to explain to them that the program was not going to run at the cost of the course or that they would not have to spend more school hours; her explanations had significant results as most of the pupils then got involved with the project. Additionally, the fact that most of the children had an active role was because they realized that the teacher's part was going to be minimal so it was up to them to complete the project and they were free to work on their own as teams in an autonomous way. Finally, according to a participant, children had an active role, less during the theory part and more during the implementation part. Only one teacher mentioned that even though pupils had an active role in the implementation of the program, they would have been more active if they

had had more time. Overall, according to the teachers, children had and wanted to have an active role. The project gave them the chance to work autonomously and take initiatives, which they seem to appreciate a lot. However, there are always some children who are more cooperative, more involved, and consistent, with good intentions and interested in fulfilling a task, and some (fewer) who are not.

As mentioned above, there are always some pupils who are more involved and interested in doing school tasks and others who are not. For one teacher, this is related to the character of the child as well as to the 'class spirit' (one class could be lively and animated and another could be more silent, one class could participate more in projects and another more in dialogues). **Differences** are also due to children's idiosyncrasies; some are not very cooperative and do not know how to work with others. However, according to the same teacher, the program gave those pupils the opportunity to be part of a team and for a period of time that seemed to work well. Additionally, for the participants, the pupils who are not involved are those who show indifference to school in general. Other teachers highlighted gender differences. In particular they mentioned that girls showed more interest and consistency than boys. For another teacher, group separation caused problems at first but it was overcome during the process of the program implementation. There were always cases where some children felt that they did more work than others. Whenever there were teamwork problems teachers tried not to be very involved and let them work it out by themselves, or -in another case- they told them that they were going to be evaluated for their work, which functioned as a "threat". As the teachers said, there were only a **few children who felt excluded** from the program. In one case it was a boy who was dealing with learning disabilities and refused to be part of the project. In another case it was the boys who felt overwhelmed by the girls, and so boys felt excluded. Overall, the differences in participation, according to the teachers, is not because the children were or felt excluded by others (therefore, it is not the teachers' fault) but it is due to their own character and unwillingness to be involved.

According to the teachers, pupils **enjoyed their participation** in the program. The reasons mentioned by the teachers are the following: it was an interesting program that was different from others, and it was innovative and out of the ordinary; because the program had an action part that excited pupils; because pupils have learned how to deal with team differences and disagreements, to use arguments and dialogue, to analyze their thoughts, and to be listened to by the whole class; because pupils learned how to work by themselves, in an autonomous way; because through the program pupils offered their help to other people (e.g. the homeless), and their work became known by the local community; finally, because they realized the significance of certain matters and became more aware. For another teacher, only those pupils who were interested in the program enjoyed it. Once more, time limitations were highlighted, as one of the teachers mentioned that it would be clearer whether pupils enjoyed their participation if the program had been implemented after school hours without the restrictions of the curriculum and the time.

All teachers highlighted the **support of the principals** (and of their colleagues as well) during the implementation of the project (e.g. the principals made timetable arrangements in cases where teachers needed more time, and accompanied the class to out-of-school visits). There was no support of other out-of-school organizations, but several collaborations have been reported: with municipal social services, other high school units, special needs schools, NGOs and social welfare institutions.

The most profound **difficulty and challenge** teachers had to face was the time. They all expressed their worry and anxiety because the time given for the implementation of the program was too short to fulfill all the projects. Teachers also had difficulties in teaching children how to take over the responsibilities that follow from a specific choice and to be able to work more freely as well as to be more tolerant. On the other hand, some teachers believed that they should have had a say as regards the subject of the project because children were not in a position to choose the proper one as they could not understand the potential restrictions and problems. Pupils' irresponsibility was another issue that came out as they were not properly prepared and did not follow teachers' instructions. Overall, time limitation was the major obstacle that teachers had to face and could not overcome easily. We consider it necessary at this point to focus more on the above main difficulty teachers reported as it seems to be a major shortcoming for the effectiveness of the program. As mentioned above, for almost all the teachers, the time for the implementation of the ACT program was pressing and within this context teachers felt stressed and worried. Some thought that it would be better if they could implement it during after-school hours or if they could dedicate more school hours to it. In both cases, however, there was a chance that the pupils would have reacted; in the first case they might have refused to dedicate more time than was necessary and in the second, they would probably have complained that they wouldn't have had the chance to complete the textbook material. The following comments are indicative of the above: *"It should be implemented after 2 o'clock, so as to be loose... the program should have had a different form because it has been very stressful to us", "This whole process has been extremely time-consuming and in some cases very exhausting for the children and for me as well. I could not move on, there were cases where we had to cancel things... many of the scheduled activities could not be completed in the proper time... If the program had started in September, things probably would have functioned better... We would have completed the lesson plans by Christmas and then we could have moved on to the activities... I think time issues were detrimental to the program", "Due to time limitations I had to interfere more often than I should which is not right for the children. School time is comprised of many different activities besides the courses... At some point I wanted to quit the ACT program", "The program was OK... maybe it could be more flexible or implemented during after school hours so as to have more chances to be successful... The time was not enough. We were spending two hours each time and it was very stressful... everything has been done at the last moment."*

Teachers were asked about the **main results of the program**. Most of the participants believe that the ACT program had positive effects on pupils. In particular they mentioned the following: children enjoyed the action part of the program and the fact that their action was made known to the local community; pupils benefited through the discussions held in the class; they realized that even though they are teenagers they too can act as citizens, and they are capable of teamwork; they also realized that each one of us can contribute to the social field; they have learned to take initiatives; they practiced listening to others who have different opinions. Additionally, pupils realized that nothing can be done without ones' own work and participation. Children have also benefited from their contact with vulnerable social groups; in a particular case, as the teacher mentioned, pupils visited a school for children with disabilities and an orphanage and after their visits they seemed to have changed their views on these children; they became more aware of their situation, while some of the pupils stayed in contact with them. Pupils have learned to cooperate, negotiate and discuss. They have also learned to be tolerant and respectful of the 'other' who is different. They had the opportunity to see, at first hand, that 'different people' (e.g. children with disabilities, refugees, homeless, poor people) are not that different and that they all need to be seen and treated as normal people. Overall,

the out-of-school activities that included visits and contacts with vulnerable social groups have been of great importance in changing pupils' attitudes towards the 'different other', the 'stranger', the 'incapable'. Pupils realized that it is not shameful to be different –on the contrary, difference has a value *per se*.

For many teachers, the program's effects will be shown in the long term. In their own words: *"I believe that the results will be shown in the long term and the children are gradually going to realize what changed inside them, in their attitudes", "I can't answer right now because it takes some time to see the results of a project. I know what the children did, I know what they understood and how far they went, but I do not know how they are going to take advantage of all this"*. Only one teacher said that the program did not offer something exceptional as the children had already been familiar with teamwork and the subject they worked on. Some teachers expressed their need to be informed on the results of the program.

As regards the effects of the program on the **pupils' citizenship attitudes and behavior**, teachers' answers varied. More specifically, for some teachers the results cannot be direct and instant; changing of attitudes is a long-term process. They also claimed that pupils may have understood some of the citizenship values and ideas but they are skeptical as to whether they are going to apply them in the future. Moreover, they believe that the effectiveness of the program and the cultivation of citizenship values depend on the continuation of the project or of relevant activities in the future.

For others, the program had positive effects because pupils are going to be more prepared for the course in upper secondary education, as they have adopted new practices and new experiences on how to exercise citizenship competencies. This is true especially for those pupils who were more active during the implementation of the program; they have improved their understanding of political processes, and they have learned the joy of offering and contribution. As a teacher said *"... pupils learned that they have to do things by themselves and not wait for someone else to do them for them. And this is an active citizen to me, the one who acts, not just votes or listens... And I believe, actually I'm sure, that I have contributed to this"*. Additionally, pupils understood the meaning of multiculturalism mainly through their contact with other people. A competency that teachers also mentioned repeatedly is that through the program pupils have learned to work as a team. Finally, the fact that the school participated in a program like ACT helped pupils realize the significance of volunteering in general. Moreover, the program also gave teachers the opportunity to realize that pupils are capable of teamwork and cooperation, of expressing their own views and of taking initiatives. Teachers mentioned that the program offered them the chance to be in contact with people outside school, to learn new things, to answer their own questions, to work on their own shortcomings, and to be more organized.

The active involvement of pupils in the planning and implementation of the project are considered by most of the teachers as a **good and effective method** to enhance pupils' citizenship competencies. It is the empirical and experiential side of the coin that makes all the difference. *"The more active they get, the better results we can accomplish... It is good for them because they feel more confident to deal with society, the environment..."*, *"Whenever a pupil feels free to make his own decisions without having some authority over his head, he learns how to be an active citizen... because this is to me the real meaning of an active citizen, to be able to act"*, *"Being an active citizen means to be able to take initiatives, to discuss, to cooperate, to be encouraged, to encourage others... to know what direct democracy really is."* For other teachers,

the effectiveness of the above method depends on the group of pupils, their mentality, and whether they are suitable or not for these kinds of programs. Moreover, pupils' lack of knowledge and experience on issues like rights and duties or on democratic school processes worked as an obstacle for the program to have better outcomes. What seems to be important for the teachers is that the pupils need to be able to exercise their autonomy on many different occasions and all the time.

Most of the teachers believe that several **elements of the program** are useful and could **be applied** to many other courses –mostly those related to social sciences and humanities, and that if they had the chance they would take part in it again. Some teachers expressed their willingness to further apply the ACT program or other relevant ones, but mostly through the course of civics. This is why more teaching hours should be devoted to the civics course, to enable pupils to acquire the necessary knowledge on political matters. As a teacher mentioned, “...if you don't have the knowledge, it's pointless to act”.

Finally, a last dimension of the evaluation concerns the **communication teachers had with their colleagues from other participating schools** during the implementation of the ACT program. Most of the teachers mentioned that due to time limitations this was accomplished only with difficulty and then not very often. Nevertheless, and irrespective of the frequency and the form of communication (teleconferences, phone calls, etc.), these meetings have been helpful for some teachers.

### 3.3. Pupils' views on the implementation of the ACT program

Pupils were asked to express their views, feelings and opinions on the program; in particular they were asked, among other things, to describe the implementation of the project and their part in it, the teachers' role during the process, the effect of the program on their attributes and behavior in terms of citizenship competencies, the collaboration between the teams, and the relationships among pupils, teachers and the principal. As will be shown below, pupils' views seem to be in agreement with those expressed by the teachers regarding several parameters of the program implementation.

Generally, children described the implementation process as follows: at first they are separated into **different groups in a random way**, share ideas on the project they would like to work on and make a final decision. Most of the projects had been chosen by voting and the criterion was pupils' interest in the subject. In one case the criteria were simplicity and convenience in the implementation of the project (“*We chose this subject (bullying) because it was easier, it wouldn't need much time and it could be done inside the school so the rest of our schoolmates could participate... The other projects had more complicated ideas.*”).

After the selection of the subject, pupils **distributed the roles** for each team member –they decided who was going to be in charge (the *chairman* of the group) and who was going to be the *secretary* (keeping notes on the ongoing processes), who was going to be in charge of communication and contacts, and who were going to be the *presenters* of the work and the *timekeepers*. Each member of the group was assigned a different task (e.g. some were in charge of making the questionnaires, others their distribution, others the making of the videos, etc.) based on their interests and who the other pupils thought of as the most suitable for each role (e.g. those who had some technical knowledge in making videos were assigned the role, those who were good speakers got the role of the presenters, others were responsible for creating the

posters, etc.). In case there were two or more pupils who wanted the same part, they voted. Pupils also mentioned that taking up roles was very helpful because it organized their thoughts and actions. They all helped each other whenever it was necessary, or sometimes they mixed up “... *the groups mixed up during the project, and we worked with anybody we wanted to.*”

Finally, in most of the cases pupils **presented** their work to their schoolmates, to the other teachers and to their parents.

Below we present the subjects of the projects undertaken by the school teams, the main activities and their scope, based on pupils’ answers.

The subjects of the projects
<p>- <b>Gender roles and discrimination.</b> Pupils decided to create a questionnaire and distribute it to their schoolmates as well as to other adults they knew from their family and community. They worked on the results and they also tried to interpret the different views of males and females in their sample as regard gender roles. The project helped them realize the different perceptions people have on gender issues; moreover, they also tried to find ways to overcome or to improve the situation regarding gender inequalities.</p>
<p>- <b>Racism.</b> Pupils made short videos, and questionnaires which they distributed to their schoolmates and other adults. Then they worked on the results adding information they had gathered on the issue. They also wrote short texts and created leaflets and posters. Their purpose was to inform and sensitize other people about racism and to pass on the message that everyone is equal.</p>
<p>- <b>Refugees and inclusion.</b> Pupils made a short video, they organized a meeting with a group of refugees and they wrote a text on the issue. Their aim was to get to know these people, especially the younger ones, to learn how they feel and what their dreams are, and to make them feel welcomed; moreover, to show them that different language or skin color is of no importance and that they deserve to learn everything possible to help them adjust to the new reality they are facing.</p>
<p>- <b>Children with disabilities.</b> Pupils visited special needs schools where they talked to and played with the children. Additionally, they made leaflets which they distributed to other classes and to people in the street; they also made a questionnaire and distributed it to their schoolmates as well as to other adults, and finally they analyzed and presented the results. The aim was to get to know these children better, to know their needs, their interests, their thoughts, and their activities, and through this to inform other people who are unaware of the situation that people with disabilities face. The project was a new experience for the pupils.</p>
<p>- <b>Disability.</b> Pupils did some research on the subject of disability, and particularly on its definition, on disabled people’s rights, and on the relevant organizations. They also made a song, a PowerPoint presentation, and posters. They wanted to make a video but the teacher was concerned about the possibility of misinterpretation on the part of the viewers. The aim of the project was to sensitize other people about the issue.</p>
<p>- <b>Refugees.</b> Pupils expressed their desire to work on the issue of migration not only in Greece but as a world phenomenon; how these people are being treated by each State, what their rights are, etc. They also did a PowerPoint presentation consisting mainly of photos showing various images of refugees’ life and created a questionnaire that was distributed to their</p>

**The subjects of the projects**

schoolmates. Additionally, they interviewed the mother of one of their classmates who had this experience and videotaped it. The aim was to clarify the differences between a refugee and an immigrant and to sensitize other pupils about this matter.

- **Racism-Bullying.** Pupils initially had decided to make a video showing a boy who was supposed to have experienced bullying but the activity was not completed due to time limitations. The video was going to consist of a recreation of the bullying scene, an interview from the boy and images from the school. What is interesting in this idea is that the boy-actor was a schoolmate of different color who accepted the proposal. What they finally did was a poster and a PowerPoint on the issue of racism in general. The aim was to sensitize their schoolmates about the above issue.

- **Racism-Social discrimination.** Pupils made a questionnaire and distributed it to their schoolmates. They made paintings and they used art and literature to discuss the subject. The aim was to exchange views on the subject, to discuss the different views of their classmates, to learn more about discrimination and to sensitize others about the subject.

- **Children at risk.** Pupils searched for and visited two institutions, an orphanage and an NGO dedicated to children at risk. They tried to visit more institutions but it was difficult due to bureaucratic issues (which caused delays in the delivery of the program). After the visits they prepared individual reports on their experience and presented them. Moreover, they invited the headmaster of the first institution to talk to them on the scope and aims of the specific organization. The aim was to learn more about the difficulties many children face today, and how private and public organizations respond to these children’s needs. Additionally pupils wanted to offer their help (they gathered food) and to urge their schoolmates to be part of this effort.

- **Children with disabilities-autism.** Pupils exchanged visits with the children of a special needs school. They prepared a questionnaire and a PowerPoint presentation on the issue. The aim was to sensitize their schoolmates about the issue of disabled children.

According to most of the pupils, during the program their **teachers** acted mainly as consultants and assistants. There was only one exception where pupils mentioned that the teacher had been more intrusive than needed because the time left to complete the program was very pressing. In most cases however, teachers gave pupils directions and advice, and helped each team whenever they asked for it. The collaboration with the teachers was to a great extent successful and functional. Teachers answered their questions, agreed with their ideas or corrected the ones that had potential implementation difficulties, and generally they were very supportive of the pupils’ work. *“Our teacher has been always by our side and answered all our questions, but she did not intrude in our team to tell us what to do. I think it motivated us to be actively involved”, “Our teacher had the role of the coordinator, she reminded us of the time left, and generally she gave us advice on things that went wrong and she was mainly there to keep us in order because it was very noisy sometimes.”* Overall, teachers had a minimal role which gave pupils the opportunity to work autonomously.

Indeed, children for the most part felt **autonomous** during the process of the program implementation. Generally, they believed that they could work on their own even though occasionally they needed the teacher’s push. The teachers guided and helped them each time they were in need *“... but we tried not to make them feel tired, but to show that we could do it*

*by ourselves as a class... however, sometimes we needed them and they were there for us". Children felt that they could do their tasks on their own. "I believe that our role in the program was the most significant because our teacher did not help us, she only explained to us what to do. **We did the ACT** and this was very important."*

Generally pupils feel **satisfied** with their participation in the ACT program. They believe that they will continue to work on social issues in the future. According to a pupil: *"I think that generally, after the end of the program, all of us would like to work on other issues, not just the specific one... What I liked the most was that we cooperated and we came up with ideas on issues that we were interested in, so it was a nice experience for everybody and generally a good activity", "This program made us more humane... and more friendly to each other", "For me it was a very different experience, something I hadn't done before and something that I'm going to remember for a long time".* The program also offered the pupils the chance to get away from memorization processes and tests, and to feel free to create, be productive and express themselves; they took initiatives and tried to discover alternative ways and innovative ideas to complete their tasks.

Pupils believe that the **program** has been very useful to them and to other people to whom they communicated their work. They also feel that they have acquired **citizenship competencies** as they worked on new things, and they realized that everybody should be treated as equal regardless of their skin color, religious beliefs, and nationality. Through the program they have cultivated a 'team spirit', they have learned how to work together with other people, and they have acquired more knowledge on the subject they have worked on. Moreover, they had the chance to know their classmates better and in some cases, to form new friendships. They appreciated the chance to work as a team, to get involved in issues that most people do not. *"As soon as we voted for the subject of the project, we learned to work as a group, which we could not do earlier..., we've learned to think in a critical manner... we got interested in and sensitized about the subject", "It was like a simulation of reality because we will not always be with someone we like; you will have to cooperate with people that you don't really know. I'm surprisingly satisfied by the fact that we have managed to work with each other... I did not expect to accomplish that much."*

The projects pupils ran made them feel that they have been helpful to someone else; they felt **satisfied** because they helped other people who were in need. Moreover, through the program they realized that life can be unpredictable, which made them appreciate their own situation compared to the experiences of other people (e.g. refugees). They have also realized that the group of people they were in touch with through the project (e.g. disabled children) are no different than themselves. One major outcome of the ACT program is that it cultivated **empathy**. Pupils also managed to **overcome** their own **stereotypes**. *"Through the program which was about social discrimination, we've learned that we should also stop discriminating... ", "We have managed to control the way we stereotype other people," "We should be the first ones to change our perception in order to be able to change other people's perceptions."*

Additionally, the program has motivated pupils to be **more sensitized about social issues** and more organized when dealing with them. *"It made us more organized and motivated, and it "woke us up" to see that society has other problems and that not everything has to do with us."* Pupils felt more secure to try to do things that would improve society. They believe that the program helped them acquire a better understanding of what it means to be an active citizen. *"Now that the program is over I realized that an active citizen means someone who cares for the society he lives in, who knows the problems and who tries in any way he can to solve them, and*

*who participates in anything that could be helpful and be for the general good.” “An active citizen is not one who is just informed of the situation in his area, but the one who acts and who does everything in his power to help.” “I believe that a basic aspect of citizenship is to be informed and have an opinion on current issues. I think this is something we have accomplished.”*

Pupils **appreciated the hard work** they did for the projects; in other words they appreciated themselves, and this made them feel more secure and self-confident about what they could accomplish in general. *“What I’ll keep in my memory is the presentation we made yesterday, because I saw our work for the first time, completed; I saw all the hard work we have been doing during the past few months and I believe it was a decent outcome.” “I won’t forget the efforts we’ve made in the class for the program, the jokes we’ve shared, the work we have done all together and with our teacher.”*

Most of the pupils report that all their **classmates participated** and got involved during the project. Whenever there were any arguments they talked about them and resolved them. *“I believe that the project was an opportunity to see how responsible the others are and how they can handle the team obligations.”* Other pupils report that some of their classmates did not participate as much as they should, and that they were indifferent because they were uninterested on the subject or because they were obliged to work in their free time. *“I believe that whenever it was necessary to work on something after school, in their free time, they wouldn’t do it. They only participated during school hours.” “Some children did not help as much as others, but OK, they did some things. I mean that at first we all participated, but towards the end of the project some of us relaxed.”*

Schools in general participate in various educational programs. In this context several pupils reported they had some **experience** of small projects in elementary school or during the first two grades of high school (e.g. projects or programs on environment, on sexual orientation, on people with disabilities etc., organized by UNESCO, ERASMUS, etc.). None of the pupils reported participation in a project that is similar to the ACT program. Moreover, only a few pupils mention that they are volunteers in some organization. Overall, pupils’ participation in activities is mostly related to school initiatives and not to family or community ones.

Pupils believe that their **schools** (compared to other schools and despite minor problems) function in a democratic way where pupils have their own voices. In many cases pupils reported that the principal and the teachers discuss a number of issues with them, listen to their opinion and the pupils feel that they are active participants during decision-making processes. *“The principal listens to us; even if he is going to say “no”, he listens. He says “that is a very good proposal” but he tries to explain why we cannot do what we are asking. He explains to us, we understand him and we find a solution together”*). There are also cases where the final decisions are made by the principals and the teachers. *“Up to a point we can express our opinion, we will be listened to and understood by our teachers. However, at the end they will not include it in their decision”*.

The role of the **15-member pupil committee** is regarded by several pupils, as important and effective. In one case it was mentioned that the pupil committee’s role was very constrained, *“...there are things that we would like to do and we had them planned, but the implementation was not in our jurisdiction.”* Others believe that the committee’s role is merely formal. It consists of the popular pupils, and pupils’ voices are being ignored. *“Many times we vote for our friends and not for someone we can actually do something,”* and this why is the committees ignore

other pupil's views and opinions and, in turn, are being ignored by the principals and the teachers.

As regards the **relationships** with their teachers and schoolmates these are characterized as very good. As the pupils put it, there is mutual respect, they feel free to communicate their needs to the 15-member pupil committee and there is a very good cooperation among all parties involved (principals, teachers, pupil committee, and individual pupils). Teachers are viewed as very helpful, involved, and friendly people who try to motivate pupils. Teachers are also characterized as good professionals –they know their subject and they teach it well. In one case (of a school located in a low-income area) pupils mentioned that while overall there is a good climate, and the teachers and the principal are trying to do their best, some of their schoolmates behave disrespectfully. Another negative parameter mentioned that influences the school climate is the competition between the pupils in terms of academic success.

Many pupils mentioned that they **would not change anything** in the program, if they had the chance to do it again. *“It was an interesting program. If I had the chance I would do it again because it is nice to work like that, as a team, and try to pass on a social message (...). What is important is to communicate the message to other people.”* *“...We’ve learned to work with each other, to organize something specific, to set a goal and to achieve it.”* Other pupils mentioned that if they had the chance they would try to encourage the uninterested pupils to participate, and they would try to work more on teamwork. They would also try to find out more about the subject they had been working on, to rearrange the time schedule, or to do more things so as to sensitize the community. *“If the program had started at the beginning of the school year we would have been able to do more things”*.

We conclude this subsection with a case which is indicative of the problems that could arise during the implementation of a program like ACT, and at the same time of the unexpected and unrealized positive consequences. The pupils of the specific school reported that the project **has not been completed** because the tasks hadn't been organized very well and the teams did not have good collaboration. In their own words: *“I think that we should have been better organized from the beginning so as to complete the project, and that we should have decided on the time we would spend in each activity so as to be on schedule... The communication between the teams hasn't been very effective.”* In this particular case pupils said that they did not gain anything from the program mainly because they did not have the time to complete it. It is worth mentioning, however, that the pupils of this particular school did gain something, even if it seems that they haven't realized it. *“What we have learned is that it is hard to work in large groups and that the next time, if we were going to do it again, we would be better prepared and organized and we would have better communication with the other groups”*.

One last quote:

*“I realized that generally we stay inactive and do nothing... we only observe from afar... we don't act...But there are so many things that we can do and it is our actions that will make a better society”*

### 3.4. Class observations

The evaluation team had the opportunity to observe the implementation process, making two visits to each participating school. The data collected regarded the program setting, the physical

and human setting of the classroom, as well as the interactional setting. Below we present the main results of the analysis for each school separately.

➤ **1<sup>st</sup> High School**

The class participating in the ACT program consisted of 20 pupils, separated into five groups. Some of the pupils are immigrants with no language issues though. The project undertaken by the particular school was about racism and social discrimination. It was chosen because it consisted of multiple activities. According to the teacher, the lesson plans were followed without any changes. The tasks undertaken by each team were the following: the preparation and distribution of a questionnaire, the preparation of leaflets, the creation of a PowerPoint presentation, the selection of a video, and the writing and presentation of a theatrical performance.

The classroom used during the implementation of the program was the school's projection classroom which was relatively small but it was chosen because of the technical equipment (laptop and projector). Each of the five teams (consisting of 5 pupils) sat around two desks while the teachers wandered around discussing with the pupils whose movement around the room was minimal.

On that particular day the aim of the course was to present the tasks each team had completed and to plan the next moves. During the first 15 minutes pupils were preparing to present their work and after that teacher asked the first team to present the PowerPoint to the rest of the class. The presentation was well organized and comprehensible and it seems that pupils have understood very well the dimensions of the issue of social discrimination. After that, they presented the videos they had chosen for the final presentation. The teacher suggested that they should use subtitles for one of them or that they could make a single video consisting of extracts of all the others. Then another team shared the scenario for the play they had prepared which was based on a real incident of social discrimination in a school environment. The teacher made some remarks on the scenario, the roles and the setting.

We did not have the chance to watch how children work with each other. Our impression is that this particular class had been prepared in such a way so as to be presentable and adequate for us. Teachers generally are not particularly familiar with evaluation procedures and the presence of an outside person in their class probably caused anxiety. This might explain why pupils did not have an active role or take any initiatives: the teacher acted as a leader and the pupils followed her. Moreover, when we asked the teacher to schedule the second class observation she was hesitant and made excuses mainly related to time limitations. The possibility that our presence might negatively affect the implementation of the program led us to decide not to perform a second observation. Nevertheless, taking into consideration all the above context we strongly believe that this particular observation was not representative of the total work done by the specific class; the analysis of the teachers' and pupils' interviews support this belief.

➤ **2<sup>nd</sup> High School**

The class participating in the ACT program consisted of 20 pupils, separated into five groups. The project undertaken by the particular school was about gender roles and discrimination. This particular subject motivated children because, according to the teacher, they had a lot to discuss

and talk about. The three lesson plans were followed without any changes, but as the teacher said, ***the activities of painting and the model didn't seem to motivate pupils.***

The teacher used the class's normal classroom during the implementation of the program. The classroom was of medium size, very bright, and there were three rows of desks. The arrangement of the desks allowed pupils of each team to work together. The classroom had no technical equipment. Children remained seated throughout the whole class while the teacher moved around. The tasks undertaken by each team were the following: preparation and distribution of a questionnaire, and analysis and presentation of the results. Pupils had expressed the idea of conducting a social experiment and videotaping it but the teacher discouraged them arguing that it would not be safe.

On that particular day the aim of the course was to work out the completed questionnaires. At first the teacher distributed an uncompleted questionnaire to each team and asked them to write down the results. Then she gave them detailed instructions on how to calculate and analyze the data. She guided the pupils step by step, making clear and analytical suggestions that did not leave much room for initiatives and self-action. She moved around, and explained, supervised and answered pupils' questions. Pupils seemed to follow the teacher's instructions although they were somehow troubled by the data analysis procedure. Generally, the class was calm and silent. Finally, the degree of participation and collaboration varied among the groups as there were some members who were more active than others while when a task had been completed the members of the groups stopped to interact with each other.

***During the 2<sup>nd</sup> class observation***, a week later, there were no changes regarding how desks were arranged and where pupils sat. The teachers asked the observer whether it was necessary to do more activities and the observer told her to refer to the IEP coordinator.

The aim of the particular course was for each group to comment separately on the results of the analysis and then to discuss it in front of the whole class. Then the teacher shared the bar charts a pupil had prepared, so that the groups could discuss them. She walked through the groups and asked questions. The class was quiet. In most of the groups the discussion didn't last long. Some pupils again are more active than others, while generally there didn't seem to be much collaboration. Only two of the groups presented their comments because there had been a lot of discussion afterwards and the time was not enough for all. Pupils – mostly girls– talked a lot about gender differences in society and the changes that had occurred. It was a particularly intense discussion and pupils seemed to express their views based on their sex. The teacher interfered as little as possible. According to the observer the discussion and the arguments made were based exclusively on personal opinions, and there was no theoretical framing of the subject: as the teacher said, there wasn't going to be any such framing due to time limitations.

### ➤ ***3rd High School***

The class participating in the ACT program consisted of 21 pupils, separated initially into five groups for the preparation of project proposals and afterwards into two groups. The project undertaken was about refugees and the significance of mutual help.

The classroom used during the implementation of the program was not the normal one; instead the one with technical equipment (pc, projector and blackboard) was used, even though it was small. There were two rows of desks and each team of pupils (four children) sat in a circle. The

teacher was standing most of the time, and she occasionally asked questions. Generally there was a good climate among all participants.

On that particular day, the course dealt with the implementation of the third lesson plan, that is, the selection of the subject. ***The previous two lesson plans had been completed with minimal modifications*** (two more activities had been added on human rights because the teacher thought that pupils had a serious lack of knowledge on the issue). The teacher handed out instruction papers to each team (instead of each pupil separately) and asked them to present their proposals. Some of the proposals presented were unclear, not well organized, and with no solid argumentation. Teams proposed issues related to social discrimination and racism, bullying, sexual orientation, refugees, etc. The latter was voted to be the subject of the project because as stated by the children it was more doable, clear and interesting. However, due to time limitations, there was no elaboration on the selected proposal and no distribution of tasks.

During the presentations the teacher did not interfere much – she mostly wanted to see whether there were any questions. Her aim was more to coordinate the procedure and less to cultivate dialogue and exchange of ideas. All the pupils cooperated with each other, whereas some had been more motivated than others.

During the **2<sup>nd</sup> observation**, a week later, the course that took place in the same classroom was about the distribution of the tasks and the planning of the next steps of the project. Pupils decided to produce a questionnaire, to create a song and to prepare a presentation for the entire school. The teacher asked them to think about the process and left them on their own. The pupils didn't work in teams; instead the whole class participated in the discussion. Most of the children took part in the discussion, they expressed their opinions, and they showed respect to each other. It seemed however that there was a lack of understanding regarding the content and the substance of citizenship while there was no discussion on the social causes of discrimination or other deeper analysis.

#### ➤ **4<sup>th</sup> High School**

The class participating in the ACT program consisted of 18 pupils, separated into five groups. The project undertaken was about bullying.

The classroom used was the normal one and it had no technical equipment. The specific course regarded the implementation of the third lesson plan, that is, the selection of the subject. The first two lesson plans were completed as predicted but in less time – time had been a major problem for the teacher.

The teacher handed out instruction papers and explained the process in detail. ***She kept reminding the class about the time limitations.*** The subjects proposed included bullying, disabled children, inclusion of drug addicts, and racism. The proposals were not well prepared and organized. The emphasis was on the activities and not on the analysis and understanding of the subject as a social issue. A few interesting questions that came up (e.g. *“have you noticed that our school is not very friendly towards children with disabilities?”*) were not utilized by the teacher. Generally the children tended to mock the whole process.

After the presentation of the proposal, the class proceeded to the voting. The teacher gave instructions during the voting process and then she handed out the instruction paper and asked

the teams to prepare their ideas on the selected subject. She also asked them to cooperate with each other and to find out ways to contribute to the project.

The class made a lot of noise during the whole time and did not participate much. Pupils' reactions (verbal and non-verbal) indicated their low interest. They talked to each other on irrelevant matters; others did not talk at all, while the team whose subject had been selected claimed that they did not need any help from the others. It was obvious that the pupils didn't take the program seriously, despite the efforts of the teacher.

A week later the evaluation team conducted the second observation which was held in the same classroom. At the beginning of the course the teacher separated the pupils into four teams and assigned the tasks. Then she asked them to work on these tasks, to discuss their role and to make time schedules. Generally pupils did not seem to be satisfied during that process. Some teams completed their task too soon while members of other teams studied for an upcoming test; few pupils seemed to cooperate and be interested in their tasks. There were also some intense moments where pupils disagreed with each other and asked the teacher to intervene. The most active team was the one whose subject had been chosen; however the text they were writing was full of stereotypes, even racist views. It was obvious that pupils had a lot of misconceptions and wrong ideas. The teacher intervened trying to make them rethink their decisions but it did not seem to work.

#### ➤ **5th High School**

The class participating in the ACT program consisted of 20 pupils, separated initially into six groups for the preparation of project proposals and afterwards into two groups. The project undertaken was about refugees.

On that particular day the teacher used the lecture hall of the school, a large, bright room. The room had a projector, a pc, and a portable white table – the latter was the only material used during the course. There was also a desk close to the stage. Each team of pupils was seated in a separate row of chairs and used the stage for the presentation of their work. The teacher was seated at her desk and moved to write on the board or to hand out leaflets.

The specific course regarded the implementation of the third lesson plan, that is, the voting for and the formation of the action plan –the time was not enough though for the completion of the lesson plan. The teacher handed out evaluation sheets and gave instructions. Each team got ten sheets whereas the teacher wrote on the board the titles of the suggested action plans. Of the different proposals which regarded the issues of refugees, disabled children, and social discrimination, the pupils voted for the first one. The teams were not very well prepared, it was obvious that the pupils hadn't worked on the proposals and overall there was a low degree of motivation and participation and a relatively high degree of indifference – during the class, pupils made a lot of noise and didn't pay attention to the presentations of their classmates. The teacher had to intervene a lot reminding them of the rules and pointing out the values of respect – however, her interventions had no result.

Another significant issue that we observed is the lack of understanding of the notion of citizenship. All pupils' proposals had a philanthropical view and scope and no intention of studying and analyzing the subject in a critical manner. For the most part the discussion revolved around practical issues while many of the proposals included charity activities which are actions

that predominately reproduce social injustice and inequalities. Finally the last activity after the voting, which had to do with the motivation and encouragement of the teams whose proposals had not been selected and the enrichment of the selected action plan, also did not seem to be successful, despite the teacher's efforts. The time was pressing, the pupils looked tired and the productivity of the class was low. The class ended without the distribution of the tasks and with no new ideas on the implementation of the project selected.

**During the 2<sup>nd</sup> observation**, a week later, the classroom used was the normal classroom for the course which was relatively small; the walls and the bookshelves were empty, and there wasn't any technical equipment. The arrangement of the desks was the typical classroom arrangement of the traditional mode of teaching.

At the beginning of the course the teacher asked pupils to divide up into two groups and to rearrange the desks accordingly, a process that took plenty of time. Then she gave instructions and handed out a paper. She asked the teams to work on specific tasks based on the program's instructions. The questions were about the causes of the immigration phenomenon and the purpose of the class project. The teacher assigned a specific task to two pupils who hadn't participated much during the previous course. **Generally all pupils seemed to be more motivated and expressed interesting ideas on the subject.** However, there were still some children who didn't participate. The teacher was repeatedly giving instructions to the pupils on the tasks and the time schedule and she was also trying to remind them that their actions must not take the form of a charity. When the two groups completed their cooperation they presented their notes and ideas. The teacher had to intervene on many occasions so as to point out the need for more study and deeper knowledge on the subject. Then she instructed the teams on the second activity (the planning and distribution of the tasks) asking pupils to decide on particular tasks. Then they made a time plan and decided on the date of the final event, whereas the teacher wrote on the board the specifics of each activity. During the whole time she was trying to include the pupils who did not participate.

Overall, the teacher's role was more active than that of the pupils. Because of her constant interference, pupils seemed to be confused and to face difficulties in concentrating on their tasks. It was obvious to us that the teacher was very stressed due to time limitations and she was pushing the children.

### ➤ **6<sup>th</sup> High School**

The class participating in the ACT program consisted of 22 pupils, separated initially into four groups. The project undertaken by the particular school was about disabled children and discrimination.

The classroom used was the normal one. It was a relatively spacious and bright room, the walls were covered in pupils' paintings, and there wasn't any technical equipment. There were three rows of desks. The members of each team were sitting close to each other. The teacher was sitting at her desk during the whole course. At some point she asked two of the teams to go out in the hall and discuss the potential to work together on their assigned task. The rest of the pupils were working quietly.

The class had already completed the first three lesson plans but, as mentioned by the teacher, **they omitted the first one (Osler and Starkey's model) because the pupils had had a similar**

**experience in the past.** On that specific day the teams were about to present proposals and ideas on the implementation of the selected subject. Each team reported their work, discussed with the entire class and answered the questions posed. The aim of this process was for all pupils to be informed of the course of actions of the other teams and to be organized for the steps to follow. Each team had a different task: to organize the visit to the special needs school, to select the activities they were going to perform with the children, to create a poster and a text, and to produce questionnaires.

After the presentations, the teacher passed out a leaflet and asked pupils to comment on the problems of the action plans, as well as to think of questions that are related to the notion of citizenship and that would not insult the respondents. All the above lasted less than fifteen minutes which in our opinion did not help children get a full understanding of the teacher's intentions.

As regards the class climate, it was relatively quiet and peaceful. The intention of the teacher's questions was to make pupils think, elaborate on their ideas and spot potential difficulties in the implementation of individual action plans. She tried to encourage them to open up, to share their ideas and to make solid arguments, and at the same time to be autonomous and responsible. Her effort seemed to be successful. There were some cases though where she should have encouraged pupils to reflect more on their ideas. Generally, pupils played an active role; they seemed to be engaged in the project, they had good relationships with each other, they collaborated and made common decisions after long discussions. However, and just like other cases, not all pupils had a high degree of participation.

The **2nd observation** took place one week later in the same classroom. We did not observe any significant changes as regards teacher's and pupils' behavior, teams' organization, and class climate. During the course pupils discussed the progress of their tasks and programmed the next ones, motivated by the teacher's questions, comments and suggestions. The teacher drew pupils' attention to time restrictions. On the whole, pupils were encouraged to work autonomously and cooperatively. However, as seen in the first observation of this class and of other classes as well, not all pupils showed interest and participated to the process.

### ➤ **7th High School**

The one class (C1) participating in the ACT program consisted of 17 pupils, separated initially into four groups. The particular course was on social movements. The classroom was medium in size, there were three rows of desks and the only teaching equipment was the blackboard.

At the beginning of the class the teacher asked pupils to sit in groups, and to do so they had to move the desks. Then the teacher handed out a questionnaire which had been prepared by the pupils with the assistance of the IT teacher. They did not use the textbook for the creation of the questionnaire as it wasn't useful to them. The pupils were supposed to complete the questionnaire at home and bring it back for the next class. After the distribution of the questionnaire the teacher read a text related to social problems and then asked children about the causes of the social problems. At the end of the course she asked them to choose a specific social problem and work on it individually or in groups. Pupils' participation was active; the teacher gave them a lot of opportunities to work autonomously and the children were quiet and cooperative.

The second class (C2) of the school consisted of 18 pupils. The classroom was medium in size and bright and the only teaching equipment was the blackboard. The content of the course we observed was on social problems. At the beginning of the course, two pupils of the previous class C1 handed out a questionnaire and gave instructions. After that the teacher continued the lecture and at the end, she gave instructions on an assignment relating to social problems. The low degree of pupils' participation and interest negatively affected the teacher's work.

➤ **8<sup>th</sup> High School (class 1)**

The pupils of the class participating in the ACT program were separated into six groups. **The class didn't follow the standard procedure for the choice of the subject**; instead each team had to work on a different dimension of the thematic unit of cultural heterogeneity. This probably affected the implementation of the program. Nevertheless, we present in short the data from the class observation, keeping in mind the inaccuracy of the process.

According to the teacher, three lesson plans had been completed without changes or difficulties. At the beginning of the course, the groups of pupils discussed their tasks. The teacher intervened only to tell them to be quiet. We approached the groups and asked them about their different subjects (religious fanaticism and its consequences for education, politics and arts – multiculturalism – women's social status – common characteristics of ancient civilizations). Their tasks included finding information, creating posters, collages and texts, and making videos and PowerPoints. The different themes and the single tasks assigned to each team show that in this particular case the ACT program was not implemented according to the instructions. It is obvious that there was a misunderstanding on the part of the teacher, even though based on the teacher's and the pupils' interviews the experience and the outcomes of the program were, for the most part, positive in many respects.

➤ **8<sup>th</sup> High School (class 2)**

In this particular case, a long telephone communication preceded our visit to the class. The teacher has been particularly troubled about whether she was going to continue the implementation of the program. The reasons she mentioned regarded the limited support from those in charge of the program, the fact that she had limited flexibility for the implementation of the program, and disagreement with the children on the subject of the project. She also had to intervene all the time so as to make pupils understand the dimensions and the requirements of the program. Moreover, she mentioned that children decided to take up a new activity without asking or consulting her. To resolve this situation she asked pupils to vote on whether they wanted the program to continue and on the project they were going to run. It seems therefore that the cooperation between the teacher and the pupils had many difficulties. During our visit we realized that children seemed to be prepared for the class observation and that the teacher had a lot of stress, and once more we decided not to proceed to a second observation. Nevertheless, we present in short the data from the class observation, keeping in mind the above-mentioned difficulties.

There were four groups of pupils working on the subject of gender roles. According to the teacher, the three first lesson plans had been completed. The only change made was that the teacher had asked the children to prepare a text along with the painting activity. During our visit, pupils reviewed their work; two of the teams had been working on PowerPoint presentations and the other two on posters. It was obvious that pupils had acquired a good understanding of

the process and the goals of the program. Additionally, the presentations were very well organized and structured, indicating that pupils had acquired a deep knowledge of the subject. The paintings also were rich in content and covered a variety of dimensions.

#### 4. Conclusions

The above analysis of teachers' and pupils' perceptions and practices on citizenship education, as well as on the results of the ACT program, shows that generally the program has been worked out quite well despite the already existing problems of the course and the educational system in general (i), the time limitations for the implementation of the specific program (ii), as well as the fact that it was a first-time experience for the teachers and the pupils (iii). It is important to note, however, that teachers' and pupil's views have been, for the most part, in accordance with each other regarding the benefits of the program as well as the problems during the implementation, whereas class observations have brought to light mainly the problematic aspects of the program implementation. Below we present, in short, the main outcomes of the analysis:

- Citizenship education *is perceived* as an education that transforms young people into 'social volunteers' who really care about other social beings, with genuine interest in societal issues, who are actively engaged and who are capable and willing to be part of the society. Being a good citizen is something to be learned and this is what school is all about. However, the *reality* is full of problems and obstacles due to the structure of the curriculum and the indifference and ignorance of pupils on social and political issues, which is one of the most crucial challenges teachers and principals have to face. On the whole though it is believed that children *are able to gradually build* citizenship competencies in an appropriate environment and at the appropriate time: school could and ought to be that environment! As most of the participants (principals, teachers and pupils) made clear, schools try their best to function in a democratic way and pupils are allowed to have their own voices. The ACT program seems to work towards the enhancement of this democratic culture. More specifically:
- Based on teachers' views, the ACT program has been beneficial for the children, and it has cultivated citizenship behavior and attitudes, despite the difficulties reported. In particular, children have learned to cooperate, negotiate, discuss, and be tolerant and respectful of the 'other'; they have also learned to take initiatives, to listen to others who have different opinions, and they have realized that nothing can be done without one's own work and participation. Finally, teachers believe that the program will have long-lasting results.
- As regards pupils' views, they seem to be in agreement with those expressed by the teachers regarding several parameters of the program. Besides the competencies mentioned in the previous paragraph, pupils particularly stressed that through the ACT program they have learned to work *as a team*, to work *autonomously* (as the teachers acted mainly as consultants and assistants), to cultivate *empathy* and to *overcome* their own *stereotypes*.
- What seemed to be the most problematic part of the project was the limited amount of time that had been dedicated to its implementation, which caused anxiety to both teachers and pupils and prevented the completion of some activities. A second

significant issue that came up regarded the low degree of some pupils' participation which was due to children's indifference to the subject selected or to the program, or even to education as a whole. Moreover, some teachers expressed their skepticism whether pupils are going to apply citizenship competencies in the future, whereas they believe that the effectiveness of the program depends on the continuation of relevant activities. Pupils, too, refer to time limitation issues and to the fact that not all of their classmates participated as they were supposed to.

- Class observations verified the positive as well as the negative aspects of the program. There were cases where both teachers and students were very much engaged to the program and the pupils demonstrated various citizenship competencies (collaboration, autonomy, respect, empathy, etc.), but there were also several other cases indicative of the above problematic aspects of the program. More particularly, class observations drew attention to the way time limitations had caused stress and anxiety to teachers, and to the fact that the degree of participation and collaboration varied among the groups of pupils as there were some members who were more active than others. Finally, another issue that emerged through the observations concerns the structure and the content of pupils' tasks which in some cases were not well prepared, organized and comprehensible, and they lacked a theoretical basis; they are based mostly on personal experiences, views and opinions. And while most of the teachers were trying to make pupils think critically, elaborate on their ideas, share their thoughts and make solid arguments, not all students met their teachers' expectations.

Overall, the ACT program worked as an incentive for both teachers and pupils to get involved and play an active part. Based on all the above it seems that the program has been quite successful in enhancing participating pupils' democratic engagement, improving their levels of tolerance and inclusion, and building up their civic skills. However, in order for the program **to have better results**, more time should be dedicated and more assistance should be given by the people in charge of the program. Additionally, a more systematic communication among all schools involved in the program during its implementation would have been of great importance as it would have allowed principals, teachers and pupils to exchange their experience, knowledge and expertise on the implementation and the outcomes of the program. Finally, in order for the program to have a further meaning for the participants, they should be informed on the results so as to realize the benefits these kinds of actions could have for the whole school community, as well as to reflect on their own work and make the appropriate changes and improvements.