

Engaging VET students in democracy through aesthetic experience

Greece

<https://www.gsvetlly.minedu.gov.gr/>

DESCRIPTION

The project “The utilisation of the aesthetic experience with the scope of raising students’ democratic awareness” was part of both the European Year of Youth 2022 national campaign and the national “Democracy Here | Democracy Now” youth campaign. 11 students of the 3rd class of the Vocational High School of Neapolis, Lassithi, Crete, took part in the activity.

This educational initiative aimed to **encourage students to think critically about democratic decision-making processes through the observation of high aesthetic value artworks**, specifically *The Round Table*, a sculpture by Chen Zhen for the 50th year anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A scale model of the sculpture was placed at the entrance of the school as a focal point for reflection.

The initiative took place in 3 phases:

- In the first phase, **students critically reflected** on topics such as **democratic decision-making, group participation, responsibilities, and rights**.
- In the second phase, students from the Department of Structural Projects and Geoinformatics Technicians constructed a **miniature model of the sculpture**, which was **placed in a central area of the school** to serve as a **prompt for critical thinking**.
- In the third phase, other classes, inspired by the artwork, **discussed its significance and redefined the concept of democracy in school decision-making**. This phase was completed in November 2022 with a reflection on the activity’s impact, supported by responses to an online questionnaire completed by students from all classes, designed by the coordinating teachers of the project.

REFLECTION

Through democratic dialogue, commitment and cooperation are fostered, with each participant playing a crucial role and sharing responsibility. The involvement of many and diverse minds bring creative and valuable ideas to the table with diversity seen as an asset rather than problem.

Everyone’s ideas are taken into consideration, and even when consensus is not reached, the **entire process of communication and decision-making remains constructive** and opens the way to **new perspectives**.

This initiative can be considered highly successful as it **engaged and motivated young students from a local VET school in a rural area** to participate and reflect critically on democratic values, inspiring broader impact and reach.

IMPACT

The responses collected during the third phase of the project showed that **95% of the students experienced a shift in their own views** and students also noted a shift in the perceptions of their peers **regarding democratic dialogue**. They reported that the initiative made them question their initial assumptions and reflect on the meaning of democratic dialogue itself.