



Trial positioning of an orthostate block in the Parthenon's west pediment. Photo K. Karanasos, 2021

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Inclusion activities of the Acropolis Restoration Service for students with disabilities

YSMA's Department of Information and Education started designing and implementing activities for students with disabilities as far back as 1991. The central theme of all the activities is the Acropolis, its history, its monuments, and the recently conducted restoration works. A thorough presentation of previous activities can be found in the book "Acropolis and Education", published by the Acropolis Restoration Service (YSMA), and also in the Repository of the Acropolis Education Resources (http://repository.acropolis-education.gr/acr_edu/), where all the relevant previous school projects carried out in collaboration with Special Education Schools are posted.

What follows is a brief presentation of the educational programmes implemented in the recent years and designed for groups of students who have different types of disability problems. These are diverse groups that differ according to the type of disability (visual, hearing, mental, mobility), its severity (mild, moderate, marked) and its extent (total, partial, permanent, or temporary), and also groups where various types of disabilities co-exist (multiple disabilities). Yet, what all these students share and face is the existing barriers to their access and participation in various social sectors and public goods. What is revealed in this context is the multidimensional role of cultural institutions that ought to be "open" to all citizens by including in their activities the philosophy of universal design or design for all. The aim of such planning is to allow a much broader range of people to have the highest possible access to these areas limiting the need for subsequent adjustments. Undoubtedly, knowing the specific characteristics and needs of every group that visits the monuments is necessary during the development of every activity of educational or communicative character. However, in order to have the intended results, people with disabilities should be approached not only as disabled, but also as different.

In this context, the educational objectives of the Department focus on the

fact that students with disabilities should have equal access to cultural goods and be included in the audience of cultural sites. In addition, their daily school life and the teaching practices must be enriched with new incentives that can facilitate the perception and understanding of various concepts. Furthermore, what can help the students further develop their social skills is the development of new attitudes and behaviours such as self-esteem, strengthening the relations between the students and developing alternative means of communication.

In order to achieve these goals, the Department has worked together with the teachers of the students to identify and exploit suitable educational tools and the necessary supplementary materials. The children are provided with simplified information paying attention to its quality and quantity while the vocabulary is also adapted. Moreover, objects are added to assist tactile examination, and audio stories or other visual teaching aids, depending on the group, can strengthen the experiential character of the visit and contribute to

the attainment of the educational and museum objectives.

Over the years these activities have been designed and implemented by the Department either at the students' schools, or at the Centre for the Acropolis Studies during the earlier years; and since 2009 at the Acropolis Museum. In 2017, such an activity was carried out at the Acropolis Museum for students of the 4th and 5th grade from Kallithea's Special Primary School for the Blind. The students were partially sighted or had only peripheral vision. The programme was organised in collaboration with the 4th Athens Directorate of Primary Education and the Acropolis Museum. The students visited at first the educational centre of the Acropolis Museum where they examined various three-dimensional objects such as models and sculpture copies, and then, using their imagination, reconstructed the magnificent temple where the Athenians worshipped their patron goddess. The children's experience concluded with their tour in the Parthenon Gallery, where the partially sighted students had the opportunity



*Educational programme for Kallithea's Special Primary School for the Blind.
Photo T. Souvlakis, 2017*

to realise the size of the temple and the richness of its sculptures.

Another educational activity for children with sensory impairments was organised in 2021 at the Acropolis Museum and targeted students of the 3rd grade of Argyroupolis Primary Special School for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Its theme was “Olympian riddles: searching for the ancient gods in the Acropolis Museum”. The students were looking for the ancient Olympian gods in the exhibits of the Acropolis Museum with the help of visual material relevant to the characteristics, myths, and favourite symbols of the gods. The oral language used was simple and brief as the schoolteachers had to translate it into sign language. What helped this “transcription” of the oral language was the fact that the students had the opportunity to examine a small number of tactile materials and also take part in motor activities and games.

During the school year 2022-23 the Department designed and implemented for the first time at the archaeological site of the Acropolis educational programmes for students with reduced mobility. This had become possible after installing the new slope lift and constructing new walkways for the visitors of the Acropolis Rock, limiting as such the existing obstacles for physical access for all. Many special schools were thus able to express their wish to exploit this opportunity for their students, who could not until then visit the monuments except through their schoolbooks or virtual tours. The students who participated in these specific programmes came from the Special Secondary School-Lyceum of Ilioupolis and from the Special Comprehensive Vocational Secondary School-Lyceum of Agios Dimitrios. The difficulties of those students were not of sensory nature, but included mild learning and behavioural disabilities, mental retardation, autism spectrum disorders, and (in the case of the school at Ilioupolis) reduced mobility problems.

All educational activities should be carefully planned and designed start-



Educational programme for the Argyroupolis Primary Special School for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Photo T. Souvlakis, 2021

ing with the synergy of two bodies – a cultural organisation and a school. This is a sheer necessity for students with disabilities. Thus, in the case of the educational programmes for these two Special Schools there was a collaboration with the teachers from the beginning in order to decide on the subject of the programme, the school class and the number of the participating students. The Department suggested that the students should be prepared in advance by looking into its educational material relevant to the theme of the specific visit. In addition, the teachers from the school met the archaeologists of the Department at the archaeological site beforehand to identify the route the students would follow on the Rock, the areas where they would stop and the duration of the activity.

In the first educational programme the participant students were 12 from the 1st grade of the Agios Dimitrios School, while in the second 13 students from the 1st and 3rd grade of the Ilioupolis Lyceum. In both cases the students were divided in two smaller groups that were accompanied by a large number of teachers. In cases where students used wheelchairs there was a teacher for every student. Moreover, two archaeologists-museum educators accompanied each group. During the tour the students saw the four more important

monuments of the Acropolis, starting from the Erechtheion, then the Propylaia, the Temple of Athena Nike, and finally the Parthenon. Using printed material (posters and leaflets) and also small copies of columns of the three orders that they could examine on the spot and answering simple questions through a guided dialogue the students discovered the function of each building, and recognized the different architectural orders. They were particularly impressed by the size of the monuments, asked many questions about the restoration works and were really enthusiastic with the modern equipment, the cranes and other machinery they saw at the site. Moreover, they were really interested in both the original shape of the monuments and in how they will look when the restorations are completed. What also fascinated them was the very large number of visitors and the fact that all those people had come from so many different countries.

The students from the General Lyceum of Ilioupolis were so happy and satisfied that after the completion of the programme they asked for another visit, this time at the Acropolis Museum. However, due to the limited time until the end of the school year, the teachers took the decision to accompany students from the 2nd grade of Secondary



*Educational programme for Special Secondary School-Lyceum of Ilioupolis.
Photo T. Souvlakis, 2021*

School, who similarly faced learning, behavioural and mental difficulties, autism spectrum disorders and reduced mobility problems. Yet, they eagerly wanted to participate in the programme. Since during that period there is a large number of visitors in the Museum, something that may have caused difficulties to the students' tour, we were led to opt for an educational programme that would be conducted only on the third floor, in the Parthenon Gallery. The topic was "The Parthenon sculptures. Six short stories of separation". With the help of a leaflet, the students tried to discover six famous sculptures that have been separated in Athens and the British Museum, learnt the story of their removal and what themes they depict, observed their details and tried to act out in pantomime scenes from them. In the workshop that followed, when the students visited the Educational Centre of the Museum and saw the buildings created by other students, inspired by the Acropolis monuments and made up from Lego bricks, they were so enthusiastic that we ended up changing the programmed educational workshop; it was an activity where they would have to describe by paintings and words the feelings a student could have from the separation of the Parthenon marbles. As all educational activities should be flexible

and allow for improvisations and alterations of the initial programme, we therefore decided to divide the children in small groups and let them make their own Lego constructions.

After completing these two educational programmes on the Acropolis we carried out a limited research to evaluate them. Its aim was to examine wheth-

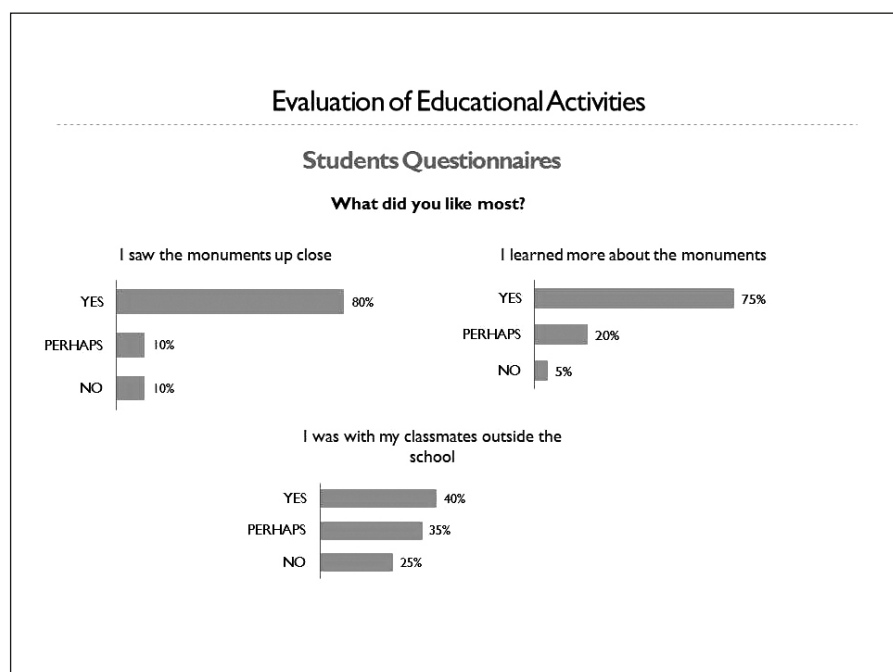
er the goals of the educational programme were achieved, to investigate the students' and teachers' experience and record their comments and suggestions for similar future programmes.

The research tools were two questionnaires, one for the teachers and one for the students, containing open and closed questions. The questionnaires were given at the end of the visit in order to be completed at the schools; thus, the students and teachers could have enough time to answer, and the students could ask for help and support when needed. The main questions were the following:

- What was their previous experience from similar visits?
- What were the students and the teachers' expectations?
- What were their impressions from the visit?
- Which qualitative characteristics of the programme did they find successful?

In total 29 questionnaires were completed, 20 from students and 9 from teachers.

The results of the analysis showed that only 7 students (35%) had visited the



A graph from the students' evaluation – "What did you like most?"

Acropolis before the day of the educational programme, whereas the remaining 13 (65%) had not. It must be noted here that from the school whose students had mobility problems only one had previously visited the Acropolis.

Responding to the question whether they liked the educational programme 70% said that they liked it a lot or very much. All students with mobility difficulties who have never gone to the Acropolis before are part of this percentage.

Answering the question relevant to what they liked most, the majority said that it was their actual visit to the monuments (80%) and then that they had the chance to learn more about them (75%). Fewer students (40%) said that they liked being outside the school with their classmates, while some said that they liked the elevator and the guided tour. Generally, it seems that they enjoyed the programme and that it met their expectations.

Most students expressed their happiness (80%) for being able to see the

monuments on the Acropolis, and also their enthusiasm (80%) to see the city from above after using the elevator. On the other hand, half the students (50%) said that having to move on the Acropolis had caused them some concern, yet, it was quite surprising to hear that the large number of visitors did not make any of them uncomfortable.

Looking into the responses of the teachers to the question referring to what they believe the specific programme offers to their students, the most common and expected answer was their chance to physically visit the monuments (89%) and the next most common answer (76%) was that it enriched their knowledge. These answers coincide exactly with those of the students. The third most common answer is entertainment (67%), while 45% of them said that the visit increased the awareness of the children towards matters concerning the protection of the monuments.

Discussing the whole experience and specifically what the visit meant to the children, most of the teachers said that they were impressed and happy

and that they would like to come back, whereas no-one mentioned that they got tired or bored.

Finally, evaluating these programmes we can certainly conclude that the initial objectives, of both the schools and the Department, have been mainly achieved and the collaboration of the two bodies was quite successful. At the same time, we were able to identify some factors that should be further considered when organizing similar activities in the future. It is therefore clear that YSMA's Department of Information and Education responding to the multifaceted demands of the modern era develops outreach educational activities addressed to a heterogeneous audience with diverse needs and expectations; an audience that claims for equal access to all cultural goods and for its active involvement in cultural life and the learning process.

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Archaeologist

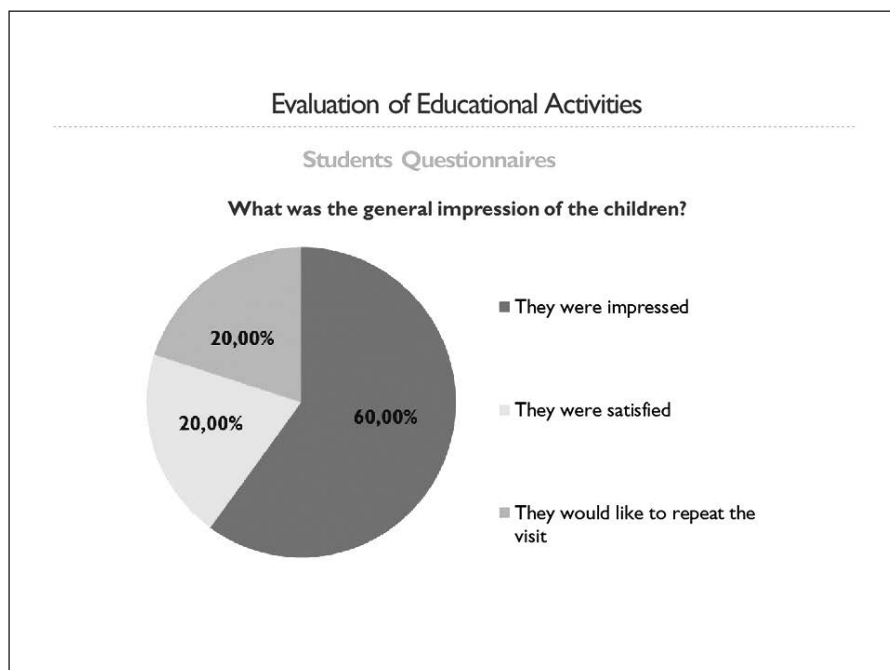
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* Translation by A-M.H.

** The following articles were used in the text: X. Κανάρη (2020) «Θεωρητικές αρχές σχεδιασμού και εφαρμογές διαφοροποιημένων εκπαιδευτικών προγραμμάτων σε μουσεία για άτομα με αναπηρία», *Επιστήμες της Αγωγής*, 1: 149-170 and B. Αργυρόπουλος – Σ. Κατσαντώνη (2020) «Μουσεία, καθολικός σχεδιασμός και άτομα με αναπηρία όρασης: μια οικολογική προσέγγιση», *Πολιτισμός για όλους. Μουσεία χωρίς αποκλεισμούς (Αθήνα)* 1-9.



A graph from the teachers' evaluation presenting the students' impressions



*Walking up the West Ascent during a guided tour of the Acropolis in the context of the 7th International Meeting for the Restoration of the Acropolis Monuments.
Photo T. Souvlakis, 2021*



*Visiting the Parthenon during a guided tour of the Acropolis in the context of the 7th International Meeting for the Restoration of the Acropolis Monuments.
Photo T. Souvlakis, 2021*

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