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Ecumenical Patriarchate



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ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
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Actions of Environmental Awareness in the 19th High School (Marasleion): Instilling the Principles of Sustainable Development in Tomorrow's Active Citizens

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Since the middle of the 20th c., the need for changing the human's attitude towards nature has been a real necessity. This could be achieved through a course that would be more compatible with the natural rhythms of ecosystems and less conflicting with the natural environment. Therefore, one of the basic elements of the new culture which has since then emerged, is the redefinition of our relationship with nature. Since the 1960's and 1970's through environmental education and since 1990's through sustainable education, the terms "Sustainability" and "Sustainable Development" not only have become the core of the changes developing in environmental pedagogy, but also a strategy for educational reformations.

Education has been recognized as one of the basic tools in order to achieve sustainability and create a sustainable world through the cultivation of a new environmental culture, knowledge, skills, values and attitudes.

Therefore the actions of environmental awareness in the Maraslio-19th Junior High School of Thessaloniki are materialized within this context. Each academic year, one to two environmental teams are organized, dealing with an urban or non-urban environmental issue, in an experiential and exploratory way and through teamwork. The teams include also students with special learning difficulties, such as autism and Asperger syndrome as well as financial migrants and refugees. The environmental teams participate in local and national thematic educational networks for the environment and sustainability. They take part in educational and teaching visits to forests, wetlands, national parks, caves, lakes and rivers. They observe the flora and fauna as well as the architectural monuments, which are harmoniously integrated into the environment. They visit Environmental Education centres and they organize programs themselves. They also present their projects through videos, power points, posters, dances, songs and paintings at Environmental Program festivals and Students' Environmental conferences. The members of the environmental groups are encouraged and guided by their teachers, who take over the implementation of the program and co-operate with the Municipality, with other schools and even with the High Commission.

The actions of the environmental teams were not hindered by the pandemic during the difficult school year 2020-2021, as there has been a collaboration with the "Patriarchal Foundation for Patriarchal Studies", for the creation of a book park at the school, as well as for the students' paintings inclusion, in the exhibition "Nature in Art. The Case of a Byzantine Manuscript". The exhibition was co-organized by the Patriarchal Foundation for Patristic Studies and the European Center for Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Monument and took place in the Patriarchal Stavropegic Monastery of Vatopedi in Thessaloniki and a lot of students took part in these with their paintings inspired by the illuminations of the manuscript.

Through all these actions, our students, as tomorrow's active citizens, have experienced the environmental sensitivity as a way of life, according to the Orthodox theology and life, which proclaims that the whole world has been created for the human being.