

Youth Assemblies on Climate Change with the participation of high school and university students

"Shaping a Green Deal for Athens"

A few words about the Youth Assemblies

Youth Assemblies on Climate Change are experiential learning activities, part of the **ARSINOE** project funded by the European Commission (Horizon 2020). The project seeks, inter alia, to bring scientific knowledge closer to society, to encourage the involvement of stakeholder groups and citizens in the process of enhancing resilience to climate change through holistic approaches and the promotion of innovation. The project involves 41 partners from 15 different countries and is coordinated by the University of Thessaly, Greece. With the organization of Assemblies for high school and university students, the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) seeks to open new channels of communication with the young generation, which must not only be heard more when it comes to climate change, but also has to have a say in decisions which, ultimately, concern its own future.

The first Assemblies were organized online on 5 & 6 May (University Students Assembly) and 12 & 13 May 2022 (High School Students Assembly), respectively. Students from the wider Athens metropolitan area were invited to map the challenges pertaining to their neighbourhoods, to discuss with their peers from other neighbourhoods and to propose solutions.

Specifically, participants measured their carbon footprint and recorded the vulnerability of their area, as well as existing measures to tackle climate change and adapt to its inevitable effects. They also proposed specific actions, negotiated and concluded through a structured dialogue on policy proposals for a Green Deal for the Municipality of Athens and for the Metropolitan Area of Athens (Local & Regional Green Deal).

The students who participated in the Youth Assemblies enthusiastically presented their proposals, which highlighted how they themselves experience climate change in the areas where they live in. In fact, they pointed out the specificities of the different neighbourhoods of Athens in terms of their vulnerability to the effects of climate change, which must be taken into account when taking measures.

A Green Deal for the Municipality of Athens

The university students of Athens propose...

In their conclusions the university students emphasize the need for *the city of Athens to move to climate neutrality*, proposing specific measures, such as providing incentives for the design of bioclimatic buildings, the installation of photovoltaic systems in buildings for their energy autonomy, energy upgrades for buildings, use of photovoltaic systems in public transportation and the installation of "smart" lamps for lighting public spaces. They highlight the fact that in order for citizens to leave their cars parked, it is necessary to increase public transportation services and extend their opening hours, as well as to raise the awareness of young people for using public transport instead of private cars.



The *green regeneration of Athens* is deemed to be of vital importance by the university students. To that end, they consider that radical measures should be taken immediately, such as identifying and expropriating unused/abandoned plots of land for the creation of parks, preferably in the densely populated districts of Athens, after increasing the budget of the Municipality for this purpose. Equally important for the students is the provision of financial incentives to the residents of Athens for the creation of green spaces on the rooftops of apartment buildings.

Students also strongly support *recycling* and point out the *need to adopt a modern waste management system* based on the basic principles of recycling (more dumpsters, each for a different material) and reuse of materials locally. They propose: a) the adoption of the program "I pay as I pollute", where the individual/household production of waste is offset by recycling in the calculation of municipal fees, thus creating financial incentives for the adoption of "green habits"; b) the creation of an electronic application to find the nearest dumpster depending on the type of material to be recycled ("Find My Bin"); and c) the implementation of a system for the collection of surplus food and its provision to vulnerable social groups (measures for mandatory participation of restaurants, hotels, public markets, supermarkets, military camps) thus also reducing food waste.

Finally, university students stress the *need to enhance the resilience* of the Athens area to the effects of climate change, with the immediate adoption of measures for the construction of durable and permeable road surfaces, the operation of public spaces to accommodate homeless people and stray animals in periods of adverse weather conditions, as well as cleaning streams of debris and the use of building materials that reflect sunlight instead of absorbing it.

A Green Deal for the Athens Metropolitan area

The high school students of Athens propose...

In their conclusions, the high school students consider a Green Deal necessary for the Athens Metropolitan Area, due to the high vulnerability of the area to the effects of climate change. Their proposed measures constitute a holistic plan of municipal and regional interventions, based on two axes: adaptation to the climate crisis, as well as mitigation pursued in a way that is fairer and compatible with the principles of sustainability. The students believe that, in this way, a green just transition and the improvement of the living conditions of the entire population will be ensured.

Having recently experienced catastrophic wildfires and floods, the students stressed the *need to strengthen services and infrastructure* for the protection of Metropolitan Athens. In particular, they consider necessary to revitalize the Hellenic Fire Service, to reforest burnt areas, mobilize citizens for voluntary forest protection with the provision of appropriate equipment, review existing firefighting plans, and install special sensors on trees for alerting the Fire Service in case of fire. Moreover, they consider it imperative to implement flood protection works along rivers and seasonal streams, proper urban planning to prevent the risk of floods, systematic cleaning and reconstruction of drains and sewers for flood avoidance, and the operation of emergency numbers (112), both for informing citizens about the extent and location of the risk and for crisis management.

The *expansion of green spaces* seems to be vital for high school students. They consider it is necessary to remodel outdoor public spaces to create green spaces and provide financial incentives to citizens for planting trees, creating small gardens ("pocket parks") and green rooftops. They also deem necessary to *improve the*



energy efficiency of existing buildings, encourage their energy autonomy with the installation of photovoltaic systems, adapt urban planning to the area's microclimate and the anticipated local climatic changes, and to use innovative construction material both for the renovation of old buildings and for the construction of new ones.

Waste management is a major issue for the Athens high school students, who consider necessary the adoption of a modern waste management model based on the basic principles of recycling, for example with more dumpsters, each for a different material, the establishment of more collection points for the recycling of electronic devices, informing and sensitizing citizens, as well as adopting the "I pay as I pollute" and "Remunerative Recycling" programs. In addition, the high school students highlight the need to educate students and citizens about the environmental issues of their area, the inclusion of relevant programs within school hours, the encouragement of students to travel by bicycle and the reuse of books whose condition is considered good, so that the unnecessary waste of paper is reduced.

The high school students, realizing the contribution of the transport sector to climate change, put forward specific proposals for "green transportation", such as encouraging the use of electric public transport means, installing photovoltaic panels on traffic lights, creating bicycle lanes and special parking spaces, providing incentives for the purchase of electric bicycles, improving public transport in terms of frequency and urban network coverage, and affordable ticket pricing for reducing the need to use private automobiles; finally modernizing the fleet of municipal vehicles and arranging for the transportation of students to and from school with buses and not their parents' cars.

