



ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ  
ΠΑΤΡΩΝ  
UNIVERSITY OF PATRAS

# «The implementation of intercultural mediation in Greece nowadays - 2016: Job or Volunteerism? Needs and Policies»

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## SUMMARY

Current Greek society is characterized by diversity and cultural pluralism in conditions of intense economic crisis and hardship. The influx of third country citizens, particularly in recent months, mainly in the eastern part of our country has created many different issues in all areas of public administration and social life and redounded to the adoption of new policies by the Greek government. Given this reality, confronting the phenomenon is necessary for refugees and immigrants, through a modern multicultural approach that will accept these populations' different culture, will interpret their cultural identity and will recognize their specificities through understanding morals, customs, language and religion. Intercultural mediation in Greece is necessary, not within the narrow framework of professional activity, but as a contribution to the neighbor on the basis of volunteering and solidarity!

The new cultural reality, so, highlights the special value of Intercultural Mediation to support third country nationals' integration in all aspects of everyday life. In the sensitive area of health, mostly, economic, cultural, communicative, social and psychological factors are common reasons that hinder the access of immigrants to public health services. Intercultural Mediation makes diversity of foreign patients understandable and facilitates third country citizens and creates bridges with the hospital staff, for immediate and effective response to their problems. At the same time, in the key field of Education, Intercultural Mediation, creates bridges between the different and coexisting populations, achieves the smooth integration of vulnerable groups in the society of the host country and contributes to their psychological empowerment. The contribution of an intercultural mediator overcomes the barriers of a rigorous professional stroke and touches the spirit of volunteerism and giving help to fellow human than any professional can adopt!



By the personal contact with the refugees hospitality in the region of Myrsini, located in the region of Western Greece-near the city of Pyrgos, as volunteers with a group of students from the University of Patras, one can understand the usefulness and necessity an intercultural mediator has. In crisis situations, the state apparatus has difficulty in providing the appropriate to people in need of emergency and the contact with other cultures must be based on mutual respect, acceptance of diversity through meaningful interaction, equality climate, actual placing communication and contribution, in order to be effective. (Council of Europe. European Union)

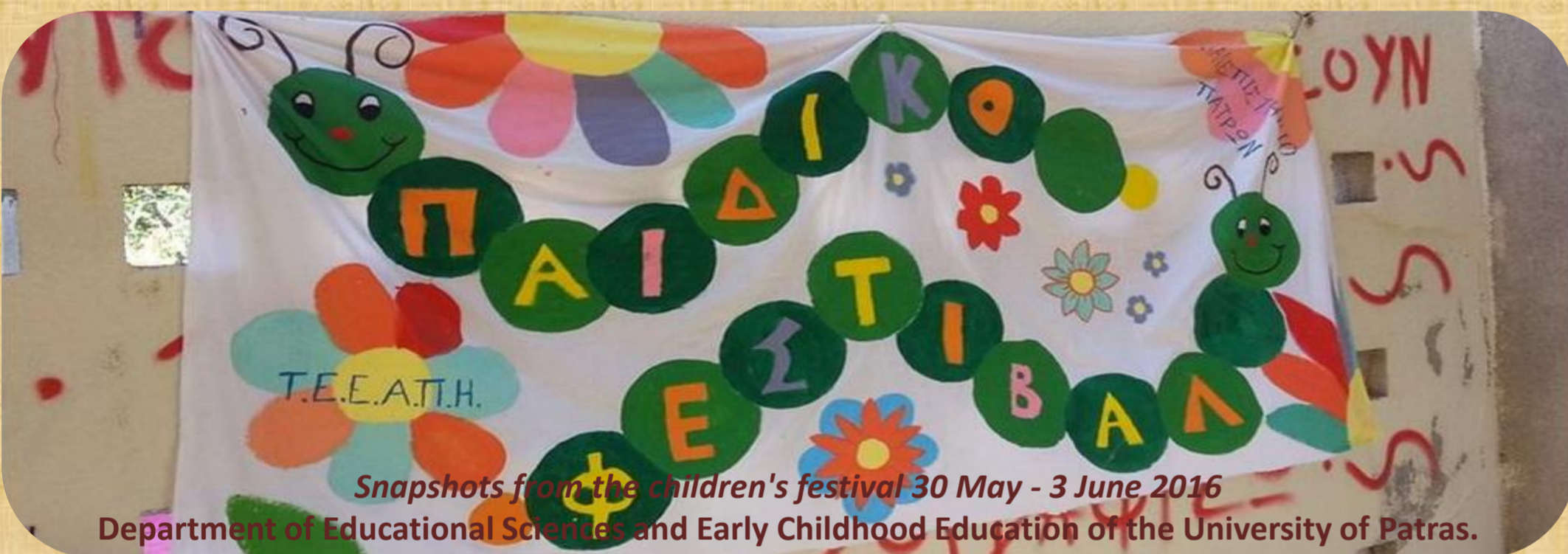
In Myrsini, one of many volunteer groups that helped was, as stated above, that group of the University of Patras. Professors, teachers and students (graduate and undergraduate) education departments and in particular the Department of Education and Early Childhood (T.E.E.A.P.I.) and Primary Education (WB thesis), tuned to provide systematic quality regular educational work. Of course the whole effort for the educational part came from the responsible educational addresses of Iliia and Achaia and by the school consultants who offered training, as well as several volunteers under the auspices of seven member committee of the action of both parts professors.

The requirements, design and operations of the team adjusted the data encountered in hospitality. The requirements given the traumatic experiences of children and their first contact with some type of planned school reality was not excessive. Children were asked to learn basic skills and vocabulary that will be needed in their daily lives, taking into account the possibility of residence and their transfer to other European countries. It was a remarkable effort to harness the potential housed there. In particular, the part of school teachers from Syria took upon our relative incentive to undertake the teaching of their mother tongue and mathematics. Then we geared Syrian children learned basic vocabulary Greek and English. Of course this does not become a mass order. The population that was interested, as participation in classes was optional, was divided into three groups. The first type extended kindergarten (4-8 years) related to preschool and primary school children, the second type of elementary-school (children aged 9-16) and the last adult (with persons over 16 years). The courses were held initially in two areas, one of them indoors for younger migrants.

Our small group encountered many difficulties. We were called, in short period of almost six months (March to September, and after that the official state takes action with the educational work with their integration in school local units), to help people of all ages, without of course everyone to be willing and sometimes underestimating our work. Our main difficulty was the communication, which was succeeded by the interpreters' contribution (Syrians who knew English). Additionally, most children had never been to school, so we were called to familiarize them with the idea repeating many times the matter. As students were not regular in lessons, that thing complicated the design and implementation of activities. Moreover, we notice the loss of Syrian teachers, who settled in Athens, factor that destabilized our effort and the ability to communicate with children. Furthermore the Ramadan feast, which although interesting, disorientated our pace, making us the one time, in the group at least smaller as creative group and not providing pedagogical educational work. Finally, although the University team was then inspired to come and other teachers providing assistance, the rotation of people and the continued presence of new and nonqualified often a constraint in our design, as the children had cut off information we were called to link.

Despite the above issues, many positives existed that we could quote from this transformative experience, we would say. Contact with children is refreshing and constructive. The optimism, the desire to learn, to approach and meet new people, to trust each new despite their experiences are life lessons. Additionally all teachers were tested to launch our knowledge, our skills in new and unfamiliar paths, thing that was shocking, if we consider the major problem of language. The inventiveness, imagination and responsibility required by this particular profession and practice appeared was a real test for us all. Even the opportunity to putting up something from the beginning, to get in touch with a completely different culture and teachers with more experience tests the limits of endurance and adaptability. But, in any case, we insist on the benefits of this action both individually and collectively.

In conclusion, according to our experience, where we met with a number of volunteers from around the world, volunteers with different specializations, nationalities and ages we note the following. Volunteering is a wonderful experience that requires disposal, time and money. Not everyone can perform it. However we do not believe that this is the same as intercultural mediator and the two concepts should not be confused. They can coexist. Volunteers have power but not the power of the intercultural mediator, who would be good to have knowledge of psychology and certainly the language where requested to do mediation. Having experienced professional facilitators and watching their work, we can certainly describe it not as volunteering but as a vocation. It is certainly an important position that not anyone can succeed in and this assistance contributes substantially to the community. On the other hand, each of us carries his own culture and all of us are called upon daily to take independent distribution intermediary position, time, money and profession.



## POSTER ANALYSIS

Modern society is more open to new trends and impulses that can come from different sides of the globe. The synchronous multicultural tinge of Greek cities and culture requires us to create a common code of communication, so that people can express themselves freely without any ambiguities. Globalization, liberalism, free movement of goods and people, unemployment and education are key factors for the promotion of dialogue between people. Citizens are asked to accept the diversity of their own culture and that of others, always with respect, lack of fear, indifference, scorn and negative comparison, racism and inequality.

Our contact with other cultures is becoming more common and necessary nowadays. It is understood that, in the modern globalized and enlarged society, interculturalism is a reality where all professionals, either in health or in education field, are required to accept and adapt readily to new data every time. As Europe is not a homogeneous religious, national or cultural nature, the possibility of contact with other cultural systems is often dysfunctional. Racism, xenophobia, discrimination and violence are emerging, which is not consistent of the structural principles towards cultural multiplicity, human rights, democracy, liberalism, fight stereotypes and prejudices. So, intercultural mediators are invited to bridge the gap between different cultures, religions, political beliefs and languages, to investigate the possibilities and ways of communicating with the "different", "others", the "foreign" and achieve the harmonious coexistence all of us.

As most of us are informed, intense phenomenon of migration is observed, particularly of young graduates in foreign countries, and refugees, mostly from war-torn countries in Europe mainly addressed to Greece (see Syria). This population flow changes the structure of societies, usually creating many social, political and cultural problems in the host countries. European countries mainly, and not only, are invited to respond promptly and effectively to interpretation issues, asylum, feeding, housing, education, general humanitarian assistance and job placement. The volume of these issues is difficult to deal with from a centrally structured state (see the case of Greece and refugee accommodation centers). To this point intercultural mediators contribute positively, as well as voluntary organizations, independent volunteers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Agencies, entities and those people who find solutions to everyday problems that arise in practice contribute substantially to the neighbor. They help to raise awareness of the culture and the culture of other nationalities, strengthen migrants/refugees involving the practice of power factors in the effort to understand and accept each other and in daily contact between third countries and national citizens, providing respect for guarantees and commitments discrimination. By that way, they prevent social alienation, the extremism, racism and xenophobia. This achieves social cohesion (integration of persons of different origins, culture and religion in existing communities) with financial growth opportunities in a democratic and equitable coexistence. (Kavvatha B.)