

Newsletter



I, You, We, Mediterranean Citizens



Issue 5

*News from the Mediterranean
4th student exchange meeting in Greece*

Monday, 27th February

Arrival

It was a cold but sunny day when we landed in Thessaloniki. With great expectations we were looking forward to meet old and new friends. The bus was taking us through an interesting landscape towards our destination - Naoussa. Although we all live in the Mediterranean, the diversity of the landscape is amazing. We were fascinated by the difference in agricultural sorts and scenery. And then we saw the town at the foot of a mountain.



The bus stopped in the middle of the town and we saw the first familiar face - Mr. Giannis, the headmaster came forward with a big smile and words of warm welcome. Then everything happened at once. We were greeted by our host teachers Maria and Georgios, and students were already hugging their hosts and their parents. Music was heard all around the town and people were happy, dancing and celebrating. It felt good to be there.



„The Carnival in Naoussa is also characterized by the spontaneity, the enthusiasm, the hospitable disposal of local inhabitants, the carousals without any particular preparation, the satiric carnivals. However the most particular and central element is the custom of "Boules" or "Yanitsaries and Boules". It is a custom with deep roots which incorporated elements of the local tradition and heroic fights throughout its many centuries history. Although its flourishing time is located at the end of 19th and the begging of 20th century, the custom exists inalterable up to our days.“

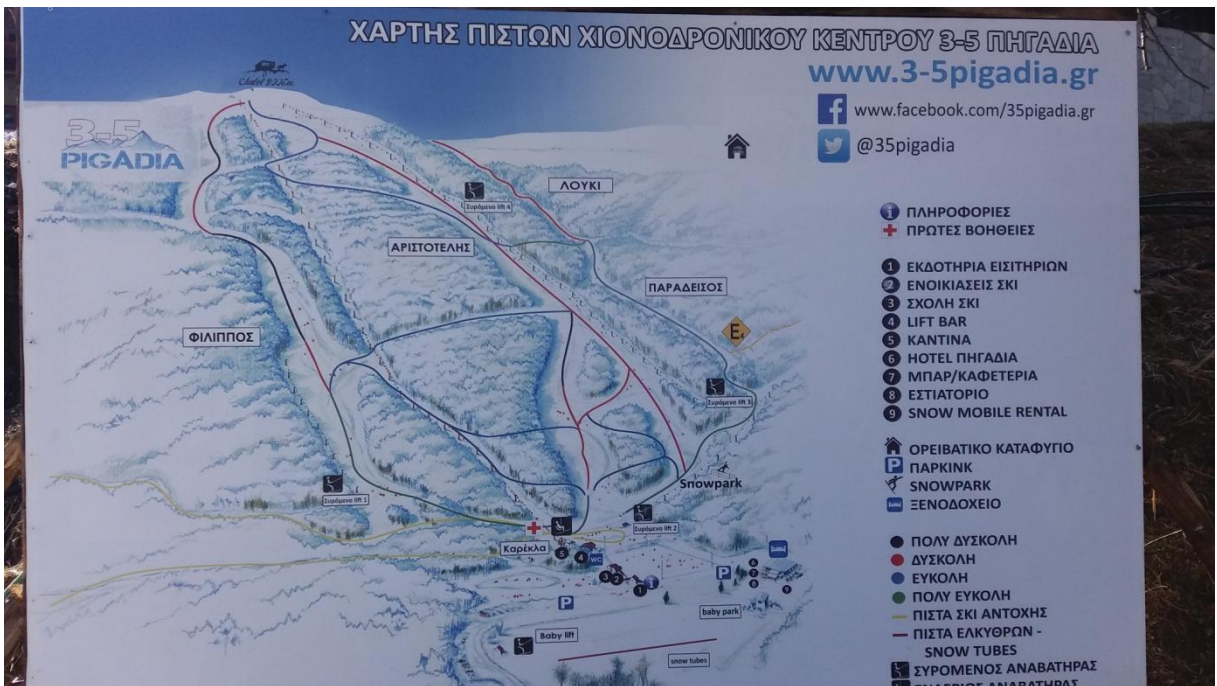
It was the last day of Carnival. Yanitsaries and Boules were dancing without their masks and people in the street joined them in their merry celebration. Stands were full of delicious food, traditional music was heard in every part of the town and streets were crowded by people smiling and dancing to commemorate heroic historical fights and to salute spring. What a welcome!



At one point we met a kind gentleman who was introduced as the president of the Carnival association. He invited us to visit their house, a renovated mill, where they practise dancing and keep the custom alive by tutoring young generations of Yanitsaries.



Tuesday, 28th February **Day 1**



Driving up the mountain we enjoyed in panoramic scenery of the landscape, excited to have the opportunity to try some winter sports. No persuasive speeches were needed for our students to try skiing. For most of them this was the first time they experienced the feeling of walking in ski boots and their reactions made us all laugh.



We were on the track, ready to face the truth: are there future champions among this adventurous group, or is this a one-time contact with white slopes?



We soon found out that there will be no champions in skiing competitions, but we thoroughly enjoyed the activities. For less enthusiastic skiers our hosts organised hiking through the forest and later on we took the ski lift to the top of the mountain.



In the afternoon there was a painting workshop. First of all, our host teacher Georgios explained the custom and showed a video about traditional masks and costumes. Then it was our turn to paint the masks.



And while we were painting the masks, our hosts were secretly preparing a surprise with another host teacher Georgios (Biliouris): the photos of our students and their hosts on wooden boards. What a souvenir!





Archaeological Museum of Vergina (Royal Tombs)

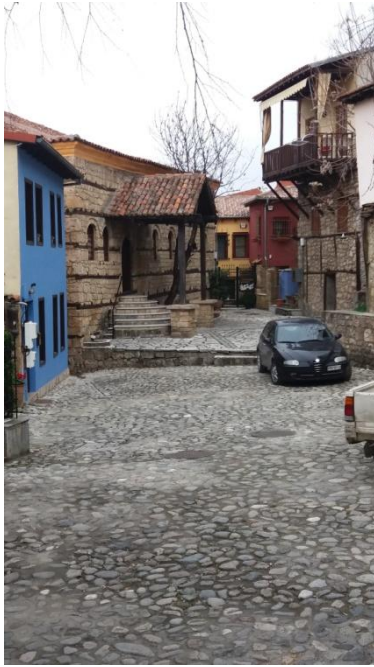
Some of the most impressive and important exhibits from the Macedonian dominating period of the Greek history can be seen in the exact location where the original excavations took place.

'Excavations unearthed the burial site of the kings of Macedon, including the tomb of Philip II, father of Alexander the Great which unlike so many other tombs had not been disturbed or looted. It is also the site of an extensive royal palace and of many rich ancient tombs. The objects and paintings found in the tombs at Vergina are of extraordinarily high quality and historical importance.'



The Altar of the Apostle Paul

We continued our sightseeing in Veria, where we visited the altar of the apostle Paul and Byzantine church, walked through the old town and visited the oldest buildings.



On the way back to Naoussa we visited Macedonian tombs of Judgement and Anthemia and Aristotle School.





It was a special feeling to be lectured about the past at the same spot where Alexander the Great was lectured and prepared for the future.

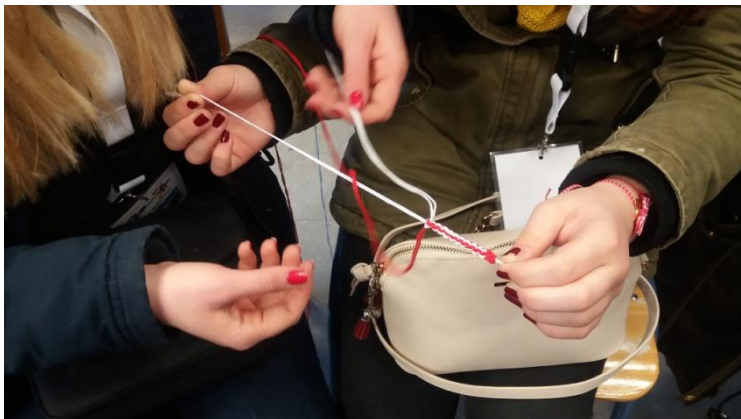
And the day was not over yet. In the evening we visited a place where traditional masks and costumes are made. It was raining cats and dogs and by the time we got to the old house we had only one wish: to get into some warm place. And warm it was. We were invited in a house by an old lady who was proudly greeting foreign guests. Soon her husband joined us to tell us about their craftsmanship. The room was cosy and there was something magical in listening to the old gentleman speaking proudly about his work and tradition in an unknown language, not understanding a word but recognizing pride and tranquillity in his voice. Johnny translated his story and we were amazed by some facts and grateful for sharing them with us.



It was a sunny morning and we were ready for new adventures. While waiting for everyone to gather in front of the school, we were sharing experiences regarding host families and their generosity, delicious food, interesting activities and new friends.

March bracelet workshop

Then the first workshop began and we were told that there is an interesting tradition of wearing a March bracelet. It is made of white and red woollen threads, white colour representing the winter and red colour the Sun. The purpose of wearing the bracelet is to remind you not to stay too long in the sun during March because it is unhealthy. The most interesting part is that you have to wear the bracelet throughout the month



and there is only one way to take it off earlier, and that is if you see a swallow.

Kite construction workshop

After making beautiful bracelets we were invited to another room where we were instructed how to make a kite. Some math and drawing skills were needed and it turned out we are quite talented for the job.





It was time to visit the town hall. The mayor gave a warm welcome speech inviting us to enjoy this beautiful and peaceful town.



Then we went to the Municipal theatre to attend the opening ceremony. Our host coordinator Maria, headmaster Giannis and other school representatives welcomed us and then we were fascinated by the school choir performance (well done!) and local dances.



In the afternoon we went to St. Nicolas grove to admire beautiful nature reviving after months of peaceful winter season. After a short walk around the park where we saw some unknown animal species (did you know that in this area more than 170 kinds of birds are registered, among them some rare species such as Dalmatian Pelican!) we came to a mesmerising place above the river Arapitsa, which forms fascinating falls and cascades on the slopes.



Sport activities were done by everyone, boys, girls, students, teachers, young, younger... We all like good competition to make victory sweeter.



In the evening we visited a Cultural centre and met some local artists who spend time there in creative atmosphere.



But the real reason for being there was to learn another art, dancing traditional Greek dances. Our dancing teacher was very patient when teaching complicated steps. Some of us learnt quickly, some of us never will, but we had a great time and thank you all for that!



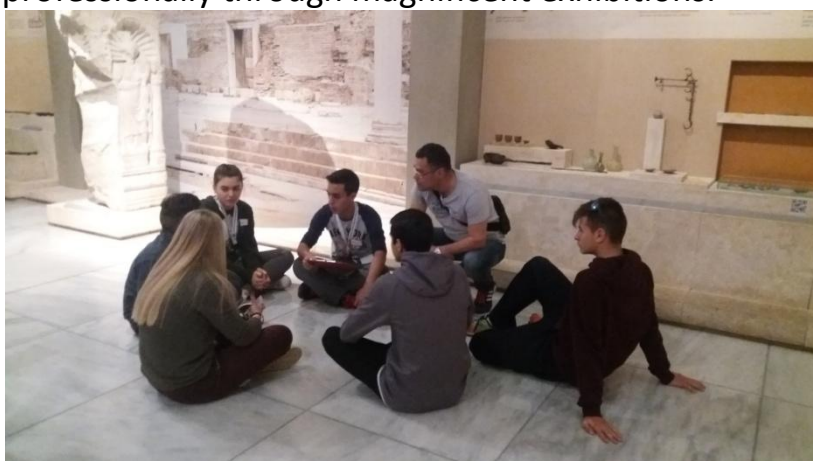
Sirtaki

Day trip to Thessaloniki



It was one of those days when you wake up in the morning and you just know it is going to be a great day. A day trip to the second biggest city in Greece began at 7.30 when we gathered in front of the Park Gate. A one-hour bus ride enabled us to observe the landscape and soon we recognized the home of Greek Gods, Mount Olympus on the right and Thessaloniki in front of us. First of all, we visited the

Byzantine Museum, an impressive modern museum which is a work of art itself. Our students participated in informative workshops and teachers were guided professionally through magnificent exhibitions.



Sightseeing continued by ascending the hill to the citadel, a Byzantine and Ottoman-era fortress situated on the north-eastern corner of the acropolis of Thessaloniki. The panoramic view with Mount Olympus in the back was breathtaking.



Rotunda of Galerius



It was time to visit the monument we wrote about last year when learning about famous Greek/Roman monuments in our regions to make a presentation about them and win the quiz in Spain.



Then we descended to the famous Arch of Galerius and on to the Roman Forum and Baths.



After lunch we visited one of the most recognizable monuments of Thessaloniki, the White Tower. The present tower replaced an old Byzantine fortification, known to have been mentioned around the 12th century, which the Ottoman Empire reconstructed to fortify the city's harbour some time after Sultan Murad II captured Thessaloniki in 1430. The tower became a notorious prison and scene of mass executions during the period of Ottoman rule.

The White Tower was substantially remodelled and its exterior was whitewashed after Greece gained control of the city in 1912. It has been adopted as the symbol of the city.



The White Tower

The day slowly turned into night while we were walking along the beautiful promenade by the sea. It turned out to be a magnificent day and the morning prediction came true.

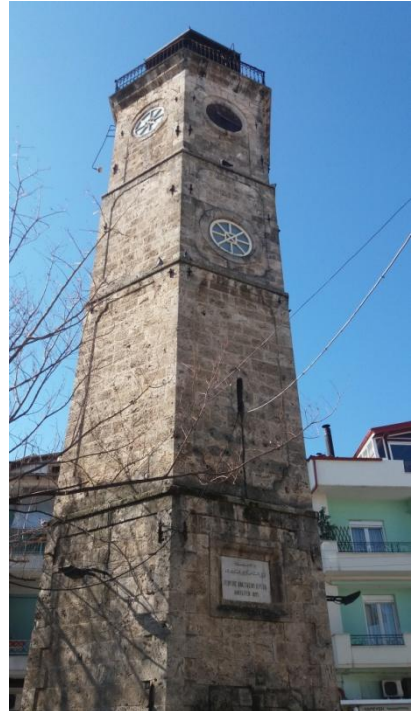


Saturday, 4th March

Day 5

The last day of our visit began by gathering in front of the host school. The meeting point for the tour around Naoussa was there and we went through picturesque streets, observed old and modern architecture, stopped in front of the oldest school in Naoussa, the Ottoman tower and the oldest tree in town, as old as the town itself. Our guide told us an interesting story about foundation of Naoussa, the clever idea of tearing an ox hide into thin threads to enlarge the town area.





At the Folklore museum of Naoussa students were given worksheets for the next activity. It was a quiz about the museum and they had to observe closely the exhibited materials to find the answers. The tour ended in a beautiful place with a sad story about heroic women who chose death rather than being captured by the enemy.



In the afternoon we visited a monastery and the local winery. In culinary workshops we learnt how to make some traditional food called dolmades and a delicious dessert moustopita.

Dolmades are made with vine leaves, stuffed with a delicious herbs and rice mix, shaped into little rolls and boiled until wonderfully tender.



Moustopita is a local dessert with grape must. Delicious!



Of course, there would be no proper picnic without tasty souvlaki 😊



The day was at its end and so was our meeting. There were many hugs, tears in our eyes, precious memories and hope to see each other again. Au revoir, dear friends!



Students' reviews

Luka Tadić

Greece was a lot of fun and I had the time of my life. I've met many people and made friendships with an unbreakable bond. I hope I'll be able to visit Greece again and have the same experience. Their cuisine was delicious and they sure know how to have fun wherever they go. Last, but certainly not the least our teachers, while being helpful and very responsible they always let us have fun and enjoy our trip to the fullest!

Ivan Stančić

I had a time of my life in Greece. We made a lot of new friends. Greece is wonderful and full of enjoyable places and historical monuments. Food was so tasty and fulfilling. We visited many historical and learned a lot about the region. If i ever get a chance to go to Greece again, I will.

Margita Golubičić

Going to Greece was one of the best experiences in my life. It was also the first time I was in a plane which was very exciting. Greece is one of the most beautiful countries I've ever seen. My hosts were absolutely amazing and I met so many friends. I made friends for a lifetime. Monuments, food, interesting historical stories. Everything about the trip was marvellous. I would like to thank my teachers for giving me the opportunity to travel with my friends and meet so many nice people. I will cherish these memories for the rest of my life.

Martina Novak

On 27th of February (Monday) we began our trip to Greece. At first we were all a little bit worried because we needed to spend seven days in an unknown country with people we never met before. The second I walked out of the bus and saw all those friendly and kind people I knew we would have the best time there. We met a lot of new friends and all of them were very generous, kind and nice to us. They wanted us to feel welcomed and like at home. Except the new friendships that we made we also learned a lot about their language, culture and the town Naoussa. I can't say that a certain day was my favourite because all of them were the best for me and each day we saw something different, learned something new and of course had lots of fun. I will never forget how

much fun I had there and how amazing it was. We all made friends for life and I will never forget them. I hope that one day we will all see each other again because I miss all of them a lot.

Ivana Remetić

The trip to Greece was something special and unforgettable. Greece is a beautiful country and people there are so friendly. My hosts were so nice to me and they gave me everything I can wish so I felt like they are my own family. The best thing in Greece is their food. I can't even explain with words. But we didn't just have fun there, we were also learning about Greek traditions and visited a lot of monuments, churches and tombs. We made great friends there and I am sure that they will be our friends for life. In those 7 days I spent the time of my life and of course I want to go back.

Ria Viličić

A few days ago we returned from Greece. We had a great time there. We visited many tombs, participated in the Orthodox ritual. We were at the Carnival where they had the typical costumes. One day we were on the mountain where we learned to ski. For some of us this was the first time we tried it. I'd love to come back one day with my friends, because without them it would not be so much fun. That week we made many friends and I would be sorry if we never met again.

Doris Carić

We spent seven days in Greece. In that period of time I met many people. We immediately became friends and I won't forget them for sure. Together we visited museums, churches, went on a tour around the second biggest city in Greece, Thessaloniki, we played sports and many other things. The trip would not be so great without our teachers who made it even better. In the beginning I was scared a little bit, but now the trip is a beautiful memory that I will keep forever.

Partners' reviews

SPAIN



We all, teachers and students, knew that this step in our program “I, you, we, Mediterranean Citizens” would be an interesting, funny and enjoyable experience before our stay in Naoussa. Now, afterwards, we are able to say that all our expectations have been met successfully.

In our way to Naoussa we had to stay for a night in Athens, because of some difficulties related to flight schedules, but this circumstance became an excellent chance to see some of most beautiful churches while we walked through the old city centre and, of course, to visit the Acropolis. Even though we didn't have much time to enjoy this stunning monument, it gave us the opportunity to get in touch with the rich, ancient Greek culture and heritage.

When we arrived in Naoussa we were welcomed by all the Greek team and by the families that were waiting for our pupils and looking forward to meeting them. Our students immediately realized that their hosts would be wonderful as they could appreciate during the following days living together.

Apart from the warm embrace and all attentions we received all the time, we could enjoy of a wide list of activities that range from a visit to Thessaloniki, Veria, Vergina and other amazing spots, to knowing the traditional carnival celebrations and customs. If we had to highlight some of them we would choose two activities: the visit to the Museum of the Royal Tombs in Vergina and the visit to a traditional family home in Naoussa. Both were very different but both excellent exponents of Greek culture.

In our opinion, the Museum of the Royal Tombs is the most impressive museum we have ever visited, not only for the treasures we can see in it, but also for the great idea of erecting the building on the spot.

The visit to a Greek home was an example of living culture. Our hosts, a very large family, welcomed us in their house and showed us the costumes that people usually wear during the

carnival. In the meantime, the patriarch told us all the history, all the meaning, all the feelings... and during this time we could appreciate how these persons live their local traditions. It was a really emotional time.

Congratulations to the Greek team for their hard work. We have had a very good experience full of good moments. Thank you for everything!!!



Our pupils' opinions:

I think it has been the best journey of my life because I have met new people from other countries and I have learnt about a new culture too. And on top of that, I have developed closer links (and more confidence) with my Spanish mates and now we're better friends than some weeks ago.

Miquel Leiva

I think that this trip has been a great opportunity to meet new people and get to know new traditions. It has been the best journey in my life and I will return again! During this week I have learnt a lot of things... It's been fantastic!

Leonor Soriano

What I liked most about the trip was Greek food. Also I liked so much the game that we played in the Byzantine Museum with the Roman inscriptions and all that stuff. I liked Greece very much and of course, I want to go there again!

Fernando Gallardo

What I liked most about the trip to Greece is how the family treated me. They were very nice to me. I also liked the activities we did when we visited the wine cellar and the day trip to Thessaloniki.

Sergio Marín

I think Greece has many good things but for me the best thing of the trip was the family who hosted me, they were good persons and my partner was very interesting because he is very smart and knows fascinating things. One day I think I will come back.

David Alfonso del Rosal

FRANCE



We came to Greece with Noémie, Lou-anne, Chrystal, Lucas, Eric and Javier. Marine and I, Bruno, tried to accompany them at best.

We would like to thank all our partners and especially our Greek friends for the great kindness and attention they have shown to our students. Our students, despite their difficulties with the language, really enjoyed their trip, their visits (translated into French by Mrs Marina and Aristotle) and their meetings with the Greek students.

The kindness of the whole team is matched only by their big heart.

We personally took a lesson in hospitality through your dedication and commitment. It is clear from the whole of our journey a respectful admiration of your traditions that you continue to support. All the visits allowed us to discover the immense wealth of your region. Unfortunately, we have often had to rush from one visit to another when your temper invites us to take the time and ask ourselves to assimilate all the wonders that we have been able to discover.

If you have awakened in us a desire to return to Greece, you have left an indelible trace in the memory of our students.

The students were very well received and have an indelible memory of this trip which for the most part was their first trip.

They found that peaceful relationships were possible between teachers and students. They discovered that your students could go out at night as well as sing in a live choir, spend a traditional costume, perform traditional dances or play a musical instrument. They also

discovered the presence of the religious fact at school or around the school, which, for our students, gave rise to many questions.

ITALY



Words are not enough to describe the wonderful atmosphere and the warm welcome we found in Naoussa. Both, teachers and students were moved by the way everything was planned and organized by the wonderful team!!!

Collegues, students and families were always ready to satisfy our needs. It was amazing!!! We could feel in the air the love people from Naoussa have for their land, their culture, their roots, their traditions, such a rich cultural background which in some ways is related to ours. We will keep memories of this mobility in our minds and in our hearts...

Weather, food, places of interest, friendly welcome and a lot of fun have been or friends.... Thank you Maria, Iannis, Georgos, Georgos, Eva, Sophia and anybody else was involved in the organization of such an interisting experience.....

GREECE

As a host, even though this was not the first meeting, I felt a bit anxious about the week's progress. Initially, I had planned the meeting during Carnival time so that you could experience first-hand how excited local people get in Naoussa in Carnival and how important and moving our custom "Yanitsari and Bules" is. When we changed the meeting dates last year in France, I felt a bit frustrated. However, now that I'm looking back at the days we spent together in my hometown I feel a great relief and satisfaction because with the help of my colleagues, my students, their parents and several people representing cultural associations we managed to share with you a vital part of our traditions and psyche.

The fine weather and your good disposition contributed to the final success of our fourth meeting. I enjoyed every part of it and I hope it whetted your appetite to come once again to Greece!

Parent's opinion

As a parent, I would like to thank all of the teachers, both here in Greece and abroad, for the countless hours of work that have gone into making this program a success. It is an invaluable program for these students, particularly during a time when so many in this world feel the need to emphasize our differences and to use them as a reason to fear each other. This program has allowed our children to recognize those differences but, instead, to embrace them. That lesson will no doubt play an important role in how they live their lives. Thank you again for your amazing contribution and for providing our children with an unforgettable experience.

Patrice Van Roten

