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Academic Teachers’ Perceptions and Experiences of Outdoor Education

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### Academic Teachers’ Perceptions and Experiences in Outdoor Education

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**Abstract**
Outdoor education constitutes an alternative teaching approach that is characterized by authentic experiences and activities in outdoor natural and cultural landscapes. As a relatively new and progressive teaching method, it tries to find and consolidate its place within the existing educational system. The current thesis explores Greek academic teachers’ perceptions and experiences in the field of outdoor education. More specifically, eight academic teachers from a Greek university express their views about outdoor education and report their experiences in outdoor lessons. Through a qualitative approach, this research includes analysis of data extracted from semi-structured interviews with the academics. From the thematic analysis of the data four themes emerged that illustrate teachers’ opinions. The results of the research revealed academic teachers’ basic knowledge on the field of outdoor education, as they presented some well-aimed examples of main characteristics of the approach. Moreover, they reported limited previous outdoor experiences with their students and perceive outdoor lessons as any action outside the typical classroom, attributing higher importance to outdoor activities performed in cultural rather than natural landscapes. Also, academics acknowledged several benefits that outdoor education provides to their students such as the stimulation of all their senses, the connection of theory with practice and the promotion of social relations. In addition, they attributed significant importance to both the experiential approach to learning and to the connection with nature that outdoor lessons provide. Nevertheless, academic teachers highlighted many barriers that inhibit their efforts to apply outdoor lessons such as lack of time and appropriate places, inadequate infrastructure, human resources as well as insufficient pedagogical training and preparation. Concluding, what seems to trouble academics most is the prevailing educational culture inside schools and universities as well as teachers’ and academic teachers’ attitudes. The above findings contribute to the current limited scientific knowledge concerning the practice of outdoor education in the higher level of education. Last but not least, further qualitative research is a prerequisite in order to study the origin of the perceptions and attitudes of Greek academics and comprehend the socio-cultural and educational context in which these have been formed.

**Keywords**
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Concluding, I would like to dedicate my thesis to Pavlos, with all my love and gratitude, for he has persistently supported me and still continues to do so, no matter the cost.
The system of education

As a general truth, academic institutions base their philosophy in main aims such as the promotion of contemporary scientific knowledge and the cultivation of personal and social development of their students. However, most universities seem to follow a didactic methodology that does not include progressive and/or alternative teaching approaches to meet the aims of the curriculum, but more traditional and non-flexible methods that often lead to sterile knowledge. In many cases the university curriculum, as John Dewey successfully notes in his book ‘Experience and Education’ (1997, chapter 1), is stable and old-fashioned. Additionally, the body of knowledge does not meet the needs of today’s society but on the contrary serves mostly the needs of political power and the financial market.

In line with the above, David Orr strongly believes that “schools, colleges and universities have been uncritically accepting of, and sometimes beholden to larger economical and political forces” (2004, p.xii). As Orr discusses in his book ‘Earth in Mind’, the higher educational system lacks the necessary environmental perspective, something that is obvious not only in the curriculum but also in the architecture of academic buildings and the design of indoor and outdoor university areas. According to the writer, this is considered to be a great failure, not to say a great problem, for the society needs and expects to receive from the institutional community a more environmental quality oriented philosophy.

Nevertheless, in the light of the traditional education alternative voices exist that echo the need for changes. These voices are not new as progressive ideas have been present for over a century and they constantly alter along with educational currents and societal needs and (re)formations. Progressive education gains momentum as the traditional education often seems to submit itself in obsolete knowledge and receptivity, something that not only diminishes the possibility for meaningful learning but also involves significant risks for the formation of environmentally healthy and aware citizens.

The appearance of new, experiential teaching approaches opposes to the existing pedagogical model that according to Freire isolates live experiences and leads teachers to ‘reduce their pedagogy to a form of middle-class narcissism’ (2005, p.xiv). Outdoor education is an approach that emanates from the field of experiential learning and represents an interesting alternative teaching strategy for schools and universities, which is conducted in
outdoor places. The current study deals with outdoor education and its interaction with the Greek educational system, from the Greek university teachers’ perspective and point of view.

**Outdoor Education in Greece**

The Greek educational system is primarily based on traditional education methods and approaches. However, the last few years there has been an effort for the school curricula to become more attractive, progressive and to meet the current needs of the students. Thus, new courses have started to be applied and students now explore a new educational environment, with the use of more interactive modules such as new technologies (IT and media), research projects (in lyceums) and theatre and aesthetical education (in primary schools)\(^1\).

Even though the new curriculum for the primary and secondary Greek school supports experiential approaches and outdoor activities, there is no systematic implementation of outdoor education practices in Greek schools and universities\(^2\). The only teaching subject that mainly sport teachers apply outside the classroom is physical education. Greek teachers do not get out of the classroom often, but only in cases of institutional activities such as daily excursions and visits in museums or natural gardens. Nevertheless, one form of experiential learning in Greek schools can be found in environmental education programs that some teachers implement with their students. These programs include activities in direct contact with nature but can also regard culture, health or social issues. However, these programs are optional and the amount and kind of outdoor activities depend mainly on the teacher. 33 environmental education centres in Greece accept students or adults and provide such programs concerning both local and global environmental issues\(^3\).

It is apparent from the above that there is fertile ground for outdoor education to be incorporated in such programs and thus enter the Greek educational system. Nevertheless, school teachers, as a rule, don’t utilize outdoor activities in their lessons. That fact led to the creation of several queries when I was interacting with my colleagues in the primary school that I work as a sport teacher (and thus I am always outside the classroom with my students); why Greek teachers don’t teach outside the classroom? Could it be that they don’t know how?

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\(^1\) Information about the concept of the ‘New School’ can be found in the webpage of the Greek Ministry of Education [Υπουργείο Παιδείας, Δια Βίου Μάθησης και Θρησκευμάτων] (2012).

\(^2\) The Greek curriculum for the primary and secondary school includes programs for planning and development of interdisciplinary activities that mainly concern environmental or health education subjects and can be found in the webpage of the Greek Institute of Education [Παιδαγωγικό Ινστιτούτο] (2011). However, during my four year didactic experience in Greek primary schools and my long experience as a student, I have observed only sporadic implementation of outdoor activities in Greek schools and universities.

\(^3\) More information about the Greek environmental education centers is available in the educational portal of the Greek Ministry of Education (2012).
Could it be that they can’t find a reason why? What are their reasons for staying and teaching mainly inside the classroom and the school?

**Research aim and objectives**

The aforementioned questions triggered the conduction of the current research and contributed to the formation of the basic aim and the objectives of the study. The sample was decided to be academic teachers instead of school teachers, as the former are responsible for both the knowledge and the educational attitudes and choices of the latter. In addition, university teachers constitute a role model for prospective teachers who in turn, through their teaching, form environmental and ethical consciousness to the next generations.

The current study wishes to reflect the perceptions and experiences of university teachers concerning outdoor education. Academic teachers from a Greek university are expressing their views about outdoor education theories and practices as well as possible benefits and potential obstacles for implementing outdoor lessons in Greek schools and universities. The basic aim and the objectives of the research have been formed as follows:

- **Basic aim of the research:** Academic teachers’ perceptions and experiences of outdoor education.
- **Objectives of the research:**
  - Academic teachers’ knowledge and experiences in outdoor education
  - Academic teachers’ perceptions of benefits and impediments of practicing outdoor education in their teaching field

Through the current study I am hopeful to provide a comprehensive image relevant with academics’ perceptions about outdoor education and thus be able to understand or even connect the results with the absence of outdoor practices from Greek schools and universities.

**Research contribution**

Much research has been conducted relating to primary and secondary school teachers that reveal interesting opinions and perceptions about outdoor education philosophy and practices. However, it is a fact that we know little about university teachers’ perceptions concerning outdoor education, for there are no relevant studies that investigate this level of education. Thus, this research is expected to discover and identify university teachers’ perceptions about outdoor education and therefore to offer a contribution to the current inadequate scientific knowledge about implementation of outdoor practices in the higher level of educational studies.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The current chapter brings the discussion about outdoor education forward by dealing with two important issues; the theoretical and practical concepts that define this educational approach and the basic reported perceptions of teachers and academic teachers concerning the application of outdoor education in schools and universities. Examining these two central points will give a useful perspective for probing into Greek academic teachers’ perceptions, by analyzing and discussing their current opinions and views about outdoor education.

Defining Outdoor Education

*Three things are needed for education: nature, study and practice.*


Since its emergence in the educational foreground, outdoor education has been gaining both attention and acceptance over the years. In an effort to put a framework into this newly arrived concept, a debate about the most appropriate definition has been developed and continues to evolve in some extent, nowadays. What is outdoor education? Does it constitute a method? A subject? Or an approach? Starting from the very simplistic definition, that outdoor education is “education in, for and about the outdoors” (Donaldson & Donaldson 1958, cited in Priest 1986, p.13) the discussions moved towards a multilateral concept that includes experiential knowledge and an emphasis in relationships between people and natural resources (Priest, 1986). Along with this, Nicol (2002) mentions this debate in an effort to depict the nature and the basic attributes of outdoor education and concludes in that, since it is not clearly defined by a body of knowledge, it is then an approach rather than a simple subject.

The historical roots of outdoor education can be found in Ionic and Greek natural philosophers, who strongly believed in the knowledge of the hand and its connection to firsthand experiences in the authentic environment of the outdoors (Dahlgren & Szczepanski, 1998). Most of these attributes of outdoor education can also be found both in old (Comenious, 1967; Rousseau, 1991; Dewey, 1997) and contemporary (Nicol, 2002a, 2002b; Higgins & Nicol, 2002) educators’ pedagogic essays. Moreover, Bartunek et al. (in Higgins & Nicol, 2002), refer to outdoor education as a cultural construct, something that provides a stimulus for further investigating its nature and relationship with human culture and society. Concluding, outdoor education embraces main concepts such as firsthand experiences, use of
the landscape and a process of learning in authentic contexts; it would be a slip for this approach to be interpreted abstractly and one-dimensionally, as these many different aspects are reflected both in its theories and practices.

**Theoretical concepts in Outdoor Education**

**Basic Aims of Outdoor Education**

According to Dahlgren and Szczepanski (1998), one basic aim of outdoor education is the acquisition of knowledge and the creation of bonds between nature, culture and society, through activities and experiences in the outdoors. This is further supported by Γεωργόπουλος and Τσαλίκη (2005), who also highlight the importance of the natural environment that is used as a field of learning, acquiring not only knowledge but also skills. According to the writers, the ultimate purpose of outdoor experiences is to develop appreciation for nature and rebuild a decent relationship between man and natural environment. Moreover, the enhancement of personal and social development and the acquisition of life skills are important goals that outdoor education seeks to accomplish (Beard & Wilson, 2006).

**Experiential learning**

Educational theorist David Kolb, heavily based on the work of Dewey, Piaget, Lewin and Montessori, established the idea of experiential learning and contributed to the formation of the current outdoor education philosophy. First-hand experiences constitute the major component of this educational approach and help the learner to connect real people with real circumstances (Higgins & Nicol, 2002). This means that in outdoor education students literally experience the upcoming knowledge. The latter cannot be perceived immediately, as previous knowledge and present experiences interact and go through reconstruction and reflection, so that they ultimately lead up to concrete new knowledge. According to Dewey (1997), direct experiences are the catalytic power that leads to knowledge; “every experience is a moving force” (p.38). Adding sensory experiences to the learning process, through immediate contact with the natural environment, is being highlighted as extremely important; “The stimuli that children engage from the outdoor environment through sensory organs allow them to adopt new data, awaken within them the need to raise questions and to learn even more” (Chauvel & Chauvel 1998, p.12). Additionally, nature experiences are shown to be important not only for acquiring knowledge but also for instilling values and promoting personal and social development (Nicol, 2002; Higgins & Nicol, 2002; Bögeholz, 2006; Szczepanski, 2009).
It is important to note at this point that outdoor education does not reject theoretical knowledge. On the contrary, according to Jordet (in Jordet et al, 2009), “…outdoor learning, in combination with a more traditional classroom teaching has a great potential, and can have a significant impact on the individual pupil’s learning as a whole human being” (p14). In outdoor education theory and practice do not act within a dualistic framework but in a rather integrated form, aiming towards meaningful learning\(^1\). The latter is also supported by Dahlgren and Szczepanski (1998), arguing that outdoor education “… is possible to bring conceptual, theoretic and experiential knowledge together” (p.23).

**Place based learning**

The selection of the appropriate place, where the learning process will lead to essential knowledge, is considered as one very significant facet of outdoor education (Sobel, 1996). An authentic, unique and tangible place should be the base for students in order to “... learn directly about the relationship of knowledge to the physical reality of this place” (Szczepanski, p.18, in Higgins and Nicol, 2002). In outdoor environmental education, the natural environment, except for the object of learning also becomes the place of learning. In order for this environment to be considered creative and lead to firsthand experiences, it should be variable and unstructured (Dewey, 1997; Szczepanski, in Higgins & Nicol, 2002). However, not only natural but also human made environments can serve the aforementioned purpose, as far as they are authentic and can be directly linked to the learning goals. Moreover, as Dewey supports, “a means of understanding the present is to make acquaintance with the past” (1997, p.78); thus, local knowledge is an important parameter for further understanding the present cultural and environmental conditions of a place.

According to Szczepanski (2009), children today are disconnected from the natural world, mainly due to man-made ‘protective fences’; for example, human constructed forms of teaching (like school buildings), information (like media, books and visual images) and entertainment (like shopping centres, indoor playrooms). Therefore, children do not experience the outdoors so often, as they are captured into a ‘triangular form of life’ – the school, home, shopping centre (Szczepanski, 2009, p.3). Richard Louv refers to this alienation of children from nature as a ‘nature-deficit disorder’, a cultural phenomenon that is

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\(^1\) According to Taniguchi et al. (2005) meaningful learning is defined by the realization of our weaknesses, strengths and potentials. Outdoor activities that include attributes such as perceived risk, awkwardness, sublimation, reconstruction (through reflection) and personal growth, sometimes vivid while other times subtle, clearly state the accomplishment of meaningful learning while you experience the outdoors.
characterized by the “diminished use of senses, attention difficulties and higher rates of physical and emotional illness” (Louv, 2005, p.36).

At this point important questions arise; why do we need authentic outdoor places, natural landscapes to teach in? Why not in the classroom, why not indoors, as we already do? In an effort to look into the above questioning, proponents of outdoor education put forward some important points; Sobel (1996) illustrates successfully in his book ‘Beyond Ecophobia’, the fact that exploring and understanding in a personal way the local environment, is reinforced by primary experiences in the outdoors. Outdoor education, through place-based learning in authentic landscapes, leads students not only towards a vital and essential connection with nature, but also allows them to liberate themselves of the four walls of directed teaching (Φλογαΐτη, 1998). This belief is echoed and probed furthermore by Sandell et al. (2005), who support that opening the doors in the walls of society to the outdoors, through education in the landscapes, can establish an understanding about human – nature relationship and dependency on the environment, as well as create natural and cultural bonds within the society. Nevertheless, as Harisson (2010) supports, the role of the place in outdoor education needs to be further investigated as it is under researched and poorly documented.

A pedagogical tool into practice

Outdoor activities

One very important attribute of outdoor education is the fact that it can be implemented through many different outdoor activities. Field trips, outdoor games and drama are only some of the various examples. According to Palmberg and Kuru (2000), pupils who experience outdoor activities such as hiking, field trips and outdoor games seem to have a strong empathic relationship to nature, along with a better social behavior and higher moral judgment. Additionally, Dahlgren and Szczepanski (1998) mention that outdoor recreational activities such as cycling, fishing, canoeing, hunting and skiing create many opportunities for closer contact and socialization with the outdoor environment, and thus should be integrated as natural parts of the pedagogic planning.

Outdoor games are being highlighted for their significant contribution to the learning aims; “singing and folk games … always involve different senses, different capacities for learning and different subjects” (Sarv & Vilbaste 2008, p.12). This is further addressed by Γεωργόπουλος and Τσαλίκη (2005), who state that outdoor drama and games help children to understand meanings closely associated with the ecological balance while the skills developed are critical thinking, assessment of alternatives and problem solving. All the aforementioned
are reinforced by Martin (2011), who through an ethnographic case study concluded in the great importance of outdoor drama; “Art, music, drama and adventure activities are mixed in order to touch different dimensions of a person - physical, social, mental, creative, spiritual, and so on” (p.79).

Through outdoor activities, outdoor education seeks to accomplish personal and social development, along with a sense of environmental awareness. However, to reach this ultimate goal, outdoor activities per se are not enough. The need for a substantial connection of activities with the teaching subject is imperative. Techniques such as problem-based learning and reflection can enhance students’ comprehension and link both environmental and curriculum knowledge to real circumstances. That is a prerequisite for teachers, as well. Questions like “why am I doing this activity with these individuals at this time?” (Higgins & Nicol 2002, p.3) are being put forward for exploration and discussion both in the outdoor classroom and to outdoor educators.

The importance of reflection

Another important attribute of outdoor learning is the reflection that follows each experience in the outdoors. The “learning by doing” Dewey's motto is quite often not interpreted correctly, as Dewey strongly supported that experiences lead to knowledge that in turns lead to the reconstruction of the same experiences or to the acquisition of new ones (Dewey, 1997). This ‘learning by doing – doing by learning’ circular movement includes a significant pause; a reflective procedure which helps to internalize the actions and experiences and transform them into knowledge (Molander 1993, cited in Dahlgren & Szczepanski 1998, p.33).

Basic requirements for the outdoor experiences to be effective are to stop, to eat, to stay dry and warm, so that you can think and finally act. This succession in experiential events is also supported by Dewey, who believes that postponing an immediate action and let observation and judgment intervene will solve the educational problem (Dewey, 1997). However, for the reflection to be effective, the need for distance and time away from the experience is crucial; only then the reflection is deep and leads to real knowledge (Leberman & Martin, 2004).

Outdoor education, as every progressive educational approach, tries to find and consolidate its place within the existing educational system, using different tools and practices than the traditional teaching methods. This effort has attracted the interest of both teachers and academics within the educational community, raising both various and different opinions and perceptions. Following, there will be an attempt to summarize the most central and
important of these perceptions, aiming to clarify the current educational climate about outdoor education and to support the current research with the relevant literature background.

**Education in the outdoors**

Nowadays, outdoor education is being formally implemented in some special progressive schools such as Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner Schools\(^2\). Also, many universities in Europe, U.S.A, Canada and Australia have incorporated outdoor education in their curriculum, mainly in the form of a master program or a single course in the undergraduate or postgraduate level \(^3\). However, outdoor education is widely being applied neither in the traditional school curriculum nor in the university educational system. According to many researchers, this limited implementation of outdoor teaching is due to several factors such as constraints posed by time, materials, schedules (Robertson & Krugly-Smolska, 1997) and lack of training (Ernst, 2009). Also, this teaching practice is considered to entail a certain amount of risk and it depends largely on the location of the schools in relation to nature (Backman, 2011). On the other hand, some primary and secondary school teachers use the outdoors to fulfil several teaching goals, as much research argues that outdoor activities entail significant benefits for the encounters with nature, such as the promotion of environmental knowledge and attitudes (Fančovičová & Prokop, 2011), the enhancement of physical condition (Dahlgren & Szczepanski, 1998) and the development of creativity, imagination and harmony (Dahlgren & Szczepanski, 1998; Louv, 2005).

**Outdoor teaching benefits**

Both old and contemporary scientific studies, relevant with the implementation of outdoor education programs and activities, lead to positive results concerning students’ knowledge, attitudes and environmental awareness. According to Fančovičová and Prokop (2011), outdoor education programs improve students’ environmental knowledge and attitudes. These recent findings reinforce previous research which concluded in that direct experience teaching in the out-of-doors results in broader and richer educational opportunities and provides a better climate for learning (Blomberg, 1967). Moreover, the exploration of the outdoors promotes concern and empathy for nature (Emmons, 1997), improves children’s social

\(^2\) For more information about Maria Montessori schools look in the International Montessori Index (2012) and about Rudolf Steiner schools in Hindes (2011).

\(^3\) Outdoor Education programs and courses can be found in Linköping University, Sweden, the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, the Lakehead University, Canada, the Latrobe University, Australia, and other. Also, see more information about outdoor courses in Outdoor Education Research and Evaluation Center (2008).
relations (Higgins & Nicol, 2002; Mygind, 2009), and enhances their pro-environmental perceptions (Johnson & Manoli, 2008).

Apart from the great importance of outdoor activities for the development of social relationships and the positive spirit of cooperation that they induce (Dahlgren & Szczepanski, 1998), they also promote physical condition and a unique kinaesthetic coordination of the body (Dahlgren & Szczepanski, 1998; Higgins & Nicol, 2002). Furthermore, students that experience the outdoors often present reduced anxiety and depression levels (Kanters et al., 2002). Due to positive research results such as the above, outdoor education has gained a significant position in scientific educational journals and conferences as an alternative approach for teaching that benefits students of all ages, as well as adults through lifelong learning programs.

**School teachers’ perceptions**

Through practicing outdoor activities and lessons, school teachers experience several live situations, form different opinions and perceive outdoor teaching in a multidimensional way. Further on, teachers’ and academic teachers’ main opinions and beliefs are being addressed, as they referred in the relevant literature, in an effort to shed light into their perceptions concerning outdoor education approaches and experiences.

**The perception of risk**

A perceived amount of risk is stated by many outdoor practitioners through qualitative research in the field of outdoor teaching. This risk, though, contains a twofold meaning; on the one hand is perceived as an important aspect of learning and development (Ogilvie, 2005; Little et al., 2011; Backman, 2011) while on the other hand it is considered as a barrier for the implementation of outdoor activities (Maynard & Waters, 2007; Backman, 2011).

According to Ogilvie, “outdoor challenges may involve some risk and uncertainty” (2005, p.32). The writer supports that the total absence of risk in outdoor settings is not feasible and many times the participants have to take responsibility for their actions and depend on their own strengths. However, the latter becomes a matter of independence that promotes learning and personal development on the long run. Practitioners of outdoor play mention the necessity for children to take physical risks when learning new skills, “not only for skill development but also for confidence building and learning how to avoid injury” (Little et al 2011, p.123). Also, early years teachers are convinced that there is a connection between successful physical risk-taking and a willingness to undertake risks in other areas of
learning (Stephenson, 2003). Finally, some teachers suggest risks and critical incidents to be inevitable elements and part of friluftsliv\textsuperscript{4} teaching: “kids need to be challenged in life and not always be on the safe side” (teacher opinion in Backman 2011, p.59).

However, Seyfried and Neiβl investigated possible reservations toward outdoor education, such as the risk of accidents (in Higgins & Nicol 2002, p.65), and through the results of their study it seems that teachers’ opinions concerning risk perceptions are divided. About 20% of the teachers agree that with outdoor education activities there is a high risk of accidents, something that reinforces the considered risks related to outdoor activities as barriers for teaching (Backman, 2011). Moreover, Maynard and Waters (2007) mention teachers’ perceived risk as a ‘cultural protectionism’, mainly originated from the combination of limited access to outdoor spaces (city environments) and fear for physical harm or inappropriate adult threats.

The perception of place

Braund and Reiss (2004) mention the positive influence that outdoor lessons, as a context of learning, have had both to teachers and students. Teachers mention gains such as developing knowledge about learning, becoming more active and motivated and enjoying the outdoors as much as their students: “My best advise to you is to get involved with anything you can outside school ….. anything where you see pupils and how they learn in a different light” (teacher comment in p.2). According to Tan and Pedretti (2010), accessing and using the outdoors is very important for teachers who advocate outdoor education, as they perceive the place as a way of connecting their students with the local environment and learn more about it, thus addressing community and environmental issues.

Dahlgren and Szczepanski (1998) suggest that finding a place for implementing outdoor education programs can be direct and easy to achieve: “outdoor education can be practiced in schoolyards, parks and gardens, in urban settings [industrial landscapes and cultural historic environments] ….. during city walks, visits to the zoo or in nature reserves” (p.26). In a research of Hutson \textit{et al.} (2010), that revealed teachers’ different perspectives and personal meanings assigned to places, it is suggested that teachers “may find greater clarity in the values they espouse by understanding the range of meanings they attach to the natural environments they work in and for” (p.440). For example, some teachers perceive outdoor teaching as a difficult task to fulfil in big cities, as they believe that a remotely located place in relation to civilization is needed (Backman, 2011). However, this belief contrasts the

\textsuperscript{4} Information about the ‘friluftsliv’ concept you can find in Gelter (2000).
philosophy of outdoor education, which is based on a pedagogic context in a landscape that is authentic, alive and constantly changing, but not necessarily natural and away from societies.

**The perception of barriers**

If we look closely into the literature we can detect some barriers or negative opinions, mainly expressed by school teachers who implement outdoor and environmental education programs. To begin with, time constrains and overcrowded curriculums are some perceived difficulties that many teachers mention. According to many researchers (Robertson & Krugly-Smolska, 2005; Tan & Pedretti, 2010; Wright, 2010), teachers believe that environmental education programs is a difficult task within the realm of schools due to such variables as limiting teaching time and schedule constrains: “These variables include the format of the programme [club versus course], the time the teacher is able to spend with the students, the flexibility the teacher has for involving students beyond the confines of the school and schedules…” (Robertson & Krugly-Smolska 2005, p.319). Apart from time constrains, the access in the outdoors as well as weather problems are also among basic teachers’ concerns when organizing an excursion. These perceived problems may prevent teachers from finally implementing activities in the outdoors (Wright, 2010; Backman, 2011).

Another barrier, referred in some studies (Robertson & Krugly-Smolska, 2005; Tan & Pedretti, 2010), is the lack of financial resources, educational material and infrastructure to support the outdoor lessons. Of course, this is a commonly mentioned obstacle in educational processes, something that Tan and Pedretti state somehow like this: “these challenges come with the terrain of teaching and it was almost a job description to have to work with limited time and resources” (p.72). However, not only educational materials but also students’ behaviour is mentioned as one important impediment for the practicing of outdoor activities. Students’ apathy for environmental issues and difficulty to stay concentrated in the outdoors has been mentioned as two significant reasons why their teachers don’t take them out often (Tan & Pedretti, 2010; Wright, 2010). Moreover, teachers don’t feel strong or confident to support outdoor teaching, due to lack of training in environmental issues (Ernst, 2009) or in movement education (Sevimli-Celik *et al*, 2011), and lack of support from colleagues or headmasters (Robertson & Krugly-Smolska, 2005; Wright, 2010).

In conclusion, the most important conceptions of primary and secondary school teachers that are mentioned in the literature concern the subject areas of perceived risk, suitable location for implementation of outdoor teaching and barriers that impede outdoor education practices. However, the above findings only relate to how school teachers perceive
outdoor lessons and do not necessarily connect to university teachers’ perceptions about the topic. There are only a few similar studies that investigate academic teachers’ views about outdoor activities and experiential approaches, which are being discussed in the next section.

**Academic teachers’ perceptions**

In a research in the field of Geography and Environmental Science lessons, that extended previous studies of students’ perceptions, Scott *et al.* (2006) examined the students’ lecturers’ perceptions of the value of fieldwork as a pedagogic tool. The researchers defined the word ‘fieldwork’ as “any study of the environment that takes place outside the classroom” (p.161). According to lecturers, field trips help students to contextualize the theory, (e.g. put the academic content in a practical applied sense). Moreover, they suggested that fieldtrips provide a sense of reality to the students and improve both student-student and lecturer-student relationships. Finally, they supported that fieldtrips help themselves to teach subject-specific skills and perceive fieldwork as an essential engagement with the ‘out’ world.

In another international study about university programs in outdoor adventure education, 38 academics were questioned as to their perceptions of the importance of various characteristics and attributes to an outdoor adventure education program’s survival and academic excellence. Among their answers, the one that prevailed in scores was the critical importance of having a departmental chair/supervisor to publicize and defend the department’s outdoor program. Other opinions were related to effective management, strong and competent leadership and sufficient resources (Potter *et al*, 2011).

According to Hickcox (2002), experiential learning programs and courses in off-campus sites create new opportunities for faculty and students to interact. As one academic teacher mentioned, “Students are no longer just faces occupying seats in a classroom. They are individuals with ideas, concerns, feelings, and interests that I can’t easily ignore” (academic teacher’s statement, p.127). Hickcox supports the latter, highlighting that “teachers find that ‘one-sizefits-all’ methods are quickly discounted as their students struggle with unique dilemmas…” (p.127). Overall, there is an unclear picture relevant to academic teachers’ perceptions about outdoor education, as there are very few studies that investigate this level of education. The present study aims to contribute toward this scientific gap, researching about Greek academic teachers’ perceptions relevant to outdoor education theories and practices.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the design and data collection of the research. It consists of a description of the research area as well as the sample that was selected for the conduction of the current study, accompanied by the reasons for this selection. Additionally, the research tools that were used for the data collection as well as the process of the research and the strategy of the analysis are mentioned.

Research area and sample

The reason for the selection of the research area and sample stems from the research contribution that has been mentioned in the introduction of this study; we do know only little about university teachers’ perceptions related to the outdoor educational approach, for there are only a few relevant studies that investigate this level of education. Also, personal interest related to the ‘fate’ of outdoor education in Greek schools and universities contributed to the final decision about the origin of the research sample. Taking under consideration some ‘de facto’ advantages that Greece holds for implementing outdoor lessons, such as great weather all year round and many beautiful natural landscapes and cultural places, it is awkward the fact that teachers in all levels of education don’t practice outdoor activities often. This educational approach is neither known nor usual among didactic methods in Greek schools and universities. Thus, not only the current scientific research gap but also personal questioning led to the final decision about the research area and sample.

The research is concentrated on two university departments in Greece that were easily accessible by the researcher, due to pressing financial and geographical restrictions. Moreover, time constraints (e.g. it was a holiday period for universities) confined the research sample to only 8 academics from one university in Greece. The academic teachers that participated in the research work in two different departments of one university; 3 teachers teach in a Department of Primary Education and 5 teachers in a Department of Preschool Education (among totally 18 departments, 9 Departments of Primary Education and 9 Departments of Preschool Education in Greece). The exact location of the university is preferred not to be reported, as this will ensure the participants’ wish to remain anonymous. The teaching subjects of the academics are in brief: Didactic of Mathematics, Didactic of History, Didactic of Literature, Environmental Education, Educational Communication, Didactic of Media, Didactic of Philosophy and Teaching Methodology. In the research 2 women and 6 men
participated and the average age of the sample is 50 years old (from 44 up to 59 years old). Finally, the average time of their academic teaching is 11 years (from 3 up to 15 years). At this point it is important to mention that the above sample is not representative and does not allow for the results of the research to be both generalized and applied to all the Greek university teachers. However, the emerged information does give an insight of academics’ current knowledge, practices and perceptions concerning the outdoor educational approach.

Last but not least, the sample choice was based on two criteria. Firstly, the access to available academic teachers, as the interviews were taken during Christmas vacation and not many academics were in the university at that time. Secondly, the variation of the teaching subjects, as there has been an effort to avoid participants that teach the same subject in the university. Thus, even though the research sample was not targeted as far as the individuals’ selection is concerned, an effort was made for the teaching subjects of the academics to be representative of the overall departments’ curriculum.

**Research method and tools**

For this research a qualitative approach was used, that included analysis of data extracted from qualitative semi-structured interviews with university teachers in Greece. This method allowed a certain amount of freedom to utilize all the questions with a flexible way and to ask additional, non-planned questions. As McMillan and Weyers mention, “the value of qualitative research derives from the authentic and case-specific detail that it can encompass” (2010, p.125). Thus, another advantage of the semi-structured form of interviews was that it helped the extracted information to stay to the point and not get disoriented by a total unstructured conversation. Moreover, according to many researchers (Bond, 2004; Bryman, 2008) the semi-structured interviews help to uncover the meanings and intentions of specific actors in specific situations, offer a good means of examining experiences, feelings and opinions and help specific issues to be addressed. Finally, this method allowed some space for comparability of responses among Greek academics, for the questions were the same for all.

**Interview schedule**

An interview schedule that included basic demographic questions and 14 main questions was created for the collection of valuable data from the interviews (Appendix 1, p.57). These questions aspired to cover the main aim and the objectives that have been put forward in this research and were tested through a pilot interview. During this pilot interview the questions were checked both by the researcher and a colleague (PhD student) for whether they meet the
research objectives, whether they motivate the respondents to feel important and give trustworthy answers, and if the responders could understand what is required of them. After the pilot interview a few questions were formulated in a different way to render data gathering the most efficient possible, contributing both to the validity and reliability of the interviews (Cohen et al., 2011, p.204).

According to Patton (in Hughes, 1996) through the interview questions a researcher can acquire six different types of information; “demographic information, experience/behavior information (what a person does or has done), opinion/value information (what a person believes), information about feelings (emotional responses to experiences and thoughts), knowledge (factual information) and senses (sensory questions)” (p.172). In this research, the interview questions were expected to reveal basic knowledge (question 1), experiences and attitudes (questions 4, 5 & 7) and opinions and perceptions (questions 2, 3, & 6-13) of academic teachers concerning the outdoor educational approach and its implementation in their teaching field.

**Conducting the research**

In face to face meetings with each prospective participant, all of them were informed both verbally and in writing about the study and they were kindly requested to contribute to the current research. An invitation letter was created that informed them about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity, all followed by the name and signature of the researcher (Appendix 2, p.59). All the academic teachers were positive to participate in the research and appointments were made according to the date and hour that suited them most.

The interviews were carried out in January 2012. 6 out of 8 interviews were held inside the university building, in quiet offices or laboratory rooms, one in a school and one in an office outside the university building. In most interviews the setting was calm and quiet with no important interruptions or problems emerging through the procedure. Since the first contact, most participants wondered about the outdoor educational approach, thus each interview started with a short conversation about the researcher’s educational background and a brief description of the research subject and aims. Also, some information about the interviewees was discussed, including the demographic questions of the interview schedule. The total duration of each interview and discussion varied from 30 to 55 minutes.

According to Hughes (1996), a voice recorder can make a respondent suspicious; “it is often necessary to avoid using the tape recorder for at least the first five minutes” (p.174).
Thus, only after the introductory discussion and the demographic questions had been completed, permission was asked from the interviewees for using the voice recorder. 6 of them replied positively while 2 didn’t accept the voice recorder usage. For the latter, the traditional way of recording the answers in paper was used.

During the procedure, the order of the questions changed in few interviews, as some respondents went further on discussing, covering later questions or topics. This, however, didn’t constitute a major problem, as both sequence and content of the questions were formulated in a way that didn’t cause an important contextual effect to preceding or upcoming questions (Oppenheim, 1992). Additional questions were asked, mainly related to each participant’s teaching subject. Also, some participants were more open and receptive, so more questions about their perceptions and feelings were put forward. After the main questions had been asked, the discussion ended with questions asked from the interviewees (interview question 14). At this point of time, most respondents wanted to find out more about outdoor education practices, looked for information about how they can improve their lessons or how Swedish universities have included outdoor education in their programs. The biggest part of the ending conversations was also recorded with the participants’ permission and much additional information has both been extracted and analyzed, and will be discussed in later chapters.

Motivation is extremely important for qualitative research; if the participants feel valued then the participation is likely to be enhanced, as well as their attitudes toward future involvement in social research (Moser & Kalton, 1983). After each interview had been completed, a thank-you letter was given to each participant that showed the researcher’s appreciation for his/her participation (Appendix 3, p.60). With this letter, not only the valuable contribution of the participant was acknowledged, but also a way for further contact and more interviews was paved.

Finally, all respondents showed an interest in the disclosure of the research results to them, four of them offered material (book chapters, books, articles) relevant with outdoor didactics for the enhancement of my research and one of them asked for relevant material, so that he would enrich his teaching lessons. After the collection of the data had finished, all the interviews were transcribed verbatim (though skipping pauses and face reactions) and translated into the English language. To ensure the correct translation of the transcripts, main parts of the interviews were checked by a native English speaker. All the discussions that followed after the interviews were also recorded and along with the interview schedule material they constituted the total material for analysis.
Concluding, during the communication and interview procedure with the academics, all ethical considerations regarding the harm to participants, the invasion of privacy, the lack of informed consent and deception were ensured (as has already been described during this chapter), by actions such as the invitation letter and the protection of all the data, following the guidelines set forth in Bryman (2008).

Data analysis

According to Cohen et al. “qualitative data analysis … is often heavy on interpretation, and one has to note that there are frequently multiple interpretations to be made of qualitative data…” (2011, p.537). That became very obvious from the beginning of the process of analysis, as the amount of data extracted from the interviews was enormous and extremely complicated. The first reading helped only to realize the latter, and thus an effective strategy had to be adopted; an analysis that included careful and detailed reading, concentrating to preliminary themes and not respondents. I decided that the data analysis would be driven by themes and not by individuals, as the whole set of responses of a person was complex and disorientating from the research aims. Also, analyzing each interview separately would neither connect explicitly the respondents’ answers nor reveal the overall picture in each research aim and objective (Cohen et al., 2011).

During the second reading, effort was given to read carefully and note all information that was constantly appearing in the data material, something that led to the formation of preliminary themes. Codes\(^1\) and sub codes were also created to record the different answers, along with hidden perceptions or opinions. After this first analysis, these codes and sub codes were checked again, some of them were separated in more codes, some others were merged and data that did not fit in any code stayed aside, temporarily. Then, interconnections between codes were sought, and after another reading some basic themes were formed, including several sub themes. The reading was repeated for several times and notes were taken, in an effort to ensure the interconnectedness of each participant’s responses and to protect data fragmentation in every single interview (Cohen et al., 2011, p.551). After the completion of the analysis, some responses were removed or limited to the basic concept or idea displayed, as specific names, locations or other information that the interviewees mentioned would reveal their or others’ identity.

\(^1\) According to Cohen et al. (2011), “A code is simply a name or label that the researcher gives to a piece of text that contains an idea or a piece of information … It enables the researcher to identify similar information” (p.559). This process can be regarded as a categorizing system that stores all the relevant data under the same code.
The final themes that emerged after the completion of the data analysis are presented in Figure 1 (p.19) and correspond to the main aim and the two objectives of this research. The direct link between the aims of the research and the themes is presented in chapter 4 (Table 1, p.20) along with all the final results of the current study. Finally, a more in depth discussion of the most important results will follow in chapter 5.

Thematic analysis of the results

**Figure 1: Thematic analysis of the results of the research**
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the current study. From the data analysis four important themes emerged which are introduced in this chapter and are further discussed in chapter 5. Moreover, the connection of the themes with the research aim and objectives is presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESEARCH AIMS</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>THEMES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic aim</td>
<td>Academic teachers’ perceptions and experiences in outdoor education</td>
<td>All Themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective 1</td>
<td>Academic teachers’ knowledge and experiences in outdoor education</td>
<td>Theme 1: Views about outdoor education, Theme 2: Experiences in outdoor lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective 2</td>
<td>Academic teachers’ perceptions of benefits and barriers of practicing outdoor education</td>
<td>Theme 3: The perception of benefits, Theme 4: The perception of barriers</td>
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Table 1: The connection between the aims of the research and the themes.

At this point it is important to mention that there has been an endeavour for the results to be presented in a concrete and explicit way, aiming to provide the overall impression about academics’ viewpoints and perceptions. Nevertheless, the amount of information, the eloquent use of the language and the unique character of each respondent rendered this process an extremely difficult task to complete. In many cases, academics’ exact words had to be displayed, for keeping the material authentic and alive, contributing thus to the reliability of the results and providing a narrative character.

**Theme 1: Academic teachers’ views about outdoor education**

The first theme of the research had the purpose to study academic teachers’ views concerning the outdoor educational approach. Teachers reported what they know and believe about the method along with some of its basic attributes and experiential practices. Their answers are related to the first research objective of the current study.
The diverse interpretations of the concept ‘Outdoor Education’

In the beginning of the discussions about outdoor education the initial responses of the academics were short and oriented toward a definition. Four academics referred to outdoor education as the process of teaching outside the school or the classroom. Teachers’ phrases such as “outside structured school environment”, “education outside the classroom” and “teaching a course outside the school” are some representative examples. Two other teachers mentioned that outdoor education belongs to progressive or modern education: “Outdoor education incorporates all the basic principles of the so-called modern education; in fact, it comes into conflict with traditional education” (respondent #6). Moreover, three respondents tried to define outdoor education using paradigms of educational movements (such as the British school) or educators like Georg Kerschensteiner¹ and Elen Parkhurst². However, respondent #5 replied by saying “Nothing. It is the first time I hear it” and respondent #8 was not sure what outdoor education is really about:

... either it will be an education in the outdoors or it will be an education for the outdoors, one of these two. So I believe that it rather is education for the outdoors.

The above statement introduces one interesting perception that emerged by half academics about the close relation of outdoor education to environmental education. More specifically, academic teachers referred to outdoor teaching as primarily an education for the outdoors; “In outdoor education elements from the outdoors can be exploited to give children stimuli in order to deal with a more experiential way with things that concern the environment” (respondent #1). However, in contradiction to this perception, respondent #6 expressed a different opinion about the aforementioned connection:

... they have related the outdoors with nature or want to be related to nature ... if, anyway, you ought to do the lesson outside the classroom, that for me is outdoor education. Therefore, in that point things get a more tough character, we enter the nucleus of what is called outdoor education. I could tell you very generally and shortly, they relate outdoor education to the trees, which of course has a point, but its not only that, I would say that it is much more interesting when it is not that, because then it forces you to find what exactly is (outdoor education).

¹ Georg Kerschensteiner was a German professor and educational theorist, primarily known for developing a pragmatic approach to education that included the integration of academic study with physical activity and the establishment of a network of vocational schools.
² Helen Parkhurst was an American educator who created the Dalton Plan and founded the Dalton School. She created a progressive educational model with objectives such as to tailor each student’s program to his or her needs, interests, and abilities, to promote both independence and dependability, and to enhance the student’s social skills and sense of responsibility toward others. Parkhurst developed a three-part plan (Dalton Plan) that continues to be the structural foundation of a Dalton education. More information in Parkhurst, (1921).
The above opinion reinforces what Dahlgren and Szczepanski argue about in their book ‘Outdoor Education’ (1998) concerning the importance of the outdoors not only for acquiring environmental knowledge but also for other gains such as the promotion of personal and social development and the cultivation of creativity and meaningful learning.

**Outdoor Education attributes: experiences, body senses and the landscape**

Along the discussion about what is outdoor education, the respondents also reported some basic attributes of outdoor teaching, such as learning through experiences, using all the senses and forming a relationship with the body. More specifically, six academics mentioned that experiential activities are a part of teaching in the outdoors and referred to the use of all the body senses through outdoor practices: “In this teaching all the senses take place” (respondent #7). Also, one respondent stressed the relationship that you develop with your body while being in the outer environment:

> I would choose to highlight in particular the relationship you get with your own body as it lies within the same environment, or, if you want, to reorganize all the associations that you have with your own body (respondent #6).

However, only two respondents mentioned the appropriate use of the landscape as a characteristic of outdoor education, a result that is important and will be discussed in the next chapter. Lastly, three academics argued about the flexibility of this teaching approach when it comes to the applicability in many different places, in all ages (from preschool education to adult learning) and in both formal and informal education.

**Outdoor Education practices: virtual and simulated excursions**

Academic teachers were also asked and reported some examples of outdoor education practices, based on their knowledge or personal perceptions. Excursions in specific areas of historic, cultural or natural interest predominated in the answers; “An outdoor lesson can be a visit in a specific area of historical interest. We can integrate a monument in a history class or an ecosystem in science lessons” (respondent #1). Only one teacher mentioned outdoor games as an educational tool: “We go to the school yard and there we use games and we try to translate the virtual representation into actions” (respondent #3). Finally, half academics reported as outdoor practices several indoor activities such as the workshop and laboratory use, visits in the libraries, the use of Skype program for distance learning and computers’ virtual environments. One representative example follows:
A dimension of experiential approach that I think should be emphasized, despite the fact that it is secondary and simulated, is provided by our computers, the virtual environments ... Here let’s say, it is a history workshop, because we have direct access to the library, because we have computers, because we have records of oral testimonies, because we have musical devices, here is a form of experiential learning (respondent #2).

To conclude, the first theme led to the disclosure of academics’ knowledge and views relevant with outdoor education theories, attributes and practices. Overall, most academics appeared to know at least some of the basic characteristics of the approach, which have already been described in chapter 2 (p.5-7). Their answers displayed basic knowledge on the field, providing a simple image of this educational approach. This first result also gives an insight of teachers’ basic perceptions about what is outdoor education and it is expected to affect the rest of the results, something that will be discussed further in the following chapter.

**Theme 2: Academic teachers’ experiences in outdoor lessons**

The second theme of the current research provided a basic teaching profile of the participants and disclosed their previous experiences in outdoor lessons. More specifically, two interview questions were designed to reveal academics’ current teaching methods and the place where they usually carry out their lessons. Then, through another question, academics described their previous experiences in outdoor lessons.

**Academics’ teaching profile: indoor lessons and traditional methods**

Starting from the place of teaching, six respondents mentioned that they teach only or mainly indoors, inside the classroom, the laboratory or the amphitheatre; “Mainly indoors. Unfortunately, mainly indoors. Outdoors I haven’t tried it many times” (respondent #1). Respondent #3 reported that sometimes he goes outdoors with his students and respondent #7 explained that twenty to twenty five percent of his teaching lessons are being performed in the outdoors. One interesting answer from respondent #4 was that as a school teacher he used to teach in the outdoors very often, but now as an academic teacher he teaches only indoors. Lastly, the basic indoor places for teaching reported to be the laboratory (6 teachers) and the amphitheatre (7 teachers).

Discussing about the academics’ teaching methods, most of them reported traditional methods and interdisciplinary approaches for teaching their subjects. Six academics mentioned lectures as the most common method, while two of them also highlighted the use of audiovisual material for enriching these lectures:
Academics justified their choice to use mainly lectures by referring to the large number of students that they have and the lack of sufficient equipment to back up their lessons (projectors, cameras, audiovisual devices and etcetera). Finally, two teachers supported that they understand the need to work with material instead of just speaking in the classroom, but they are not used to such ‘highly sophisticated techniques’.

Another method of teaching, which was reported by 5 academics, was the use of tasks such as assignments, seminars and presentations during the lessons. Through these tasks academics supported that students express their experiences and have the opportunity to present their ideas and opinions in the classroom. Also, conversations, dialectic debates and counseling methods were reported as other ways of teaching by two academics:

\[
\text{I try to activate students to transfer their experiences through interactive conversations, to bring into action their experiences or to investigate various subjects connected with our lesson (respondent #3).}
\]

In general, only two academics (respondents #1 and #7) mentioned field trips and field research as an educational tool that they use in their lessons. Respondent #7 also reported the use of other outdoor practices such as environmental trails and outdoor games, while respondent #3 supported that he uses many alternative methods: “Everything is there, drama, theater education, and monologue. We use everything”. Concluding, academics almost unanimously stated the absence of alternative or progressive approaches, such as outdoor education, from the Greek educational system: “Such practices mostly are islands in the framework of conventional courses and they do not take a form of systematic implementation” (respondent #2). Finally, according to the respondents, the Greek educational system has failed to escape from the traditional concept of education and to present an alternative character. The above opinions are very important and will be discussed in the following chapter.

**Academics’ experiences in outdoor lessons: attitudes, activities and places**

Academics were very open and receptive during the discussions about their own experiences in outdoor lessons. They revealed their opinions about how feasible it is to apply their subjects outside the classroom, giving relevant examples of previous outdoor practices with their students. This section is separated in three parts, for the best possible presentation and comprehension of academic teachers’ several opinions.
Positive attitudes towards outdoor lessons
First of all, the academics expressed their opinion concerning the applicability of outdoor lessons in their teaching field. They reported that it is possible to teach their lessons in the outdoors by using several phrases such as “completely feasible”, “very possible”, “yes, of course” and more. Three academics also provided specific paradigms of how they could use the outdoor environment in their courses; “I would prefer to go in the small theatre to do a lecture there and to talk about the basic principles of Plato and Education School” (respondent #3). Local sport stadiums, outdoor theaters and natural landscapes were reported as suitable places for them to teach their subjects. Moreover, two participants stated that outdoor lessons can be related to any teaching subject, as every single detail of the outdoors can be evolved to a proper lesson; “Any module can be related to the experience of the environment. I don’t think that there is a lesson that can be done better within four walls even if the classroom is well equipped” (respondent #1). Nevertheless, this positive viewpoint that most academics expressed does not comply with their reported actions, as they stated that they hardly ever practice their lessons out of doors.

Outdoor activities in cultural rather than natural subjects
During the interviews all academics reported at least one case of teaching in the outdoors. More specifically, four academics had practiced an outdoor lesson involving monuments of cultural heritage of their town. One representative example supports their experiences:

The subject was the exploitation of the architectural heritage of the town and its interconnection with cultural issues, history and the environment. To combine historical events with architectural issues and how they evolve in present time. How they have maintained, how they are preserved today, what is the attitude of the state to these issues of culture and environment, and how education can help to the promotion and protection of these monuments (respondent #1).

Many academics mentioned students’ visits to schools, local hospitals, radio stations, dance schools and other educational organizations as outdoor practices within their courses. Other referring outdoor lessons included arts and mathematics in the neighborhood or in the town, mathematics in local enterprises and only one lesson included activities about natural resources in a local park. The aforementioned activities concerned students of all levels of higher education in the university (undergraduate and postgraduate level) and also students from other universities in Greece or in other European countries. Academics tried to remember possible lessons that they had conducted even several years ago, when they were
working in another university or in another city (or even country), making in this way really obvious the absence or regular outdoor lessons in their current teaching schedules.

At this point it is important to mention that most academics referred to activities that were held only by the students while academics did not participate physically in the implementation or sometimes not even in the preparation of the lessons. One typical example is students’ practical exercises in schools or other educational organizations, which have been reported by almost all academics as a basic paradigm of outdoor education: “However, we make such efforts e.g. in practical exercises we empower all students to attend institutions, we are not teaching outside, but they are coming out of the classroom” (respondent #3). Also, other actions, such as the collection of oral testimonies, interactive interviews or field research in public services were mentioned to have been designed together with the academics, but implemented only by their students.

Concluding, academics described many different activities that their students implemented in the outdoor lessons. One example is:

*We went to a dance school, in ballet schools, in places for special education. We saw a workshop there, we heard lectures, we participated in workshops ... We played games and drama and we showed this material in the end, it was recorded by cameras and a discussion with all these groups together followed* (respondent #3).

Overall, the reported outdoor activities had mainly to do with guided tours, visits, observations and recording of these observations (pictures, videos), interviews, participation in workshops, outdoor games and drama, field studies, radio reports and environmental paths.

**Diverse reasons for choosing an outdoor place**

During the interviews, the respondents were asked about the location where their outdoor lessons took place and the reasons for the selection of this place. However, their reports were fragmentary and many different perceptions emerged from the discussions. Some academics mentioned spontaneous decisions or feelings that led them out of the classroom. A case in point is stressed below:

*It happened only once between funny and serious, I did an outdoor education lesson in a postgraduate program on the beach. The excitement was over us because we said ‘we are in here, closed into the academy, why don’t we go out on the beach’, and we went, sat down together at the table and discussed* (respondent #5).

Another very interesting opinion was mentioned by two teachers. According to their statements, it is very difficult to transfer their lesson outside the classroom, thus they make
efforts to bring in their indoor lesson elements from the outdoors; “So what do you do then? … I try to bring the environment into, every environment. You can not do otherwise” (respondent #6). However, the respondents reported that it is not always easy to bring material in the classroom and it depends on each teacher’s capabilities. Also, they admitted that this method cannot substitute outdoor lessons; “In any case, what we would create indoors would be a fake situation, false, artificial. The natural thing would be in the outdoors” (respondent #1).

Lastly, only two respondents considered the choice of the place important and insisted on the connection of the place of learning with the aims of the lesson. One representative opinion was stated by respondent #6:

*When you imagine outdoor education in a beautiful garden or somewhere outside, but this outside has a limit, for me this and it looks like it might not be outdoor education. Therefore, philosophical speaking, the thing at stake in this education is to investigate what means and what is outside every time, and what is the inside, against which we go outside.*

This point highlights the importance of selecting not just an outdoor place but the appropriate place where the learning process will lead to essential knowledge, something that is also emphasized by Dewey (1997) and Szczepanski (2002). Going to the outdoors simply to avoid staying all the time indoors, is a basic characteristic of most educational systems, especially in primary and secondary schools. However, according to Higgins and Nicol (2002) this does not constitute outdoor education, not if there are no specific educational aims and connections with the teaching objects.

To summarize, most academic teachers stated that they usually stay indoors and use traditional methods and interdisciplinary approaches for their lessons. Also, even though all academics supported that they have implemented at least one outdoor lesson in the past with their students, from their descriptions results that most of them did not participate physically in this lesson. The activities that academics’ students implemented were mainly visits and observations in schools or historical and cultural places. Lastly, the importance of the selection of an appropriate place for outdoor teaching is not clearly evident within teachers’ responses. The above findings reveal the current teaching profile of the academics as well as their previous practices in outdoor lessons and will help to comprehend their general perceptions about outdoor education.
Theme 3: The perceived benefits of Outdoor Education

The third research theme revealed academic teachers’ opinions and views concerning outdoor education benefits. Teachers reported multiple and diverse advantages of teaching in the outdoors along with supporting examples, answering thus to the second research objective of the current study.

Stimulation of senses

First of all, almost every participant mentioned the importance of the stimuli that the natural environment provides to the students, as well as the activation of all their senses; “Teaching in the outdoors is something that stimulates students’ senses directly” (respondent #1); “…you’re already in an environment that has multiple stimulations, obviously this is good for you” (respondent #6); Academics stated that outdoor lessons provide richer and more direct experiences than indoor teaching. This multiplication of experiences due to enhanced stimulation and use of all senses is also supported by many researchers (Sobel, 1996; Dewey, 1997; Chauvel & Chauvel 1998; Dahlgren & Szczepanski, 1998) as a significant benefit that students obtain from their contact with the outdoors.

Connect theory with practice

Another reported educational benefit from teaching in the outdoors was that the students have the opportunity to work with each teaching object in practice. According to the teachers, instead of watching the stimuli through audiovisual media or just discussing about it in the classroom, it is preferable for the students to have a more direct experience and supervision of the teaching subject. In this way, they comprehend the provided knowledge and are able to use it. Two extremely masterful replies that highlighted this benefit were as follows:

The basic benefit of this approach will be that the theory taught in the classroom will be realized in action. Teaching is nothing else than a transformation of theory in practice. If there is no practical application of principles of pedagogy, we can not speak today about a process of learning by teaching (respondent #3).

“Extensive correlations are easier to approach, that are nerveless and dead in the classroom. In the outdoors, literature texts become alive, are vivid, with an embossed manner” (respondent #4).

These arguments are compatible with progressive educationalists such as Comenious (1967) and Dewey (1997), as well as with academic teachers’ viewpoints (in Scott et al, 2006), who
believe that experiences and activities in the outdoors help students to contextualize the theory and learn subject-specific skills.

**Promotion of social relations and health**

Much research has highlighted the significance of outdoor activities for the promotion of interpersonal relations and behavioral changes of students (see in chapter 2, p.10 - Dahlgren & Szczepanski, 1998; Palmberg & Kuru, 2000; Higgins & Nicol, 2002; Mygind, 2009). Almost all academics confirmed the above, describing the development of relations of specificity and friendship, and the calmness of their students due to greater freedom in the outdoors. One pointed paradigm was:

… such an activity also helps immensely to the development of interpersonal relationships; you come closer, than being in a classroom opposite to each other. There, you act consciously more as a team. You develop greater intimacy and that helps a lot in the lesson (respondent #1).

Lastly, two academics reported that natural environments create a different euphoria and reduce students’ level of stress, facilitating this way the educational process:

*The truth is that similar environments facilitate more the educational process, as students do not feel stressed sitting in a chair all the time, within 4 walls, for sure the natural environment is something that creates a different euphoria and possibly a different interest to participate into the lesson* (Respondent #6).

Even though in the relevant literature we have encountered many reports about health benefits of outdoor teaching (see in Dahlgren & Szczepanski, 1998; Kanters et al, 2002; Higgins & Nicol, 2002), such benefits were mentioned by only 2 respondents.

**Experiential approach to learning**

Six academics reported that outdoor lessons can provide significant support to their teaching subjects due to the use of experiential learning methods. The experiences that the outer environment provides, this feeling of the ‘alive’ was stated to be very crucial for students’ body rhythm, for their behaviour and their way of thinking, elements of education in which traditional teachers do not give too much importance nowadays. One paradigm was:

*The experiential method is beneficial; you can not imagine how important it is for the activities to have a meaning for the learner* (respondent #5).

The role that experiential learning plays for both the acquisition of life skills and the relation of the experiences with the interests of each learner was reported to be extremely crucial for
the academics’ students. All the above relative reports had one common axis that coincide with Beard and Wilson’s opinions; the reference to a more experiential approach to learning, that is more effective and desirable than traditional education (2006, p.43).

**Connection with nature**

All academic teachers agreed on the importance that outdoor activities have for the connection of their students with the natural environment. According to respondent #1, Greek society has been removed from nature, is being constantly urbanized and that is obvious in every aspect:

> Even children who live in smaller communities, in villages, in the countryside... Their parents tend to put them experience the environment through various devices, e.g. they prefer their children to watch documentaries on their couch, eating chips... than to say ‘come, let's go visit a farm in our area, see how several organisms organize their way of living’. Greeks don't prefer that anymore.

This statement coincides with Sczepanski’s description of a ‘triangular form of life’ that includes only indoor facilities such as school, home and shopping centers and affects children in their everyday social lives (2009). Moreover, Greek schools and universities come after the same aforementioned model of separation from natural landscapes and activities, following a more urban style:

> The current Greek educational system does not allow the contact with nature. Thus, it is necessary to introduce that kind of education in the Greek educational system (respondent #4).

Academics seem to agree that outdoor education can provide to the Greek educational system what it really misses; a contact with nature that would provide to the students beauty and harmony, stimuli and experiences. According to respondent #5, “nature gives to the humans opportunities that are healing and makes people that are not well to become well”.

Concluding, academics reported as basic benefits from outdoor lessons the multiplication of experiences (due to increased stimuli and use of senses), the connection of theory with practice along with the acquisition of teaching subject skills, and the promotion of interpersonal relations, behaviour and health of their students. Moreover, experiential learning approaches and direct contact with the natural environment were mentioned as important benefits for the students. All the aforementioned statements verify and reinforce previous relative results about outdoor education benefits (see in detail in chapter 2, p.9-10).
Theme 4: The perceived barriers for practicing outdoor education

Academic teachers reported several impediments that inhibit their efforts to implement lessons outside the classroom or the university. These statements formed the forth theme and correspond to the second objective of the research. Except from common responses such as time, place, human resources or infrastructure constraints, teachers mentioned the lack of the necessary pedagogical training, preparation and organization for outdoor courses. Also, they proceeded to a criticism of both school and academic teachers’ mentalities and attitudes that mould an unproductive and sterile educational climate and argued a lot about the general educational culture and societal behaviours within the Greek universities.

Time restrictions and inappropriate places

To begin with time management, seven teachers reported basic time restrictions for preparing and implementing outdoor lessons, such as tight semesters, short lesson duration and lack of systematic student attendance. One example is addressed below:

> Also, time management, i.e. the three-hour teaching, it happens to have a lesson just the day after the previous lesson has been done, so no time for planning, preparation, organization, implementation (respondent #3).

Three academics also reported barriers relevant to the location where the lesson should take place. Respondent #6 mentioned the need for open and transparent places to teach, while many natural landscapes in Greece have been destroyed and human constructed open spaces are ugly. Respondent #1 highlighted the difficulty of taking the students to the appropriate place for teaching the relevant subject:

> There is an inherent difficulty to meet in several places … if I wanted to say to my students ‘come to observe how communication is realized in a school class, there should be available one class of the university experimental schools where there is more room for freedom.

Another opinion was reported by the only academic teacher who teaches twenty five percent of his lessons in the outdoors: “I feel more stressed in the outdoors, because there is a risk with the students for injury or accidents. So I avoid it, I don’t feel comfortable. In the classroom I feel safer” (respondent #7). Teachers who often expose their students and themselves to the outdoors, aknowledge the possibility of accidents and have a better comprehension of unpredictable circumstances and possible dangers. The safety of the students while being in the outdoors was only reported by this teacher, although it is referred as a realistic problem in the relevant literature (see in Higgins & Nicol, 2002; Ogilvie, 2005).
Inadequate infrastructure and human resources

Another impediment that prevailed to the conversations was the lack of university infrastructure and facilities. All academics stressed this as a big problem that minimizes any potential for applying outdoor education. Deficiencies in financial resources, means of transport and appropriate equipment as well as the institutional framework were reported to be the most important barriers. One respondent successfully portrayed in just a few sentences these problems that affect possible alternative educational practices:

_I would be happy if I had the institutional framework and the infrastructure to implement that kind of practical exercises. At this moment I don’t have it, and what is done is done occasionally, coincidentally. Infrastructures are an obstacle, programming is another, it’s the amount of administrative work we have to do, it’s the lack of qualified people to frame the teaching and there are so many institutional problems that even if you have an inspiration and a suitable theoretical construction you cannot apply them in a systematic way_ (respondent #2).

Moreover, these problems seem to affect academics’ psychology and disposition for teaching:

_It is an environment like you see right now, which by itself has no means. And you should devote too much time either to provide resources or to buy, that you may not have the opportunity to do so, and all these end up so tiring_ (respondent #6).

An interesting perception that emerged through teachers’ reported opinions was the possibility to transfer their lessons in the outdoors, as long as they take out with them the appropriate equipment in order for these lessons to be successful. As appropriate equipment they characterized the existence of a blackboard to write on, maps, wireless internet connection and computers, so that they will be able to demonstrate theories and models, as they already do in the classroom. However, they stated that it is difficult to transfer this equipment outdoors and thus they choose to stay indoors. On the other hand, respondent #6 objected to the above opinions with the following statement:

_If we are about to transfer what we usually work with from the classroom to the outdoors, then outdoor education would not mean anything. For outdoor education to mean something you must reorganize all the ways in which you structure the educational relations in the environment._

Human resources were stated unanimously as one major obstacle that academic teachers face. More specifically, three problems emerged; the number of the university students, their perceptions and behavior, and restrictions posed by other people that academics need to cooperate with (e.g. teachers in schools, assistant teachers in universities). Firstly, all academics highlighted the large number of their students (120-150 individuals), a fact that
requires special organization and thus makes the implementation of outdoor lessons an even more difficult task to fulfill: “In a course there are about 120 students, 120 students are more than it should be to run the lesson, it requires a very special organization” (respondent #5). Then, five of them also expressed significant reservations about students’ attitudes, behavior and lack of authenticity in communication while having a course in the outdoors:

*I’m afraid that if it was spring, and we were in an idyllic corner of […], this would create such expectations that any conventional course could not fulfill. I know that the outdoors create an illusion to the students, i.e. to believe that this can be repeated* (respondent #2).

Five academics also reported the lack of assistant teachers in the university to help them in the preparation and conduction of such alternative activities: “*I have no assistance; assistant teachers came too late to help me*” (respondent #5). Lastly, two academics reported that they sometimes find it difficult to collaborate with primary and secondary school teachers, as the latter should give their consent in order for university students to observe lessons in their schools.

**Insufficient pedagogical training and preparation**

Apart from the above impediments, almost all academics reported pedagogical training as another significant parameter for outdoor practices. The lack of qualified people to frame outdoor teaching was mentioned to influence academics’ decision to stay indoors. Six respondents referred to the absence of skills and experience that are needed for practicing outdoor teaching methods. Two illustrative examples follow:

*To be able to integrate the place in which you are at that moment in the course requires skills and innate and acquired from the one who teaches … I guess that it needs very good mediators. In other words, to get a trainer who has not learned anything else despite working in the classroom and to ‘throw’ him in the outdoors will do absolutely nothing, is wasted time* (respondent #6).

*A teacher does not have too much experience to do these activities … you cannot imagine what skills are required and what science, I don’t want to be an alarmist and be negative, but about maths I am not so sure that it is feasible* (respondent #5).

Then, another issue was the lack of appropriate pedagogical training of the students, which stems from the corresponding lack of academics in positions of didactics:

*In many departments we do not have university sections for teaching positions. Thus, i.e. the mathematician has no pedagogical training, so generally he is not able to teach, he knows only the subject matter* (respondent #8).
Two academics also showed uncertainty and lack of confidence for conducting an outdoor lesson, elements that stem from the lack of relevant training: “I confess that I would like to teach outdoors, but I still haven’t managed to become so wise in order to be able to” (respondent #2). The above teachers explained that they feel the need to know more about outdoor practices before they apply them to their students. They even asked for specific teaching plans that would explain the ways how a subject can be taught in the outdoors along with positive and negative points of such a process (even though something like that would sound mechanical).

Last but not least, according to three academics, the need for pedagogical preparation and organization is imperative for outdoor lessons to succeed. They reported that preparatory work should be done in the classroom, both by students and teachers. Only after this work has been completed its time to go out and investigate, get information, process it and compose new material. However, as they stated, this preparation is not happening in reality in Greek schools, and that is another important aspect that impedes essential outdoor teaching:

*Preparatory work should be preceded in the classroom, through assignments, individual dimensions of an subject, preparing worksheets, and you go over there and investigate something, such things are not happening* (Respondent #8).

So far, the above findings confirm previous research relevant with outdoor teaching barriers. Parameters like time management, appropriate place for teaching, student behavior, lack of training, effective organization and sufficient resources have already been reported by teachers and academics in similar studies to affect outdoor lessons (see in chapter 2, p.11-13). In the current research, academics were persistently referring to these barriers and reported to consider them as crucial factors that suppress their willingness to apply their lessons outside the classroom.

**The theoretic nature of the teaching subjects**

Some participants reported reservations for applying their own subjects in the outdoors. Four of them supported that the applicability of outdoor lessons is depending on the teaching subject. They explained that some courses have a theoretic nature and/or their content is not possible to be taught in the outdoors. Respondent #1 provided one illustrative example:

*No. In part I could teach some subjects but the entire object, no. In our object there is a large theoretical part where we discuss the various theories of communication. This cannot be taught in an environment outside the amphitheatre.*
Also, two academics stated that outdoor lessons can contribute to the learning process by providing a more pleasant atmosphere, but are not enough to cover the aims of their teaching subject. For example: “This could be done but not for reasons directly related to the subject, but simply because it would be a more pleasant environment for more stimulation” (respondent #1). According to the academic teachers’ statements, outdoor lessons would not give some extra value to the teaching objects as they could only create a pleasant switch in their lessons.

**Educational culture and teachers’ attitudes**

One big issue that emerged from academics’ statements was the current educational culture that also included academic and school teachers’ behaviors. Firstly, according to six academics the educational culture within the university affects any possible experimentation with alternative didactic approaches. For example, two respondents reported:

*Also, with my class, we do not go outdoors, because it is not offered itself that much and it is not prevalent in the culture of our department, unfortunately* (respondent #1).

*It's all about the culture, the mentality that is modified by social institutions ... this is potentially a negative factor even for academics who are supposed to have a deeper social background, precisely because they are constantly making research and are more ahead* (respondent #5).

Also, the school culture and school teachers’ indirect attitudes were mentioned as an important problem by four respondents. An illustrative paradigm follows:

*It is what I said before, the prevailing culture, yes, because culture is the same thing, whether it is an educational excursion that is degenerated, or it is the flexible zone\(^3\), but this institution exists and that is funny, and frustrating at the same time. Beyond that, it is the responsibility of the school, that is composed I wonder by whom, teachers. Beyond that, if you want to do a job you can do it. Fair, acceptable* (respondent #8).

The attitudes of both school and academic teachers were considered extremely important by the respondents. The cooperation and communication among academics was reported to be problematic, as introverted attitudes and grouping behaviors seem to prevail in the university:

*There are some invisible watertight at the university ... we keep on building walls around us, that's all. That is the logic of the Greek University. There are fears* (respondent #2).

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\(^3\) The flexible zone is an interdisciplinary program that is applicable in Greek primary education. More information about it can be found in the webpage of the Greek Institute of Education (2011).
Also, another important thing is, you know, the peer group i.e. we will see small groups, as always, some people who are innovators and do things, want to do things, and some who are not and have a different mentality (respondent #5).

Finally, four respondents reported lack of incentives and feelings of depreciation for their academic teaching, elements that originate from the current educational problems. The sense of disappointment was apparent through their comments. One illustrative example is:

We do this with our own enthusiasm and passion, it is a difficult story. It’s not easy, so we cannot say that the university is stuck in a groove. After 23 years in education, […] euro is my half month salary. I feel uncomfortable to say this but it’s all about the university problem. Who will sacrifice his free time? There is lack of incentives and depreciation (respondent #3).

These negative feelings seem once again to affect academics’ disposition for creative lessons:

I do not have anymore the mood, before I would possibly believe in that (outdoor teaching). I do not have anymore the mood to get an audience of 25 or 40 people who are icy, mindless and almost indifferent to me, to what I do and what I want to do. Then you simply drag them into, ‘because she said so’, and put them in this process, like Pygmalion, and ‘I would like to see in their eyes and feel proud after that I managed that’. I am not interested, I am not at this stage, this kind of teacher anymore… (respondent #6).

One very interesting opinion was mentioned by two academic teachers that revealed their own depreciation for the current educational system, in a silent and indirect way. Academics reported that they prefer alternative approaches such as outdoor education to have an explosive character and to constitute a breakthrough in the routine of conventional courses. According to their statements, once these approaches become also a routine, then they lose their meaning:

Here let me tell you a parameter, sometimes innovations are seen, are experienced positively. But when these innovations get institutionalized and get the classic character then they do not have the same response (respondent #8).

The above results revealed a two-sided hidden depreciation for the educational system. On the one hand teachers feel undervalued for their academic work in the university and on the other hand they do not appreciate the Greek educational system due to its malfunctions. The above findings are extremely important and will be discussed in the following chapter.

In general, the participants appeared frustrated, using a torrential speech while describing the above issues and several similar opinions were expressed by most of them. It is worth noting that a lot of time after the completion of the interviews was devoted from the
respondents to further explain their thoughts and views concerning the current educational system and the educational climate in it. Overall, the educational culture of Greek schools and universities seems to be the most important parameter that troubles the academics, as it was mentioned in many interview questions and throughout the discussions. The above results both enrich and strengthen previous results about academics’ perceived impediments for practicing outdoor lessons in the universities. Concluding, this theme provides new information on the field and thus it will be further discussed in chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In this chapter the most important results are going to be put into a discussion. Moreover, considerable interconnections or contradictions between the results and the relevant literature are going to be further analysed and linked with the research aims. The information displayed in this chapter has the purpose not only to highlight the most significant results of the study but also to contribute in the deeper analysis and comprehension of academics’ perceptions about outdoor education, fulfilling the basic aim of the research.

What is outdoor education for academic teachers?

Table 2 illustrates the basic results of the first theme. Next to them, the corresponding literature is being displayed in order to allow a comparative analysis of the results. What academic teachers know about outdoor education also affects their respective perceptions about this teaching approach. Thus, a comprehensive analysis of teachers’ knowledge on the field is important for further understanding their relevant views and expressed opinions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 1</th>
<th>Sub Themes</th>
<th>Literature Review</th>
<th>Academics’ answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic teachers’ knowledge and views on the field of outdoor education</td>
<td>Definition/Character</td>
<td>A teaching approach that uses the outdoors</td>
<td>Teaching in the outdoors (4) / about the outdoors (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Multidimensional character: use of many different theories and practices</td>
<td>Progressive education (2) / parallelism with educational movements (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural construct: Aims to create bonds between nature, human culture and society</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attributes</td>
<td>Experiential learning/Hands on methods</td>
<td>Experiences &amp; use of all senses (6) / relationship with the body (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Authentic contexts/local knowledge</td>
<td>Local history (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Place based education in appropriate places</td>
<td>Use of the landscape (3)/connection with aims (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practices</td>
<td>Field trips &amp; research</td>
<td>Visits in historical, cultural, natural places (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Outdoor games &amp; drama</td>
<td>Outdoor games &amp; drama(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reflection &amp; problem solving</td>
<td>Use of laboratories, libraries, Skype program, computers virtual environments (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: The light blue colored boxes state lack of knowledge, a different level of knowledge or academics’ views and perceptions about outdoor education theories and practices.
The first theme revealed academic teachers’ basic views concerning the outdoor educational approach. Six out of eight respondents defined outdoor education as a process of teaching outside the classroom and reported well-aimed examples of some basic characteristics such as the use of stimuli, experiences and all the body senses (results that are in line with the views of Dahlgren and Szczepanski, 1998). Nevertheless, half academics also defined outdoor education as environmental education, opposing to Dahlgren and Szczepanski (1998) who support the multidimensional character of the approach that includes several aspects and hosts not only natural but also cultural and social relations. Also, academics did not recognize in the approach aims such as the promotion of personal and social development (that Sandell et al highlight in their book ‘Education for Sustainable Development’, 2005) and the employment of a powerful learning tool for all aspects of life (see in Beard and Wilson, 2006). Overall, academics provided their own diverse interpretations of the concept, highlighting the importance of the outdoor stimuli and experiences and attributing to outdoor education a clear environmental perspective.

Surprisingly, even though academics lend to outdoor education an environmental orientation, the results revealed that most of them don’t recognize place based education as an important characteristic of outdoor learning, as three teachers simply mentioned the use of the natural landscape and only two referred to its connection with the teaching goals. Moreover, outdoor education is considered by many academics as a simple process of transferring the same lessons outside the classroom, rather than an experiential approach that according to Dewey (1997) is facing authentic places as a source of stimuli for discovery, interaction and learning in real situations.

As far as the outdoor practices is concerned, only two academics reported activities such as field research and outdoor games, while virtual learning and indoor facilities like libraries and laboratories were mentioned by four of them as experiential practices that are equally important. This result can be explained if we take under consideration teachers’ reported definitions about outdoor education as a process of teaching outside the ‘typical’ classroom or as a progressive or modern way of teaching. Therefore, it can be assumed that the use of the laboratory, the library or the virtual environment is something new, different, not usual and thus more ‘progressive’ for them. Overall, the academic teachers provided a different image of outdoor education than it is described in the relevant literature, which is based on their personal views and teaching experiences both inside and outside the classroom.
The perceived nature of outdoor lessons

Academic teachers described their previous experiences and practices in outdoor lessons fulfilling the first objective of this study. Table 3 presents the basic results of the second theme. Furthermore, this discussion serves the purpose of studying possible connections between academics’ former outdoor experiences and their current perceptions about outdoor education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 2</th>
<th>Sub Themes</th>
<th>Academics’ answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic teachers’ experiences in outdoor lessons</td>
<td>Place of teaching</td>
<td>6 academics teach only/mainly indoors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 academic teaches sometimes outdoors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 academic teaches 20-25% of lessons outdoors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching methods</td>
<td>Lectures (6), tasks (assignments, seminars) (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Debates, dialectic conversations (2), Group work (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Outdoor games and drama(2), field trips(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td>Outdoor lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Students’ practical exercises in schools (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Visits in historical, cultural or natural places (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Visits to health or educational organizations (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>Visits, guided tours, observations, recording (videos, photos, interviews), presentations, discussions, workshops, games, dramatourgy, field studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>The lessons were not systematically organized or regularly practiced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>They don’t participate physically in the outdoor activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Academics’ teaching profile, which includes usual places of teaching, current teaching methods and previous experiences in outdoor lessons.

From the analysis of the data it is concluded that 7 out of 8 academics teach only or mainly indoors, while only one (respondent #7) uses the outdoors more often. The latter can be based on a rationale that respondent #7 is a teacher in Environmental Education courses in the university. Additionally, most academics reported that they use more often teaching methods such as lectures, tasks and assignments while only three of them mentioned the use of outdoor techniques such as field trips and research, outdoor games and drama. The above findings provide a basic profile of the participants relevant with their current teaching places and methods; as a rule, academics don’t use the outdoors. They teach indoors, following mainly a combination of traditional methods such as lectures and diverse tasks. This profile is very important for explaining academics’ conceptions about outdoor practices as well as for understanding their general perceptions concerning the outdoor educational approach.
Through an interview question academics reported their previous experiences in outdoor lessons with their students, and supported the provided information with some examples. However, through their descriptions, it is clear that most of them neither participated physically in the activities nor accompanied their students in the lessons, but were connected to these experiences in a more indirect way. Moreover, it is important to note that these lessons were not systematically organized or regularly practiced, and their basic core included mostly visits and observations in educational organizations and indoor structures, rather than experiential activities in natural landscapes.

The aforementioned empirical results reinforced the emergence of an interesting notion that is related to academics’ personal views about what means ‘to teach a lesson outdoors’. When teachers were asked to give examples of outdoor practices with their students, seven of them referred to their students’ practical exercises in schools or other organizations, highlighting these visits as a central paradigm of ‘outdoor learning’. Indeed, practical exercises are one form of experiential learning, as they are performed outside the university and provide to the students the authentic environment of the indoor school classroom in order for them to practice the teaching subjects under real conditions. However, in these exercises students don’t utilize natural outdoor landscapes for teaching their lessons. Moreover, they do not involve in the learning process their body senses in connection with primary experiences in nature. As a result, they don’t learn how to connect authentic experiences in the landscape with the teaching subjects, something that according to Dahlgren and Szczepanski would make “the intentions of the curricula come alive” (1998, p.23).

In line with the above, academic teachers seem to consider an ‘outdoor place’ as every place that is situated outside the typical university classroom, without attributing much importance in the specific characteristics of the place. This view is reinforced as only two teachers reported the importance of choosing the appropriate place in order for an outdoor lesson to accomplish its goals. Overall, academics described as outdoor lessons mainly activities in institutional structures and cultural places, attributing higher importance in practical exercises in schools. The above results can be possibly connected to and explained by academic teachers’ limited previous teaching experiences in outdoor natural landscapes, as only two teachers referred to outdoor lessons in natural places such as local parks.
The perception of barriers

Table 3 shows the main barriers that academics reported to impede possible outdoor practices with their students. The corresponding literature review illustrates previous relevant research and allows a comparative analysis of the results. Most impediments seem to be common, as former research about school teachers’ perceptions (and a few about academics) reported the same constraints for outdoor teaching. However, Greek academics mentioned some additional or different barriers that are susceptible of further discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 3.1</th>
<th>Impediments</th>
<th>Literature Review</th>
<th>Academics’ answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
<td>Limited teaching time, overcrowded curriculums, schedule constrains</td>
<td>Tight semester, short lesson duration, not systematic student attendance, time management (7 teachers)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Place</strong></td>
<td>Access to outdoor remote places, weather problems, risk of accidents</td>
<td>Choose appropriate &amp; accessible places (2), risk of accidents (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Infrastructure</strong></td>
<td>Lack of resources, educational material and infrastructure</td>
<td>Financial resources, means of transport &amp; appropriate equipment (8 teachers)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Human resources</strong></td>
<td>Students’ apathy and difficulty to concentrate in the outdoors</td>
<td>Number of students (8), student behavior (5), lack of assistant staff (5) and bad cooperation with teachers (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pedagogical training &amp; preparation</strong></td>
<td>Lack of training, unconfident teachers, insufficient support from colleagues and headmasters, ineffective organization</td>
<td>Lack of training (6), inexperienced, unqualified and unconfident teachers (6), insufficient pedagogical preparation (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching subjects</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Theoretic nature/ unsuitable content (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational culture &amp; teachers’ attitudes</strong></td>
<td>Insufficient departmental chair/supervisor support</td>
<td>Educational culture (6), teachers’ attitudes (4), lack of appreciation &amp; incentives (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: The literature review concerns previous research about school and academic teachers’ perceived impediments (reported in chapter 2). The turquoise colored boxes state enriched perceptions, new perceptions or important differences between former research and the current study.

As a whole, academics supported that they have both the intention and the positive disposition for developing alternative educational approaches. According to their statements, deficiencies in the Greek educational system are the main reason for their ideas not to become alive. Apart from common barriers such as time restrictions and inadequate infrastructure, teachers showed peculiar persistence in problems relevant with human resources. The focal
point of all conversations was the large number of their students (120-150 persons) and their behaviour, as according to the academics it is easy for the Greek students to defect when the narrow teaching framework is disturbed. Student attitudes seem to make academics think hard and express reservations for taking them outside the classroom. These results are compatible with previous studies that marked out students’ difficulty to stay concentrated and behave in the outdoors, always according to their teachers’ perceptions (Wright, 2010).

A strong reference to the insufficient pedagogical training of both school and university teachers was another important result of the research. The preparation of the student in order to become a school teacher was stated to be extremely important for the academics and a subject under their own responsibility: “The teacher is very important for the subsequent development of the student and his choice to become a teacher” (respondent #4). One big obstacle that downgrades the students’ efficient pedagogical preparation is the lack of pedagogical training of the actual academics, something that is also supported in the relevant literature (Ernst, 2009; Sevimli-Celik et al, 2011). This is something that academics acknowledged and were not afraid to discuss in the interviews. They reported that outdoor lessons would mean nothing if students are not taught to use the outdoors effectively. However, for the latter to happen, there is an imperative need for academic teachers of didactics to teach the students such approaches. It is consequent that academics with sufficient relevant training would communicate a range of teaching methods (including outdoor education) and thus school teachers of individual teaching objects could be tailored with reference to their own didactic subject. Nevertheless, according to the academics, many educational departments don’t have teaching positions for didactics and thus students do not have the opportunity to practice methods like outdoor education in the university.

Concluding, even though the impediments mentioned in this research seem to be compatible with those that the literature review suggests, there is an ‘a lot of discussion, a little of action’ feeling that prevailed in academics’ supported explanations. In this research teachers stated barriers that did not emerge as a result of their ‘trial and error’ experiences in the outdoors (since they have not practiced many outdoor lessons), but as a rather theoretical evaluation of their experiences within the existing academic reality. Regardless the above, among all the aforementioned barriers, the number of the students, the unsuitable content of the subjects, the bad cooperation among teachers and the educational culture were the newly reported parameters that impede outdoor practices in the universities. However, the prevailing educational culture appeared to dominate to the discussions and thus it will be discussed separately immediately after.
The matter of educational culture

In the beginning of the discussions about outdoor education the academics stressed the absence of this approach from the Greek educational system. In order to justify this educational reality in Greece, teachers reported multiple and diverse impediments that have already been mentioned and discussed. Nevertheless, throughout the duration of the interviews, the educational culture in schools and universities was a constant point of reference for the academics. In more or less every interview question the respondents brought up in the discussion issues such as difficulties in educational communication and cooperation, academics’ attitudes of indifference or introversion and feelings of depreciation and disappointment.

To begin with one very interesting ascertainment, the lack of cooperation among academics was apparent not only through their relevant acknowledgements (chapter 4, p.35) but also from their contradicted answers to some interview questions. For example, in one interview question, five academics reported that they don’t know if their colleagues in the university use alternative teaching methods, such as outdoor lessons. However, the other three academics provided some names of their colleagues who use such techniques. Surprisingly, two of these colleagues were the same interviewees who stated that they don’t practice outdoor methods. Moreover, the cooperation in the educational institutions (universities, schools) becomes even more problematic, due to introvert and grouping behaviors among academic and school teachers (chapter 4, p. 35).

These views about bad communication and cooperation, introversive tendencies and unproductive educational climate are further reinforced by commonly mentioned educational problems such as limited time and resources. This patchwork of barriers frames academics’ perception of an inefficient educational system that does not provide for students, lecturers and other staff the necessary technical, educational or ethical support to go beyond the confined limits of the traditional education. According to the academics, this system seems to be the real source of a counterproductive education that inhibits the scholar to move within the ‘outer’ reality, as this will deteriorate him. And there’s more to that as all the aforementioned problems provoke the loss of incentives, the reduced disposition for creative lessons, and the reluctance to sacrifice academics’ own time and energy. Teachers displayed feelings of disappointment during the discussions, stating that they don’t have the strength or the mood to proceed toward alternative teaching methods, as those demand too much time, energy and effort that are not willing to provide anymore in their lessons.
This lack of intrinsic motivation was evident not only in the statements of the academics but also in their behaviour and body language during their interactive communication with me. To support the latter with one pointed example, I need to provide you a short story: In my first meeting with respondent #4 he was reluctant to participate in the research. He could not find any reason why to discuss about outdoor education, according to his own statements. In a second effort to interview him (some hours later) he was really kind to accept, even though he didn’t feel like it. After the interview had come to the end, he said to me: “After our debate I think about it really seriously and I would love to set up and implement it”. He was the same academic teacher who in a previous question also stated: “I used to teach out when I was a school teacher and I really enjoyed it, my students as well. But now I teach only indoors” (see also chapter 4, p.23). This light behavioral change cannot of course prove much. However, it does give an insight of academics’ lack of motivation, feelings of tiredness and the imperative need for renewal, refreshment and a lot of support. Otherwise, as respondent #6 eloquently described teachers’ attitudes, academics will never ‘get out of the wall’:

*Greeks are people who always had to exceed walls and always had to find solutions. But to do this you must want to do something behind the wall. This is what is lost in education. I.e. although he has the ability to do so, or he acquired this ability, there is nothing anymore that he wants to do behind the wall. So he does not go out from the wall. Therefore the problem is not the wall, nor the cement, the problem is that they (teachers) do not want to see anything behind, they do not want to do anything in the back, the wall is simply used as an excuse.*

According to Josie Arnold, what identifies a really good teacher is “teachers’ willingness to put their creative energy into interacting with students” (2010, p.3). Arnold supports that energy, passion, willingness to go further than the prescribed and see beyond the norm are, among other, attributes that make academic teachers to become effective teachers. In the current research, however, academics were characterized by emotions of depreciation, tiredness and loss of motivation to ‘go beyond the wall’. Overall, the educational culture prevailing in the Greek educational system appears to have a strong effect not only on academics’ perceptions concerning the use of alternative approaches but also in their actions toward this direction. However, this result is not surprising as Hardy’s research (2010) about academic teaching conditions revealed that political and cultural pressures in universities inhibit productive teaching practices that include student-centered approaches.
Some important contradictions

An issue that came up during the analysis of the results was academics’ lack of consistency between their opinions and reported actions in several questions. Teachers provided their views about outdoor education and mentioned paradigms of outdoor practices. However, in several points there seems to be an inconsistency or, in some cases, even a contradiction between their own responses and practices. For example, three academics mentioned that whenever they have the opportunity they try to implement outdoor lessons, making thus some ‘small jumps’ towards alternative educational approaches. However, from their own reports it is obvious that they don’t find enough motivation to try, as the same academics described only one or none outdoor lesson with their students, highlighting the barriers that inhibit their ideas and efforts for outdoor teaching courses.

Additionally, academics’ explicit support of outdoor lessons as a teaching strategy that has multiple benefits for their students does not comply with their limited outdoor teaching experiences. All academics reported at least one benefit from practicing outdoor lessons. For example, according to respondent #5, nature is the one that provides stimuli, gives educational opportunities and makes harmony in mathematics. Moreover, according to four academics, nature is one great teacher. Most of them also reported that if their lessons are being taught in the outdoors, this will reinforce their teaching subjects and methods. Lastly, they supported the opinion that outdoor education is a prerequisite for a better educational system. Nevertheless, academics reported only limited practical experiences in outdoor lessons, attributing their choice to the deficiencies of the Greek educational system. It is obvious that the current educational context of the university puts limits to academics’ disposition and willingness for teaching outside the classroom more often. This parameter affects academics’ educational actions and thus it is very important to be taken under consideration in further research concerning educational systems.

A third point for discussion concerns four teachers’ reports that teaching lessons in general must be done wherever the teaching goals each time are relevant and can be accomplished. For example, respondent #6 mentioned that there are times when you need an enclosed space but because you really need an enclosed space, not because the lesson must be done only there. Academics’ responses revealed both a tendency and an inner wish to use many different places for making their courses meaningful and effective, fulfilling thus their initial teaching goals. However, their statements are not consistent with their reported actions. Academic teachers, as a rule, don’t choose multiple and variant places for teaching their
subjects but they use a limited number of places, mainly inside the classroom, the laboratory or the auditorium.

Concluding, one participant clearly referred to the academics’ aforementioned contradicted opinions and attitudes, confirming with the most explicit way their existence:

**Respondent #1:** I feel very sad to realize that while we discuss so many years about experiential learning, and the concept is presented in many theories, and all Greek academics support these theories, and universities as well, especially the educational faculties, however, we haven’t made serious steps towards that direction. That is to say, we say to our students to provide experiential knowledge but we have never placed them into this experiential learning procedure, not in action.

**Interviewer:** Why this?

**Respondent #1:** I don’t know, I cannot judge, I cannot say. That’s all.

At this point an important question arises; what is the cause of this discrepancy of words and actions? Why academics support alternative educational methods only in theory? Why do they choose not to implement them? One obvious and simple explanation can be found in academics’ own answers, as all of them developed strong arguments both for the benefits of outdoor education as well as the barriers that they confront when it comes to its implementation in the universities. Moreover, through their answers one can detect their creative ideas and positive disposition for trying alternative methods which, due to system malfunctions, they don’t manage to bring about.

In line with the above, the need for deeper interpretations of this behavior constitutes a new challenge for the relevant literature. Academics support their choices not to practice outdoor lessons by giving credits to the unsuitable Greek educational system for accommodating alternative approaches. There is not enough time, not enough resources, not enough support. There is bad educational climate, there are fears, and there is no cooperation. These reasons seem more than enough to support academics’ choice as they constitute realistic impediments. Nevertheless, the educational system is not an impersonal structure that hosts students, teachers, subjects and infrastructure. The educational system is students, teachers, subjects and infrastructure. This system is alive and in a constant change as its composing parts don’t ever remain the same. The responsibility for the improvement of the educational system is collective and includes people (academics, teachers and students) who constitute the system’s basic components. Thus, I strongly believe that the aforementioned inconsistency of academics’ words and actions cannot be interpreted easily, as it seems to have a deeper and more complicated cause that exceeds the limits of the current research.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarizes the main results of the current research. Moreover, it provides some recommendations concerning methodological implications of the study as well as future research proposals on the field of outdoor education. Finally, the research comes to a close with an epilogue and the display of the literature sources that have supported it along the way.

Summary of the results

The current research aimed to investigate university teachers’ perceptions and experiences concerning the outdoor educational approach. The study succeeded the above aim, achieving to answer to all the research objectives and shedding light to this under researched scientific area. The research disclosed academic teachers’ knowledge and opinions relevant with outdoor education theories and practices along with their perceptions about the benefits of the approach for their students. Moreover, teachers revealed the barriers that suppress their willingness to apply alternative teaching methods such as outdoor education in their university lessons.

The analysis and interpretation of the data led to the following basic conclusions:
1) Academic teachers revealed their basic knowledge on the field of outdoor education and presented well-aimed examples of some characteristics of the approach. However, they tend to consider outdoor education as merely environmental education, having not come in contact with other important aims, theories and practices that define this multidimensional approach.
2) Academics reported limited outdoor experiences with their students and seem to perceive outdoor lessons as actions outside the typical classroom that mainly concern visits and observations in educational organizations or historical places. They also attributed higher importance to outdoor activities performed in cultural rather than natural landscapes.
3) Academics acknowledged several benefits that outdoor education provides to their students as the stimulation of all their senses, the connection of theory with practice and the promotion of social relations and health. Moreover, they attributed significant importance to both the experiential approach to learning and the connection with nature that outdoor lessons provide.
4) Last but not least, teachers reported many barriers that inhibit their willingness to apply outdoor lessons with their students. Lack of time and appropriate places, inadequate infrastructure and human resources as well as insufficient pedagogical training and preparation were mentioned to be important impediments. Also, what seems to trouble
academics most is the prevailing educational culture inside schools and universities as well as teachers’ and academic teachers’ attitudes.

Methodological implications and future research

To begin with methodological limitations, the size of the sample is small and can provide only an idea of Greek academics’ perceptions about outdoor education. A larger sample that would represent more Greek academic teachers would also increase the reliability of the research, providing more accurate and admitting of generalization findings. Also, even though the semi-structured interviews helped to reveal not only knowledge but also deeper perceptions and hidden opinions of the teachers, a combination with observations of the teaching practices of academics would provide more information with regard to their referring outdoor activities. However, the information acquired from the interviews was rich, included new views and perceptions, fulfilling the basic aim and objectives of the current research.

Apart from a bigger sample with Greek academics, it would be of a great value for the current research to be extended in countries that are well known for their traditional cultural bonds with nature and outdoor activities. For instance, it would be interesting to investigate Swedish or Norwegian academics’ perceptions and practices relevant with the approach and compare their views with Greek academics’ respective opinions. In that case, more factors would enter to the research process and analysis, such as social and cultural differences, educational systems and traditions in outdoor life.

Moreover, further qualitative research is a prerequisite in order to study the origin of the aforementioned perceptions and attitudes of Greek academics and comprehend the socio-cultural and educational context in which these have been formed. Of course, this could be further enriched and connected with university students’ opinions about such alternative educational methods, as they will be the disseminators of knowledge, values and attitudes in Greek public and private schools in the future.

Finally, school teachers’ and students’ opinions and perceptions about alternative teaching approaches and experiential methods hold their own value in the research field of outdoor environmental education. In Greece, this becomes even more essential, as environmental education programs are not strongly connected with regular and well organized experiences and activities in the outdoors.

1 The allemansrätt in Sweden and the friluftsliv in Norway are representative examples of a deeper connection of these societies with nature. For more information about Sweden see in Natur Vårds Verket (2012) and about Norway in Inovation Norway (2012).
Epilogue

“... the road of the new education is not the easier one to follow than the old road but a more strenuous and difficult one.”

(John Dewey, 1997, p.90)

John Dewey highlights in his book ‘Experience and Education’ (1997) the difficult but meaningful road to experiential learning. Like in any form of teaching, outdoor education needs training, modification and transformation of attitudes and mentalities of both the educators and the students. Of course, these transformations are not easy to be accomplished, as they are affected by socio-political factors and deep cultural issues. However, outdoor education can reinforce the current system of education, through the multiple benefits that holds for the students. Authentic experiences in nature can provide valuable opportunities for the students to learn and also can equip them with essential skills for a more sustainable way of living.

Nevertheless, the remarkable neutral attitude which most universities demonstrate when facing the enormous environmental problems of our times can only but affects most aspects of social life. Let’s not forget that higher education has a great responsibility and bares a heavy burden on its shoulders. Both academic and school teachers are responsible not only for the formal education of their students that can be reflected upon the curriculum. A much more important task is the instillation of moral values and the promotion of ethical thinking and acting. The ultimate goal of universities should be to create aware citizens who respect life in every form, are interested in the public matters and can easily integrate themselves in the social network.

Academic teachers who teach in educational departments are the ones who inspire and embrace prospective school teachers during their studies. Academic teachers lead the way; shape minds, perceptions and values. As Παπαδηµητρίου states, “values, attitudes and behaviours are being taught in many ways through the whole school context, based on what is being taught or what is being skipped” (1998, p.110). Unfortunately, many universities are still far away from an open-minded and progressive educational model; a model that transforms firsthand knowledge of nature and experiences into ethical practices and harmonious social relations, growing the matter of collective intelligence (Orr, 2004, p.52).

To conclude, outdoor education could pave the way for the utilization of more experiential teaching methods in the Greek educational system. Hopefully, alternative teaching approaches such as outdoor education will be incorporated in both universities and
schools, reinforcing thus the Greek traditional education and helping the educational system to solve social problems rather than be a part of them.
REFERENCES


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APPENDICES

Interview Schedule

Introduction
Some basic information about myself, my studies and my teaching background.
A description of the research subject and the basic aim of the research.

A. Demographic questions
1. Sex
2. Age
3. Years of teaching experience in a university
4. Teaching subject/s and level
5. Show interest on their current teaching work – short discussion
   Now its time to open the voice recorder

B. Main questions
1. Could you tell me what do you know about Outdoor Education? (Theories, practices)
2. Some educators believe that outdoor education should have an important position in the educational system. What is your opinion about that?
3. Does outdoor education constitute a necessity for the contemporary Greek educational system? Why do you believe that?
4. Where do you mainly teach, indoors or outdoors?
5. I would like you to describe me the main teaching methods you use.
6. Can your students benefit from outdoor lessons? If yes, in what way?
7. Have you ever implemented an outdoor lesson with your students?
   If yes: a) Please, could you mention the subject and the main methods and activities you used? b) How often do you teach outdoors?
   If no or not often: Could you explain why? What are the main reasons or factors that impede your motivation to teach outdoors?
8. Where do you prefer teaching? Where do you feel more comfortable? Why?
9. Do you think that is possible to teach (*) outdoors? If yes, provide an example. If no, why not?
10. Do you think that outdoor teaching can reinforce the teaching methods you already use? If
yes, how can this happen, practically? If no, why not?

11. Can you tell me if your colleagues use the outdoors in their teaching? If yes, in what way?

12. As a student, did your teacher take you outdoors for a lesson? If yes, how did you feel?

13. I wish to hear about your thoughts relevant to using outdoor teaching with your students in the future.

C. Ending the interview

14. Are there any questions you would like to ask?

15. Give the thank-you letter and discussion

Notes: a) where (...) will be the teaching object for each interviewee e.g. mathematics

b) If needed, probing will be used in more questions, e.g. “Many people believe that … What is your opinion about it?”

c) If possible, in depth additional information → “Could you tell me a little more about that?”

d) Possibility for more, non-planned questions, depending on each interviewer

Interview Information

The first interview will be a pilot interview, and based on it a reconstruction or small alteration in the interview schedule may be applied.
Interview Invitation Letter

FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES
MASTER PROGRAM IN OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND OUTDOOR LIFE

Student: Sofia Oikonomou
sofoi616@student.liu.se
Academic Year: 2011-2012
Supervisor: Aimee Ekman

Dear Mr. /Ms. ……………………,

My name is Sofia Oikonomou and I am a master student in Linköping University, Sweden. As part of my master thesis I have decided to investigate university teachers’ perceptions about Outdoor Education. My main research questions wish to reveal the current perceptions, attitudes and feelings of academic teachers concerning the outdoor education didactic approach. You are one of the most suitable people that can provide me with valuable information relevant with my subject, and thereby help me form a detailed picture of the studying theme. Therefore, you are kindly requested to contribute to the current research, through your participation in a personal interview.

In this point, I would like to mention that the participation in the interview procedure is voluntary and optional. You have any right not to answer in one or more questions, or to completely deny your involvement in the research. For the best possible interpretation of your answers, and only with your permission, a voice recorder will be used, as the interview will be semi-structured and plenty of information will be acquired.

Finally, I would like to inform you that all your answers are confidential and the provided information is intended solely for research use. The assurance of confidentiality and anonymity is personally guaranteed through this written statement, followed by my signature.

With appreciation,

Sofia Oikonomou
Dear Mr. /Ms. ……………………,

I would like to thank you for your valuable contribution to my research, and for your trust in the provision of your personal data. As I have already guaranteed, these data remain confidential and will be destroyed after the completion of my data analysis.

Thank you for your valuable time and I wish you every success in your professional and personal life!

With respect,

Sofia Oikonomou