

ΕΘΝΟΛΟΓΙΑ ON LINE

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## ETHNOLOGHIA ON LINE

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## ΕΘΝΟΛΟΓΙΑ ΟΝ ΛΙΝΕ

ΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΟΝΙΚΟ ΗΛΕΚΤΡΟΝΙΚΟ ΠΕΡΙΟΔΙΚΟ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗΣ ΕΤΑΙΡΕΙΑΣ ΕΘΝΟΛΟΓΙΑΣ

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## Schools as thresholds within prison heterotopias: perspectives on a “poetics” of prison education

Maria G. Kokolaki, Georgia Papastavriniidou, Athena-Anna Christopoulou

### Abstract

In this article we view prison schools as thresholds, liminal spatiotemporal entities within prison heterotopias that aim at facilitating the reentry of incarcerated young offenders into society in several ways, but mainly through providing them with a sense of community by creating social bonds, helping them to establish new identity and status. Thresholds, although they insinuate separation, regulated access and marker of boundary with otherness, at the same time they symbolize passage, movement across borders in time and space, potential opening to the future, flow of people and ideas and the conciliation with otherness. In this sense, thresholds embody the prospect of change and reaffirmation of status and can be powerful drivers of change. We initiate from Goffman's understanding of prison as a total institution, characterized by the “mortification of the self” as far as personal and social identity is concerned, since inmates are “defaced” and submitted to a stigmatized status. Moreover, we take into account Foucault's conceptualization of the prison heterotopia as a space of enclosure symbolising otherness in space, time and socio-cultural status. Finally, utilising the concept of liminality as articulated by Turner and based on our contact with Greek prison schools for young male offenders, we will try to present the dynamics and poetics of prison education and examine the critical role of school in the prison context as a spatiotemporal threshold and as transformative anti-structure opposed to such a highly structured and controlled space/time of enclosure.

**Key words:** prison schools for young male offenders, thresholds, poetics.



## Τα σχολεία ως κατώφλια εντός της ετεροτοπίας των φυλακών: προοπτικές για μια «ποιητική» της εκπαίδευσης στις φυλακές

Μαρία Γ. Κοκολάκη, Γεωργία Παπασταυρινίδου, Αθηνά-Άννα Χριστοπούλου

### Περίληψη

Σε αυτό το άρθρο εξετάζουμε τα σχολεία φυλακών ως κατώφλια, οριακές χωροχρονικές οντότητες εντός της ετεροτοπίας των φυλακών που στοχεύουν στη διευκόλυνση της επανένταξης των φυλακισμένων νεαρών παραβατών στην κοινωνία με διάφορους τρόπους, αλλά κυρίως μέσω της παροχής μιας αίσθησης κοινότητας με τη δημιουργία κοινωνικών δεσμών, βοηθώντας τους να δημιουργήσουν νέα ταυτότητα και στάτους. Τα «κατώφλια», αν και υπονοούν διαχωρισμό, ρυθμιζόμενη πρόσβαση και σημείο συνοριακό με την ετερότητα, ταυτόχρονα συμβολίζουν το πέρασμα, τη μετακίνηση πέρα από τα σύνορα στον χώρο και τον χρόνο, το δυναμικό άνοιγμα στο μέλλον, τη ροή ανθρώπων και ιδεών και τη συμφιλίωση με την ετερότητα. Υπό αυτή την έννοια, τα «κατώφλια» ενσωματώνουν την προοπτική της αλλαγής και της επαναβεβαίωσης του κύρους και μπορούν να αποτελέσουν ισχυρούς οδηγούς προς την αλλαγή. Ως αφητηρία χρησιμοποιούμε την αντίληψη του Goffman για τη φυλακή ως έναν ολοκληρωτικό θεσμό, που χαρακτηρίζεται από τη «θανάτωση του εαυτού» όσον αφορά την προσωπική και κοινωνική ταυτότητα, καθώς οι κρατούμενοι «αποπροσωποποιούνται» και υποβάλλονται σε καθεστώς στιγματισμού. Επιπλέον, λαμβάνουμε υπόψη την αντίληψη του Φουκώ για την ετεροτοπία της φυλακής ως χώρο εγκλεισμού που συμβολίζει την ετερότητα στον χώρο, τον χρόνο και το κοινωνικο-πολιτισμικό στάτους. Τέλος, αξιοποιώντας την έννοια της οριακότητας όπως διατυπώθηκαν από τον Turner και με βάση την επαφή μας με τα σχολεία των καταστημάτων κράτησης για νεαρούς παραβάτες, θα παρουσιάσουμε τη δυναμική και την ποιητική της εκπαίδευσης στις φυλακές και θα εξετάσουμε τον κρίσιμο ρόλο του σχολείου στο πλαίσιο της φυλακής ως χωροχρονικό κατώφλι και ως μετασχηματιστική αντι-δομή σε αντίθεση με έναν αυστηρά δομημένο και ελεγχόμενο χώρο/χρόνο εγκλεισμού.

**Λέξεις κλειδιά:** σχολεία καταστημάτων κράτησης νέων, κατώφλια, ποιητική.

## Introduction

This paper focuses on the role of schools that function in the detention units for young male offenders in Greece. In the year 2015-2016 there existed four such units (*EKKN*)<sup>1</sup> and one juvenile reform school, all of which situated in the central part of Greece (three in Volos, one in Corinth and one in Attica).

Prison schools can be defined as physical structures within the space of detention facilities and aim at providing education equivalent to the other school forms outside prison and at facilitating the reentry of incarcerated young offenders into society in several ways, but mainly helping them to re-establish relations with the outside world.

In Greece, the framework of the operation of schools inside detention facilities for minors and young men falls within a number of legal provisions that aim at protecting the rights of the incarcerated. The catholic right to education is recognized and protected by the Greek Constitution<sup>2</sup> (Art. 16, par. 4). Moreover, the legal recognition of the right to education for the minors and young offenders is ensured through articles of the Penitentiary Code (Law 2776/1999) which was revised partly in 2019 and 2020 and extensively in 2022<sup>3</sup> and through international and European conventions and recommendations as we shall further see.

However, apart from formal institutional provisions, we have identified an absence of systematic research for mapping the educational reality and the needs of the specific structures (i.e. prison schools for young/juvenile male offenders). Relevant research in Greece is fragmentary both in terms of the subject matter and in terms of focus on the specific schools. Such research could contribute to the documentation of the educational needs and challenges faced in those structures as well as to the formulation of in-depth views and proposals concerning the provision of further support to prison education in general and to the provision of education for the young prisoners, in particular.

During the school year 2015-2016 we had the chance to visit all school units of the detention facilities for young male offenders as members of the scientific committee of a Conference that took place in Volos in 2016<sup>4</sup> and focused on the challenges faced by prison education in the context of the Greek educational system and the prospects of prison schools (either the formal units operating in detention facilities for juveniles or the schools of “second chance” operating in some prisons for adults).

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<sup>1</sup> With Law 4985/2022 *EKKN* (Special detention units for young male offenders) were renamed as *EΣΚΝ* (Special correctional units for young male offenders).

<sup>2</sup> As revised by the parliamentary resolution of November 25, 2019 of the IXth Revisionary Parliament (Article 16 was not revised).

<sup>3</sup> The Greek Penitentiary Code was partly revised in 2019 with Law 4596, in 2020 with Law 4760 and more radically and broadly in 2022 with Law 4985.

<sup>4</sup> The Conference “The Education of Young Offenders: Experiences, Problems and Perspectives” was organised in Volos (22-24/1/2016) by the Institute of Educational Policy, the Supreme Court Prosecutor's Office, EPANODOS (Center for the Reintegration of Released Prisoners), the University of Thessaly's Pedagogical Departments, the Greek Ombudsman for Children's Rights and the Greek branch of the European Prison Education Association (EPEA Hellas). More information available at the Greek Ministry's of Education website [<https://www.minedu.gov.gr/aei-9/nomothesia-aei/1202-categories-2021/genikes-katigories-21/ekdiloseis/ekdiloseis-synedria/17348-18-01-16>].

Moreover, we were members of a research group which, in this context, undertook research through two online questionnaires on the needs and expectations of the teachers and headmasters of the schools within detention facilities for young male offenders, in order to map the educational needs and everyday challenges of those structures (cf. Kokolaki et al., 2016). The response to the research was encouraging<sup>5</sup> and its initial results were presented at that Conference.

Considering the ambiguity and fragmented knowledge about the operation of the existing prison schools for juveniles and young offenders in Greece, we will initially present the principles of prison education for the young. Based on our experience, our contact with those schools in various occasions and in the context of our research and knowledge of the situation, we will further concentrate on the topography and status of those schools as observed in the school year 2015-2016. We will give emphasis to their character as a kind of transformative and dynamic threshold, symbolically and physically being betwixt and between two diverging worlds, the prison and the society outside, in order to account for the dynamics and “poetics” of prison education and the critical role of the school presence in the detention facility context.<sup>6</sup> Is there an actual potential in those schools? What is that they may offer to the young offenders?

### **Prison education for young male offenders in Greece**

At this early point we should present the fundamental principles which relate to the status of prison education in Greece within the European context. With regard to the issue of education in the detention facilities for young offenders, international organisations’ decrees or conventions and recommendations, such as the United Nations’ Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners adopted in 1977, the Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (the Beijing Rules) adopted in 1985 or the UN Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty (the Havana Rules) adopted in 1990, record the importance and imperative of the provision of education, vocational training, psychological support, counseling and medical assistance that aim at supporting the young offenders, enhancing the sense of self-respect and respect for the fundamental human rights and promoting their future reintegration to society.

In the latter, it is stated that:

“38. Every juvenile of compulsory school age has the right to education suited to his or her needs and abilities and designed to prepare him or her for return to society. Such education should be provided outside the detention facility in community schools wherever possible and, in any case, by qualified teachers through programmes integrated with the education system of the country so that, after release, juveniles may continue their education without difficulty [...] 39. Juveniles above compulsory school age who wish to continue their

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<sup>5</sup>As far as the questionnaires for the teachers were concerned, we received a return rate of approximately 67%. In the case of the headmasters the return rate was 100%.

<sup>6</sup> We presented some initial thoughts concerning issues of topography and the hybrid status of those schools in the conference Purposeful Agency and Governance: A Bridgeable Gap (15-17 June 2016). See Pardo and Prato’s Conference Report (2016: 93).

education should be permitted and encouraged to do so, and every effort should be made to provide them with access to appropriate educational programmes. [...] 42. Every juvenile should have the right to receive vocational training in occupations likely to prepare him or her for future employment”. (United Nations, 1990).

Moreover, in the Havana Rules specific reference is also made to the operation of a library (rule 41) and to the contribution of physical education and sports as well as of the recreation and creative activities to the physical and mental health of young prisoners (rule 47).

Those principles are followed by the Recommendations of the Committee of the Ministers of the Council of Europe<sup>7</sup>. In particular, in the Recommendation (87)20 the Council of Ministers, bearing in mind that “the penal system for minors should continue to be characterised by its objective of education and social integration”, advises the member states “to provide both education and vocational training for young prisoners, preferably in conjunction with the community, or any other measure which may assist reinsertion in society”. In addition, Recommendation (89)12 highlights the contribution of education to order and security within detention facilities and to humanizing prisons, improving prisoners living conditions and facilitating their reintegration into the community. Based on the principle of the equality of opportunities and given the fact that a high percentage of the offenders had very limited or even negative prior educational experiences, all the prisoners are entitled to educational support such as formal learning, vocational education, creative and cultural activities, sports, social education and library facilities.

As far as the principle of equality of opportunities in education is concerned, in the Recommendations (89)12 it is also stated that “2. Education for prisoners should be like the education provided for similar age-groups in the outside world, and the range of learning opportunities for prisoners should be as wide as possible”. In line with the aforementioned rule, rule 28 of the Recommendation Rec (2006)2 suggests the provision of education to all prisoners and puts particular emphasis on the educational needs of young prisoners, those of foreign origin and the disabled. Moreover, in rule 35.2, the access to compulsory education is recommended for detained children. It is also recognized that prison education should “be integrated with the educational and vocational training system of the country” (rule 28.7), in order to facilitate the continuation of the studies of the prisoners after their release.

However, as it was demonstrated in a survey of 2011 (Costelloe et al., 2012: 15-16 & 33), in the EU countries there are nor a uniform attitude nor homogeneous legislative initiatives towards providing prison education and training to all prisoners. Thus, in some countries the legal obligation often does not extend to all prisoners, but only in specific groups, such as the juveniles (which is also the case for Greece). Accordingly, in the large majority of EU countries -including Greece- less than a quarter of the adult prisoners participate in educational activities (Hawley et al., 2013: 5).

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<sup>7</sup> Recommendations no R(87) 20 of 1987, No R(89) 12 of 1989 and Rec (2006)2.



In the aforementioned survey (Costelloe et al., 2012: 17) three main types of education offered in European prisons were identified: a) general education, covering subjects like mathematics, science, languages, b) vocational education/training for providing inmates with professional skills and competences for their rehabilitation and c) non formal learning, mostly related to vocational training, arts and crafts (however not linked to certification).

Within the above framework, in Greece, prison education of the aforementioned types is provided either in the special detention units for juveniles or in the general detention units (for adults). Up to 2018, in detention facilities for juveniles there existed school units of formal type (primary and secondary schools), while in the general detention units there were either schools of lifelong education (schools of second chance)<sup>8</sup> or of private tutorials for the needs of specific inmates<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, the Prison Council in each facility was responsible for organising programmes of vocational character for the inmates or classes of post-secondary character. At this point, we may mention that the art. 31 of Law 4521/2018 was a further step towards the recognition of and responding to the particular educational needs of the detention facilities by establishing educational counselors and providing the potential of founding educational units of all types within each facility according to its needs. This was reaffirmed in Law 4985/2022, art. 35 (substituting art. 35 of the 1999 Penitentiary Code).

The Greek Penitentiary Code (Law 2776/1999, Art. 4, par. 1)<sup>10</sup> specifically mentions: “the execution of the sentence does not restrict any other right of the detainees apart from personal freedom”. Moreover, young detainees are considered juveniles of both genders from 15 to 21 years by power of Law 4985/2022 (art. 13)<sup>11</sup> and are usually detained in special separate detention units. In this context, education of both general and vocational character must be provided and, as this law (Art. 35) also recommends, primary education of the young offenders is obligatory and there must be an additional provision for vocational training and apprenticeship programmes by the Prison Council. So, in every special detention facility for young male offenders, there should be the provision at least of a primary school. As far as young female offenders are concerned, although there is one detention facility for women, where young are kept with older women, there was no formal education provided until 2016<sup>12</sup>.

Furthermore, the school units that are hosted in the detention facilities for young males provide education that is considered equal to the other schools outside prison, thus the qualifications those schools offer are also considered equivalent to the other Greek schools of the same grade and type.

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<sup>8</sup> Schools of second chance (*Σχολεία Δεύτερης Ευκαιρίας - ΣΔΕ*) offer adults lower secondary education, which is completed in a two-year course and their degree corresponds to this offered by the lower High Schools (*Γυμνάσια*). See Dimitrouli and Rigoutsou (2017).

<sup>9</sup> See Law 4368/2016, Ch. C., art. 26 on *Compensatory Education*.

<sup>10</sup> Article 4 has not been revised.

<sup>11</sup> With the Law 4985/2023, art. 13 –which revised art. 12 of the 1999 Penitentiary Code– the minimum age criterion changed from 13 to 15. The name of the facilities was modified to “Correctional Facilities for Young Detainees.” Young detainees may remain within those facilities up to 25<sup>th</sup> year of age, to complete their studies, under strict presuppositions.

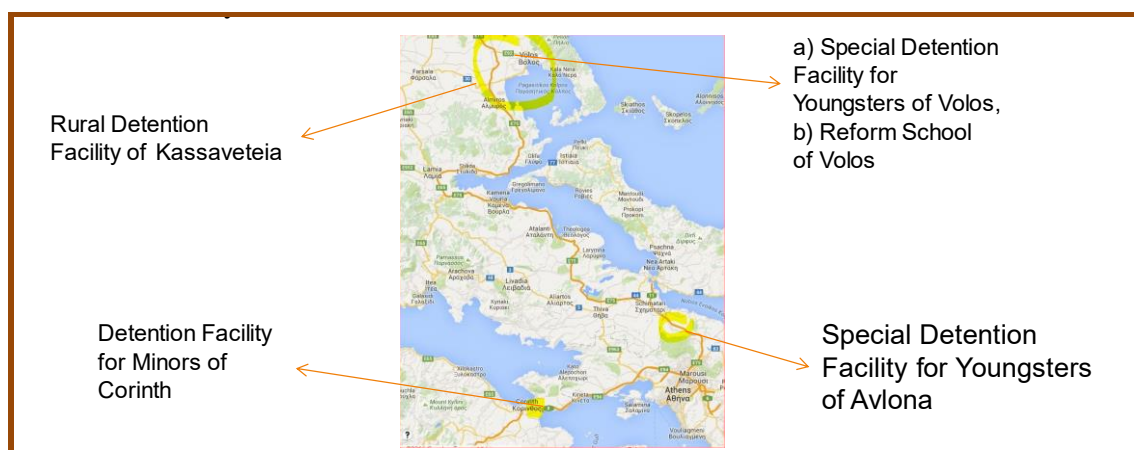
<sup>12</sup> In 2017 a primary school was initiated by the Minister of Education at the detention facility for women of Elaiona Thebes (<http://www.minedu.gov.gr/news/26857-13-02-17-egkainia-dimotikoy-sxoleiou-stis-gynaikeies-fylakes-eleona-thivon>, accessed on 8/9/2017).

However, for the protection of the inmates and their privacy, in the titles of those schools there must be made no reference to and possible connection with the prison in accordance with the Greek Penitentiary Code and international texts<sup>13</sup>.

A landmark related to the composition and density of the population in the Special Juvenile Detention Facilities was 2014, when a separate detention facility for adolescents of 15-18 years was founded<sup>14</sup>. This facility received detainees of this age group from the other prisons. Moreover, the reformation of 2010 and of 2015<sup>15</sup> in prison legislation about underage offenders changed significantly the consistency of the prison population (mainly in number) since underage offenders that were thereafter incarcerated were over 15 years old if they had committed severe crimes.

### Topography, particularities and ambiguities of prison formal schooling in Greece.

However, as relevant bibliography indicates, although the benefits of education in the prison context for both the inmates and the society are recognized, there is considerable complexity and ambiguity as far as this issue is concerned (Muñoz, 2009: 5).



**Pict. 1.** Detention Facilities for young male offenders in Greece (2016).

It is more than obvious that challenges faced by prison education and training differ from those faced by education outside prison (Hawley et al., 2013), since their pre-conditions and context are differentiated. The core issue is that prison education takes place in the context of a detention facility. Muñoz (2009: 4-5) emphasises that, although human rights –education being one of them– “are not relinquished upon imprisonment”, people in detention are “a marginalized group that faces endemic violations of its right to education”. So, regardless of the penal system, the issue of prison education is composite in its essence, as it faces endemic problems because of the prison environment which is

<sup>13</sup> See the Havana Rules: “40. Diplomas or educational certificates awarded to juveniles while in detention should not indicate in any way that the juvenile has been institutionalized”.

<sup>14</sup> This happened by effect of a Decision of the Minister of Justice (n. 90467/22-10-2013).

<sup>15</sup> Art. 2 & 3 of the Law 3860/2010; Art. 7 of the Law 4322/2015.

“inherently hostile to its liberating potential” (ibid). Moreover, prison education depends on the formal governmental correctional and educational policies that may dictate the type of education that can be provided and, thus, encourage or discourage the operation of education units within prison contexts.

Other issues that may influence the provision of education in the prison context relate to the availability of resources, the administration structure and the existence of infrastructure which also relate to the prison occupancy (Hawley et al., 2013: 5). Nowadays, in the European Union, the percentage of countries that suffer from prison overcrowding is rising. In Greece, for instance, the percentage of prison occupancy recorded in 2010 was 129.6% and there was a rising prison population trend of 59% from 1992 to 2007 (Costelloe et al., 2012: 9). At the same time, the composition of prison population in the European Union is becoming more and more diverse, especially as far as the population of foreign-born prisoners is concerned. Greece is mentioned amongst those countries, where the percentage of foreigners is very high, of 40% (Hawley et al., 2013:5).

Particularities of prison education stem also from the fact that the majority of the incarcerated has not received proper education, had low basic skills or had negative prior educational experience and even dropped out of school for a variety of reasons (Hawley et al., 2013: 12).

Moreover, school presence in a prison is often ambiguously confronted in the broader political and socio-cultural contexts and, thus, either challenged as unsafe and an imminent danger or seen as promising, emancipating and powerful. This ambiguity is connected to the nature of prison understood as an institution of control, authority and punishment. It is therefore related to people’s perceptions about crime, deviance, punishment and reform. Accordingly, some believe that prison education is a waste of resources and, if existent, must be focused on the reformation of the deviant.

However, it is also a fact that often schooling in the prison context acquires a great importance for both society and the incarcerated. Specifically, it is widely accepted that multiple benefits may stem from the provision of prison education (Giordmaina, 2013; Hawley et al., 2013). Those are mainly attributed to the future reintegration of prisoners into society and their job rehabilitation on release. Other expected benefits relate to the reduction of crime, the reintegration into educational contexts, the amelioration of the quality of life in prison and the reduction of the negative effects of incarceration on the individual. Schooling is extremely important as far as the juvenile are concerned, especially as a means of socialization, of reconstruction of their identity and preparation for their re-entry to society. Thus, often, prison education is pictured as positive.

In order to explore further this ambiguity, we will be based on our observations concerning the topography and the status of administration as well as the educational programmes that were implemented in the schools inside detention facilities for young male offenders in Greece during the school year 2015-2016 and try to articulate some initial thoughts and reflections about the potential of those schools.

An important issue concerning the function and the attributes of the aforementioned schools is the place where they are situated and the layout of the space they occupy. As we have already stated, in Greece there are five special detention facilities for juveniles and young male offenders and they all have school units offering formal education. As we already mentioned, there is one detention facility for juveniles in Corinth which had just initiated when we started our research, responding to the need of separating minors from young offenders: in 2015 it had a primary school, a Junior High school and the first grade of Lyceum. When this facility opened, it had more than 40 students, while in the school year 2015-2016, following the 2015 reformation concerning underage offenders, it had only 10 students. The biggest school structure is this of Avlona within a detention facility for young male offenders is one of the older units (operating since 1998) and the only one that has a fully operating (however not independently functioning) Lyceum. It has also a primary school and a junior high school.

Three more school units operate in the broader area of Volos. Primary and lower secondary education units exist in the open agricultural facility for young male offenders of Kassaveteia, in the detention facility of Volos and in the juvenile reform school of Volos for young children and juveniles (8-18 years old). We will further use a codification for those schools as S1, S2, S3, S4 and S5 facilities.

Attendance in those schools during the school year 2015-2016 varied and it was influenced mainly by the legislative provision and the level of law enforcement, as happened with S1 and the S3 where the prisoners were underage, so attendance was 100%. In the other facilities this percentage was lower and was influenced mainly by the lack of space and motivation for the inmates. This percentage was considerably lower in detention facilities for adults where the so-called “schools of second chance” operate, as also pointed out in our discussions with the schools’ personnel.

The limitation of space in combination with the strict timetable and framework of the prison and the heterogeneity of the student population in terms of country of origin, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and learning needs, often result in considerable differentiation of the working hours and the subjects of the curriculum that are covered. In the results of the research that we presented in the 2016 Volos conference (Kokolaki et al., 2016), the deviations mentioned by directors and teaching staff were the divergence from the formal curriculum mainly by limiting the subjects covered, the reduction of teaching periods/time, the co-teaching and the decrease of content in teaching subjects. However, most of the variations concern the management of the content of teaching and adaptations of the teaching methods and materials used to respond to the educational needs of the students.

Moreover, as far as the layout of each school is concerned, this mainly depends on the character of the detention facility. Thus, the school premises might either be inside the prison main facility or in a different building. So, in those facilities that are considered open, like the S3 and the S5, school spaces are characterized by openness and no bars. In the S3 case, the school is situated in a building outside the prison. The premises are a big events hall, which for the needs of the school is divided by three moving panels, to form the classrooms. So, this space does not remind at all the physical space of prison/space

of enclosure. In a similar (but not the same) logic, the classrooms in the school S5 are situated in the outer part of the main building with doors facing the front courtyard. However, in this case, there is the sense of enclosure, since the whole premises are encircled by a fence and there are locks and bars.

In other schools that occupy spaces inside the detention facility there is an obvious tendency for higher control. So, in the structure of S4, the classrooms were four former cells, inside the facility, separated by bars from the rest of the prison. In S1 school the classrooms were inside the prison, in a big room which is also used as an events hall and for the school purposes is divided into two by a folding door. In the S2 prison we saw a quite different arrangement. The school is separate from the main prison with a private yet small courtyard. The Primary and the Secondary school occupy different floors and there are also a computer lab and multipurpose rooms. In every classroom there are whiteboards.

However, even in this facility, the controversial character of a school in a prison is evident. There are bars in the prison corridors that lead to the entrance of the courtyard, in the existing outer windows and in the front door. The classes that have outer windows (with bars) are facing the internal schoolyard. There are high walls with welded wires in the front internal small schoolyard. The classrooms, the principal's office and all other spaces are separate, however, for safety and surveillance reasons, the classes have big windows to the internal corridor, in the logic of panopticism (Foucault, 1995: 201-205), to achieve greater control and supervision. So, this school premises is a space that might seem to function in the logic of a distinct, autonomous organization, as there is a clear demarcation between the space of the school and the detention facility, nevertheless, there is the sense of restriction and the abolition of privacy that reminds to the students where they stand. As one teacher stresses: *“Each classroom has a window with heavy bars, which functions as a restriction and reminds to the students that they operate within a restrictive environment of enclosure and surveillance within the prison.”*



**Pict. 2.** View from a school window to the internal yard (picture from a 2016 reportage of newsbeast.gr on the detention facility of Avlona).

In all cases, however, there is a clear demarcation of the space destined for the prison school, which aims at differentiating between the space of the prison and the school as a distinct place, where diverse activities take place. In the words of a teacher *“The school space differs from prison space. This*

*causes children to respect school.*” This also denotes that there is a change in the nature of control and power relations and insinuates even the school’s chance for autonomy.

These “in between” spaces and statuses are evident also in the way those schools are managed. There is an ambiguity in the control and management of the aforementioned school units, as they oscillate between two Ministries: Ministry of Education and its local directorates as far as the educational part is concerned and on Ministry of Justice<sup>16</sup> for the penitentiary part as well as for counseling and educational activities mainly of vocational character. The lack of a central, focused and systematic educational and administrative support to these units by the Ministry of Education had further consequences on the function of schools and needs further study<sup>17</sup>.

There is another particularity in the administration of all schools but the S2 units<sup>18</sup> that makes them be at the borderline, as they operate as part of a local school in the area, outside the detention facility. The aforementioned administrative arrangement bears consequences for the operation of the schools, since it practically means that the headmaster is not situated in the prison school and has no immediate contact with the environment of the prison or –most importantly- with the students (as pointed out by one headmaster). For this issue to be solved, usually, the assistant Principal (or alternatively one teacher) of the local school outside is set as responsible (Head) for the school in prison. Moreover, in this type of arrangement, the teachers that work in the facility belong to the area’s school. This practically means that the area’s school is given priority when issues of covering teaching positions arise, so usually the needs of the prison school are put on hold and are not immediately covered.

Subsequently, the schools operate having a formal internal structure (headmaster and teachers) that responds to and works with the local educational authorities (the education directorate for the administration and the counselors for the educational guidance). On the other hand, they respond also to the prison’s authorities (the director, the warden and the prison’s council), the public prosecutors and the social services. This overlapping of control and responsibilities creates additional difficulties for the framework of the prison schools and often makes them far more rigid, authoritative and austere than the schools outside. Moreover, the prison school’s administration becomes more centralized and person-centered, as dependent on and driven by the headmaster, which as noted by one headmaster might work for the short-term but proves negative longtermly.

We may mention here characteristic answers to a question about the influence of the function, security issues and restrictions of the detention facilities on the headmasters’ work. So, in the words of headmasters:

Headmaster 1: *“Many times, negatively. The situation is normalized when there is cooperation with the prison administration. Otherwise, the difficulties are great. Perhaps in a new Penitentiary code all*

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<sup>16</sup> From 2019 prisons are under jurisdiction of the Ministry of Civil Protection.

<sup>17</sup> We may mention here the initiatives of the Greek Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice in an attempt to address administration issues (2017-2018).

<sup>18</sup> Only the S2 units (primary and secondary) are independent and have their own Principals.

*parts' responsibilities will be delimited so that the operation of the school does not depend only on the good will of those responsible."*

Headmaster 2: *"Sometimes those issues influence my work as catalysts and often are damaging. The invocation of those issues, you know, functions at times like a nuclear bomb at the hands of prison directors and wardens as in this way all failures, pathogenicities and weaknesses of the custodian system are "settled."*

Furthermore, in a trial to cover the multiple needs of their students, most prison schools implement programmes or side activities. We might mention a great number of such creative activities related to sports, robotics, music, dancing and theater groups, cultural programmes, health and environmental education. Some schools also participate in European programmes (cf. Hawley et al. 2013). So, in the prison school space the inmates are also allowed to engage in various creative activities like their peers outside prison do. Those activities very often receive great publicity and they are also listed in the schools' websites. Great publicity is also given to the participation of the students in various competitions (e.g. of the Greek Mathematical Society) and to their learning progress and success (e.g. participation in the national examinations and admission of students to higher education institutions).



**Pict.3.** Participating in a Christmas feast inside a prison school (2015)  
(Source: <https://dipe.kor.sch.gr/2015/05/25/xristougenniatiki-giorti-ekkn-korinthou/>)

At the same time, schools operate respecting safety and function issues of the prison in which they are situated. Very often, however, safety rules influence the process of teaching and learning. Examples of such difficulties are the many prohibitions in materials used in teaching, which in some cases are extreme (e.g. the use of paint for painting) and may extend even in the curriculum, where some learning subjects are abolished (e.g. technology, as tools are needed that are considered dangerous). Control is also evident in the use of the computers and the internet in schools,<sup>19</sup> which is allowed in class under the strict supervision of the teachers. However, schools possess their websites.

<sup>19</sup> Indicative was the recent difficulty of providing prison education due to the restrictions and lockdown because of the pandemic: online schooling was not an option because of the restrictions in the internet use. One of the schools piloted distance-education by making a TV channel on which recorded lessons were broadcast.



**Pict. 4.** The website of Avlona secondary school in sch.gr (<http://gym-par-avlon.att.sch.gr/>)

Side activities prove to be necessary, as they have the potential to contribute positively to students' experiences and connect them to the world outside. These activities also involve the opening of the school to the prison environment and the rest of the inmates, functioning as an incentive and as a transformative force of attitudes, expectations and roles. Furthermore, they contribute to the opening of the prison school to society, mainly by allowing prisoners to participate in a variety of activities that often demand cooperation with the outside world (other schools or organisations) and then allowing them to present their work to a wider public, mainly of their families and visitors. As far as the educational impact is concerned, those activities support the learning process, strengthen communication between teachers and students, offer prospects to the inmates for reintegration into school life and society and help improve the school climate. They also contribute to the development and strengthening of personality by enhancing self-confidence, self-esteem and social skills as well as changing attitudes and behavior of the inmates.

Moreover, in this way, a framework which encourages creative and participatory learning – effective enough for addressing and challenging the issue of enclosure– is conditioned and provided. This framework also encourages entertainment, cooperation and creative use of the idle time of prison and provides motivation through encouragement and positive experiences in relation to the reintegration and expectations of students for the future.

At this point, it is very important to consider the perceived role and contribution of the school in the prison context. Our contact mainly with the teachers at the schools provided us with the impression that the schools function for the young inmates as a kind of symbolic threshold. The school is viewed as a space in between two worlds, where young prisoners are allowed to a prolonged contact with people coming from the outside, namely their teachers. Although teachers form part of another formal entity (i.e. the school), they are not equaled to the prison personnel by the students. Moreover, since the students spend lot of their time in the school and their teachers spend lot of time with them, obviously more time than they are allowed to spend with their families, this creates bonds between teachers and students and potentially turns teachers to confidants and informal mediators.

Thus, although, very often, the incarcerated choose to go to school because of the bonus in their penalty, this choice might be also related to other motives: their need to escape from their dark and



monotonous life of imprisonment or be close to people that are connected with the world outside prison or even in their projection for their future reintegration in the society and their effort to ameliorate their position and augment their future choices when liberated.



**Pict. 5.** The external wall of a detention facility painted on the inside by students-inmates as featuring in the webpage of the school (Source: <http://gym-par-avlon.att.sch.gr/>)

Teachers, in this line of thought, parallel themselves to “the bond” or “the link” to the world outside prison since they act as important agents in this process. They function as mediators, facilitators or even “translators” and informal counselors. Teachers also are usually influenced in important ways, as their involvement in the situation becomes longer and deeper. From outsiders and distanced observers of the “other” they view themselves as becoming gradually transformed to being involved and accept the role of a mediator and a reflexive agent. However, agency for them may either be perceived as reform or be in the logic of empowerment.

This, obviously, helps the inmates-students to develop special bonds with the teaching staff, a sense of respect for the school as well as a feeling of security and sense of freedom. So, as pointed to us, the school, the teaching staff and the headmasters represent another aspect of formality and receive high esteem, respect and trust by the inmates-students. In this way the inmates-students may feel –as indicated in the teachers’ answers– “*closer to society*”, or that “*the outside world has not alienated nor forgotten them*” and “*still cares for them*” and that “*they are not completely cut off from the world.*”

### **Concluding remarks: the potentiality of prison schools as thresholds**

The aforementioned spatial, administrative and educational particulars led us reflect on whether we could picture prison schools as passages, as thresholds to the outside world, both in the physical sense and the symbolic.

Individuals experience transitions and changes in their lifetime as they pass from one culturally recognized phase of life to the other, as they move “from one social status to another” (Leach, 1976: 77) and experience “alternating exposure to structure and *communitas* and to states and transitions” (Turner, 1977a: 97). According to Deleuze (1992: 3) “The individual never ceases passing from one closed

environment to another, each having its own laws: first, the family; then the school [...]; then the barracks [...]; then the factory; from time to time the hospital; possibly the prison, the preeminent instance of the enclosed environment”. Moreover, Turner viewed society as a process “in which any living, relatively well-bonded human group alternates between fixed and... floating worlds” (Turner, 1977a: vi).

This lifelong process could be visualized as being structured on spatiotemporal passages, crossing boundaries, while moving from one arrangement to the other. Foucault (1986: 24) defined those arrangements that intersect with the others and contest them either as utopias which are “unreal” spaces or as heterotopias “real” and “effective” places that, although being part of the social order, they constitute “counter-sites”. In considering space as a system of separation and differentiation, where power is exercised and performed, heterotopias could be identified as “the places of the other outside the generalized disciplinary order” (Stavrides, 2010: 105-106). At the same time, those arrangements initiate a different sense of time (‘heterochrony’/‘heterochronism’), out of the ordinary and contrary to the normal or “traditional” time of society (Foucault, 1986: 26).

Turner, for describing these in-between transitional spaces, employs the word “limen”, meaning “threshold”, from Van Gennep's second of three stages in rites of passage and views it as: “a no-man's-land betwixt and between the structural past and the structural future as anticipated by the society's normative control of biological development. It is ritualized in many ways, but very often symbols expressive of ambiguous identity are found cross culturally” (Turner 1986: 41). So, liminality is a condition of “no-place” and “no-time” (Turner, 1979: 150) and is characterised by the construction of transitory identities.

Liminal entities (liminars/passengers), being at a transitional limbo phase, “are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial” (Turner, 1977a: 95). They are ambiguous and indeterminate, as they find themselves in a cultural realm that has “few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state” (ibid: 94).

Accordingly, thresholds or passages are spatiotemporal arrangements and at the same time experiences, where “initiands” undergo rites of passage in a process of change and transformation: the suspension of the previous status/identity takes place, whilst there exists anticipation of transition or preparation for a new status/identity. In this, we may identify the ontological nexus of “space, time and being” conceptualised as the essential qualities of the physical world of “spatiality, temporality and social being” (Soja, 1989: 25). Moreover, this process might be considered as initiation to otherness thus heterotopias can be considered as “passages towards otherness” (Stavrides, 2010: 112).

According to Douglas (2001: 96) people in marginal state or in transition are “somehow left out in the patterning of society” and become “placeless” and ambiguous. As such they tend to be considered as unclean, polluting and dangerous. However, we may find in liminality positive and active qualities (Turner 1986: 41). In this liminal space-time, the one excluded from the social order is incorporated in

another reality where one experiences feelings of comradeship and belonging, as opposed to the hierarchical structure of the relations of the everyday. This alternate structure, Turner's *communitas* is understood through its "juxtaposition to, or hybridization with, aspects of social structure" (Turner, 1977a: 127) and it holds "potentiality". Liminality is developed in between past and future states and as such it carries the dynamics of the prospect of change and re-integration and possesses also pedagogical qualities (Turner, 1977a: 105). It can further be described "as a fructile chaos, a storehouse of possibilities, not a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structures, a gestation process, a fetation of modes appropriate to postliminal existence" (Turner, 1986: 42).

In this line of thought, both prisons and schools can be viewed as thresholds, heterotopic structures that have the power to juxtapose with others and create an alternate arrangement of space/time, either as an illusion or as a real space/time which contrasts –by its structure– our world. This presupposes a mechanism of closure and opening which makes heterotopias inaccessible and ensures segregation, while it also makes them penetrable and accessible (Foucault, 1986: 26).

Schooling holds liminal characteristics in the sense of being a transitional period between childhood and adulthood, of a different place and of a different context other than the familiar house environment and has often been paralleled to a rite of passage (McLaren, 1986: 24).

Prisons according to Foucault (1986: 25) are heterotopias of deviation/deviance as they are occupied by people with behavior that deviates from the norm or current standard. Furthermore, prisons belong to the so-called "total institutions" which are characterised by Goffman (1961: 12) as "social hybrids, part residential community part formal organisations". Their "encompassing or total character" is often symbolically consummated in the physical barriers posed to social interaction such as high walls and bars (ibid: 4).

Upon entry to such an institution a "stripping process" takes place which brings about a symbolic "mortification of the self" as far individual and social identity are concerned, since inmates are deprived of their personal items, become "defaced" and submitted to a stigmatised status (ibid: 20). This stripping process insinuates a symbolic cut off from the outside world, from the previous status of the person and of the normal flow of life/time. Moreover, "a leveling process" (ibid: 119) also takes place by power of which inmates are homogenised. As also Turner (1979: 149) observes, "Liminars are stripped of status and authority, removed from a social structure maintained and sanctioned by power and force, and leveled to a homogeneous social state through discipline and ordeal". In this way "signs of preliminal status are destroyed and signs of liminal non-status applied" (ibid: 19).

Moreover, according to Becker (1963) the inmates are turned into outsiders for the society, as they are in a ritualistic sense cast out of the normal life of a group and secluded. In this heterotopic space/time social timelessness (time out of time), physical separation (place out of place), dissolution of the social bonds and ambiguity are experienced by the inmates. They are viewed as "the Other", the deviant, the marginal, the dangerous.

During our contact with the Greek prison schools, this distinction between the inside and the outside was evident in expressions that were used by teachers and headmasters for describing the situation of imprisonment. Society was pictured as the “outside”, “the world out there” or the “outside of the walls,” synonymous to freedom and autonomy. On the contrary, prison was viewed as the “inside”, the “enclosure”, synonymous with the absence of autonomy and initiatives, with routine, systematic control and total submission of the prisoners.

Moreover, expressions like “the normal kids of their age”, the “normal school”, “sane” were used to refer to the educational reality outside the prison as opposed to the “deviant”, to “children that lost their path” or to “outcasts from the school, because they did not fit” that were selected when referring to the inmates.

Prison schools were symbolically pictured in teachers’ and headmasters’ discourse mostly in positive terms as “an oasis”, “a window”, “a space of freedom”, “a connecting bond to society or the world outside”, “a space of proximity with society”, “a point of contact with the outside world”, “a (brief) escape in time”, “a way out”, “a breath of freedom”, “a second chance”, “a chance for utilising the dead/lost/idle time in prison”, “an opportunity to gain the lost time”, “a transition from one status to the other”, “an important pillar of social reintegration” and “a step towards” or “an incentive to change”.

However, transitions, as being nor one state nor the next, imply danger, which may stem from our inability to determine the outcome for both the individual and the society. This transitional and controversial character is further observed in the form of agency which is selected and developed by teachers (this of reform or empowerment).

In the bipolar oppositions, inside/outside, normal/deviant-outcast, familiar/strange-different, neglect/care, positive/negative, the prison school is visualized as an “arrangement in between”, a threshold between the past and the future states, between former and new identities, which also holds the power of transformation. In this context, there is discerned an obvious potential of multiple metamorphosis: at school “inmates are turned into classmates”, “teachers are turned into mediators and facilitators”, the whole process of teaching and learning becomes a creative, transforming and liberating experience for both the inmates and the teachers.

Indicative of the above point it is the connection one teacher drew between the actual and the symbolic movement-transition that takes place in context of prison schools: *“The everyday route of the students from their cells to the school stands for the transition from the status of the inmate-prisoner to the status of a learner-free citizen.”*

Although thresholds insinuate separation, regulated access and marker of boundary with otherness, at the same time they mark transition in time, space and status, they indicate and effect comparisons, they symbolize potential opening to the future, flow of people and ideas and the conciliation with otherness. In this sense, thresholds embody the prospect of change and reaffirmation of status and as such they can be powerful drivers of change. Leach (1965) pictures transition and the

change that it brings about in a vivid metaphor as a symbolic death of the actor in the world of departure and its rebirth in the other world. Turner (2009: 95) also notices that often liminality is paralleled to “death, to being in a womb”.



**Pict. 6.** A student’s drawing from Avlona school, featuring in the programme of the 2016 conference of Volos.

Accordingly, heterotopias are not only “other” places, but heterogeneous spaces of sites and relations (Soja 1989: 17) that encapsulate, create, reinforce or even contest “otherness” in a symbolic nexus of time, space and social relations. In this context, in their life course, people become attached to many spaces of inclusion, seclusion and exclusion, where control is exercised, integrated and opposed. However, people are not just drifting in the stream of life or just conforming to circumstance or to rules imposed on them. People make decisions and develop new strategies lifelong as they enter different phases of life and at the same time different environments of enclosure.

Understanding prison schools as thresholds implies that a kind of suspension of the previous state takes place and at the same time there is the anticipation of the new. Those arrangements are not simply spatiotemporal passages where structure is substituted by anti-structure, where the order is contested only to be later re-constructed, or, where otherness is negotiated. They are dynamic and transformative passages between two diverging structures, the prison heterotopia and the society. They embody the prospect of change and affect change, as inmates have the chance to contest their attributed status/identities and built new ones. Accordingly, Turner (1977: 68) locates the “essence of liminality” “in its release from normal constraints, making possible the deconstruction of the “uninteresting” constructions of common sense, the “meaningfulness of ordinary life,” ... into cultural units which may then be reconstructed in novel ways [...]”

So, in viewing the dynamics of prison education as transformative in the sense of a social poetics, we should accept that a process of negotiation, resignification and active creation of meaning takes place when contesting with otherness, deconstructing and reconstructing and finally transforming relations and identities. However, whatever the potential of education for young prisoners or the courageous efforts and achievements in Greece might be, we cannot overlook the fact that in a country in crisis, prison education suffers in many ways, not only from lack of resources but also from lack of special

focus and targeted interventions as far as the whole framework, curricula, teaching materials, professional development of the teaching staff with regular educational support and training for teachers.

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