

Building a Greener Future Together: Futuraskolan and ELIX unite for Environmental and Social Impact

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On October 9th, 2024, the slopes of **Ymittos** Mountain in Greece came alive with the energy of young students from Futuraskolan (Sweden) and Themistoklis School (Greece). Organized by **ELIX** in collaboration with **SPAY** (The Union for the Protection and Development of Hymettus), this tree-planting event marked an important moment in the ongoing efforts to restore this vital green space.

For the 30 students from **Futuraskolan** and 15 from **Themistoklis School**, most of whom had never planted a tree before, it was a day of learning and discovery. Under the guidance of ELIX and SPAY, the students were shown how to dig the right depth, plant the saplings, and water them, ensuring the trees would thrive. By the end of the day, 60 trees were planted, contributing to the reforestation of an area devastated by the fires of 2015.

SPAY, a union of ten municipalities, plays a critical role in protecting and reviving the Mountain of Ymittos. SPAY's shared vision is to unite all residents of Attica in a mutual commitment to the environment, with values such as respect, selflessness, and a dedication to future generations at the heart of their work. As Nikos Kiouis, SPAY member, says, "It is within our power to protect Mt. Ymittos and make it green again and more beautiful than ever. We owe it to our children and the generations to come." With support from organizations like ELIX and the active participation of volunteers, this vision is steadily becoming a reality.

ELIX has been involved in reforestation efforts in Ymittos for years, organising volunteer groups to support SPAY's initiatives. The importance of Ymittos, often called the "green lung" of Athens, cannot be overstated. Its forests provide much-needed greenery and biodiversity to the region, and reforestation efforts are key to its revival.

Global Citizenship in Action: Futuraskolan's Continued Support

The students from Futuraskolan who participated in the event are part of the school's Global Citizenship Programme, which empowers learners to take active roles in creating a more peaceful, inclusive, and sustainable world. The programme fosters the cognitive skills needed to understand complex global issues, and this tree-planting initiative was a hands-on experience in environmental stewardship.

In addition to their active involvement in Greece, Futuraskolan supports ELIX's broader mission through fund raising activities held back in Sweden. At these events, organized in cooperation with the parent community, students and their families raise funds for ELIX's activities in Greece. These donations are essential to supporting ELIX's work with refugees and migrants, particularly in maintaining safe spaces like the p² multispace in Athens.

The collaboration between Futuraskolan and ELIX is led by Fareeha Rizwan, Principal of Gåshaga Preschool and Head of International Outreach at Futuraskolan. Fareeha, who took over from Chris Mockrish in the summer of 2024, has been an advocate for this partnership, building on the strong foundation laid by her predecessor. Her personal commitment to the cause has made her an invaluable partner to ELIX.

Supporting ELIX's p² multispace in Athens



The donations raised by Futuraskolan directly support ELIX's p² multispace, a safe and inclusive community space located in the heart of Athens. This space provides a welcoming environment for refugees, migrants, and local youth to engage in a variety of activities, from language lessons to yoga, knitting, crafts, and even stop-motion video production. The p² multispace also includes a playroom for children, allowing parents to participate in activities while their kids enjoy

games and books in a safe space.

More than just a venue for classes, the p² multispace serves as a hub for community-building, where young people can share their skills and arrange activities with the support of ELIX staff. Additionally, other organizations regularly use the space for training sessions and events, further broadening its reach and impact.

A Long-Term Partnership for Social Good

The collaboration between Futuraskolan and ELIX began in July 2023, when Tom Callahan, CEO of Futuraskolan, first reached out to ELIX. Tom and Chris Mockrish, the then-Head of International Outreach at Futuraskolan, attended a meeting with Judith Wunderlich-Antoniou, Director of ELIX, and Angeliki Sifaki, Project Coordinator at ELIX. "We knew from our first conversation that we would do something meaningful together. There was a strong sense of alignment in our values, and a passion from both sides to make a difference - not just for the

environment, but for the communities we serve,” said Judith. “That meeting set the foundation for what has become an impactful partnership.” Initially, discussions centered around in-kind donations for refugees, and the idea of bringing refugee and migrant students from ELIX together with students from Futuraskolan to exchange and share their diverse realities. This collaboration took shape in March 2024, when the first group of students from Futuraskolan visited Athens. During that visit, the students not only brought donations but also participated in activities with refugee and migrant students from ELIX’s Learning Center on Patission Street. The opportunity to exchange experiences - between students whose lives and realities could not be more different - was a huge learning experience for both groups. Additionally, the students engaged in a Zero-Plastic Activity on Ymittos Mountain, further reinforcing their commitment to both social and environmental causes.

Since then, the partnership has continued to grow, with the recent October tree-planting event being just one of many joint efforts. Looking ahead, more visits are planned, with groups of students from Futuraskolan set to return in November 2024 and again in March and April 2025, each time bringing 30 students to engage in meaningful volunteer activities with ELIX.

A Shared Vision for a Better Tomorrow

The partnership between Futuraskolan and ELIX exemplifies the power of international cooperation for both environmental restoration and social good. From reforesting the green spaces of Ymittos Mountain to supporting vulnerable communities through the p² multispace, this collaboration not only impacts the local environment and society but also instills a sense of global responsibility in the students involved. Through activities like tree planting, educational exchanges, and financial support, this partnership demonstrates what can be achieved when organizations unite for a common cause. As ELIX and Futuraskolan look to the future, their shared commitment to building a greener, more inclusive, and compassionate world continues to inspire and grow.

