

Rebetiko in literature, English, physical education, and computer classes in Greece

Age of students: 15 to 17 years old

Rebetiko is a musical and cultural expression linked to song and dance that initially spread among the urban lower- and working-class populations in the early twentieth century. This school, located in the port city of Piraeus - which is one of the major urban areas where the genre emerged - was inspired by rebetiko to design a cross-curricular project in order to integrate it in the daily teaching of literature, English as a foreign language, physical education and computer classes. Teachers used rebetiko to discuss gender stereotypes, and to improve students' vocabulary and communication skills in a foreign language. Students enhanced their computer skills by developing a mobile app to raise awareness about this living heritage and to contribute to its safeguarding.

Learning objectives

English:

- ▶ Comprehending written texts, scanning passages to identify important information;
- ▶ Selecting key information to form an opinion and relate it to other ideas;
- ▶ Improving communication skills using text-specific vocabulary;
- ▶ Speaking using cohesive sentences and connecting rhetorical devices.

Physical education:

- ▶ Learning the steps of the three basic rebetiko dances (zeibekiko, chasapiko, chasaposerviko) and recognizing different ethnographic elements through dance;
- ▶ Improving kinaesthetic, coordination skills and team spirit;
- ▶ Becoming familiarized with various forms of physical activity that cater to human needs, e.g. social interaction;
- ▶ Understanding that physical activity in all its various forms has always been an essential cultural element that satisfies a basic desire for creation and expression.

Information and communication technology:

- ▶ Designing and developing an application for mobile phones (according to the class syllabus) to document the process of integrating rebetiko in their school activities (using AppInventor for Android; appinventor.mit.edu);

Literature:

- ▶ Improving students' critical thinking on contemporary civilization by analysing and discussing the lyrics of three selected rebetiko songs reflecting gender stereotypes from the 1920s to the 1950s;
- ▶ Discussing past and contemporary social aspects using the text as a starting point;
- ▶ Identifying connotation and idiosyncratic elements of the rebetiko verse;
- ▶ Improving students' reading and writing skills and enriching their vocabulary.

Objectives related to the ICH element:

- ▶ Familiarizing students with the concept of living heritage and the importance of its safeguarding;
- ▶ Learning about the origin and the socio-historical background of rebetiko (early 1920s to late 1950s) and discussing its meaning today for local communities;
- ▶ Discussing cultural uniformity and diversity and mutual respect for heritage, traditional culture and ways of living.

Preparation

Description of the ICH element and the way it is practised today:

Rebetiko is a distinctive musical and cultural tradition developed in the early 20th century in the main urban centres of Greece, primarily port cities. Rebetiko songs and dances spread gradually among the urban lower- and working-class populations. Especially in its early years, rebetiko was distinguished by aspects such as collectivity, anonymous creation and oral diffusion. Its performance and many of its structural features (poetical and musical) are connected with the rural folk song tradition (*demotika*, music and songs dating from the early-modern period), particularly that of the Greeks of Asia Minor and the Aegean islands. Rebetiko evolved through a process of mutual exchange and creative adaptation involving the musical traditions of the other peoples residing in the multi-ethnic urban centres of the former Ottoman Empire (Turks, Jews, Armenians, Balkan peoples, Levantines). After the Second World War, its popularity expanded to the middle classes and in the decades since, rebetiko songs have been a constant part of the repertoire in almost every social occasion where music and dance is performed. Until the revival of rebetiko in the 1970s and 1980s, the involvement of women was mainly as singers, but nowadays they are also instrumentalists and involved in its transmission. Today, the music has spread throughout Greece and among Greek diaspora communities abroad. Rebetiko was inscribed in 2017 (12.COM) on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.¹

Linkages between the ICH element and the school subject:

Rebetiko was integrated in lesson plans across disciplines and in line with the national curriculum. For all four subjects, the living heritage element provided context-specific pedagogical material that helped reach the subject-specific learning objectives.

For English as a foreign language, the nomination text for the inscription of rebetiko on the UNESCO

Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity was approached as pedagogical material to acquire new vocabulary and improve comprehension of formal written texts. The activities aimed to enhance learners' written and oral communication and presentation skills.

During physical education class, the three main rebetiko dances (*zeibekiko*, *chasapiko*, *chasaposerviko*) were practised, encouraging students to perceive physical activity as an essential cultural element that addresses basic human needs such as self-expression, creation and belonging.

In literature class, students analysed and discussed three popular rebetiko songs depicting gender stereotypes. Following the discussions, students used creative writing techniques to reflect on and interpret the lyrics from a modern perspective.

Integrating this living heritage expression into the ICT lessons resulted in the creation of a final product, namely a mobile app that was used to document and disseminate the school's rebetiko project. The teacher monitored students' progress and helped them to develop a technically viable and creatively designed app.

In general, the rebetiko project was positively received by students, especially as music is generally not included in the curriculum for upper secondary education in Greece.

Involvement of learners in the preparation of the activity:

While the students were not involved in the preparation of the activities, they played an active role during the lessons. Interactive methods based on individual study and teamwork made the teaching and learning process dynamic and engaging for everyone. Pupils were given the option to choose the learning materials that most resonated with them. During the physical education classes, students who happened to know some of the dance steps acted as the teacher's assistants.

¹<https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/rebetiko-01291>, accessed on 7 October 2020

Involvement of bearers and local community in the preparation and/or implementation of the activity:

Given the nature of the selected living heritage, the teachers considered themselves to be part of the community of bearers. Students also had a personal connection with the music, dance and meaning of

rebetiko since these songs and dances continue to be practised in social and family gatherings.

Teachers collaborated with the Ministry of Culture and Sports to integrate these activities into the four curricular subjects. The Ministry also organized an extracurricular activity for the students.

Description of the activity

Rebetiko was integrated into daily lessons across four subjects: English as a foreign language, literature and physical education, in addition to a module in ICT classes for which the teacher dedicated five lessons of 90 minutes each. The subjects were taught in parallel, ICT and literature to A class students (aged 15–16) and physical education and English as a foreign language to B class students (aged 16–17).

4 | The English class (three 45-minute periods) centred around the official nomination text of rebetiko to the UNESCO Representative list. The text provided students with the historical and sociocultural background that has defined the cultural expression over the years. Students were provided with copies of the text in English, which they read and discussed in the classroom. The teacher distributed vocabulary worksheets with possible new words, phrases and expressions to help learners understand the material. As homework, they were asked to scan the text and answer a set of true or false questions, as well as to research a rebetiko song or a singer or songwriter of their choice and make a brief presentation in the classroom, sharing the reasons behind their selection. The teacher used a table divided into ‘what I know’, ‘what I want to know’ and ‘what I have learned’ (KWL chart) to guide and assess the students’ learning process.

In three 45-minute periods, the physical education teacher demonstrated the main rebetiko dances with students while explaining their origin, evolution and meaning. Students particularly appreciated this class as it was active, engaging and relaxing, taking their mind off the pressure of exams.

During the literature class (two 45-minute periods), the pedagogical material consisted of a selection of three very popular rebetiko songs depicting three types of women: the ‘bad’ type, who is canny and cheating, the ‘beauty’ type, who is praised by the lyrics, and ‘the heartbreaker’ who breaks her lover’s heart by leaving him. The lesson plan was based on the principles of **learning by experience** (focussing mainly on the intellectual and emotional motivation of the students), the methodology of **critical literacy** (focussing on forming a specific attitude towards the text), and **reader response theory** (focussing on the student readers and their experience of a literary work). In the classroom, pupils listened to the songs, analysed their lyrics by identifying adjectives and descriptive phrases referring to both men and women and **discussed gender representation in rebetiko, reflecting on the stereotypes present in songs from the 1920s to the 1950s. As a creative writing activity**, they were asked to change the lyrics of the third song as if it was sung by a woman to a man. They also received the lyrics to a fourth song titled *Ungrateful Woman* (Αχάριστη) but with the adjectives portraying the woman removed in order for them to propose new adjectives more appropriate to today’s world views.

The students used programming lessons in the ICT class syllabus to develop a mobile app documenting the process of teaching and learning with rebetiko in their school as a final project in this subject. The instructor provided them with material such as photos, recordings of the dances, teaching material and other online resources.

An extracurricular activity was also organized with the help of the National ASPnet Coordinator.

During ETHNOFEST, the 10th Ethnographic Festival under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture and Sports, students had the opportunity to watch three ethnographic short films that dealt with different aspects of living heritage. They then discussed

how people can experience and safeguard living culture with a representative of the Directorate of Contemporary Cultural Heritage at the Ministry who is responsible for educational activities, as well as with the film director.

Learning outcomes

The learning objectives for each of the four subjects were fully met. Teachers expressed interest in continuing to work with living heritage and would like to encourage other teachers to do the same. One of the few things that they would like to change in the future would be to make the activities even more interactive and ‘game-like’.

The students’ evaluation was positive, describing **learning with living heritage as ‘different, engaging, interesting and fun’**.

Contextualized learning, especially within a cross-curricular interdisciplinary approach like this one, facilitates the learning processes and helps students to improve their knowledge.

