Social environment and physical activity of the adolescents in Greece

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ABSTRACT
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Physical activity (PA) is of crucial importance for the health and wellbeing of human beings. It is influenced by various factors, which are interconnected and thus renders it a complex subject to study.

The aim of this study is to describe the PA in Greece and Finland especially the social environment of PA currently and in the past as well as the Greek social environment and its contribution to the PA results. One of the factors exerting influence on PA is the social environment especially during the adolescent years. Having the social environment as an angle of approach, this study aims to understand why Greece is one of the least physically active countries in Europe and what the major differences of the social environment are when placed next to one of the most physically active countries (Finland). The design of this research is theoretical and is based on previously conducted international studies and surveys on PA, such as the Eurobarometer, international studies on the social determinants of health and wellbeing, as well as studies focusing on the social environment (HBSC studies).

The analysis took place according to thematic content analysis method proposed by Mayring (Philipp, 2014). In order to narrow the broad term of the social environment down, it is defined in this research as family, peers and media. The Greek adolescents grow up in a social environment, which is much more conservative and strict than many of their Finnish peers. Not being able to spend much time with their peers outside school until they reach a certain age can be a barrier to their development. The high bullying rate in Greece is a statement of the xenophobia and uncertainty still lingering within the Greek society. Possible reasons for this type of behavior can be traced in the harsh past of Greece which brought certain ideology to the surface as means of survival. Greece is also one of the countries where adolescents spend most of their time watching television and having electronic media contact with their peers.

These notions however, are still prominent in modern society influencing the social environment and in turn the PA levels. It seems that sport and PA have different meanings in the Greek and Finnish society. The Finnish society approaches sport with a broadened perspective as opposed to Greece.

Keywords: Physical activity, social environment, adolescents, Greece, culture, Finland

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1. INTRODUCTION

The topic of physical activity (PA) and the health benefits that it provides to the individual have been widely studied. In addition, various theories and variables have been examined attempting to initially depict why individuals engage in PA and secondary how that type of behaviour can be influenced. This study describes PA and the social environment in Greece during the adolescent years. In addition, the social environment of Finland, one of the most physically active countries in Europe is used as a reference point compared to Greece. The term social environment is rather broad and versatile and can include a great number of variables. For this study, social environment includes family, peers, television and cultural aspects according to the National Institutes of Health (Health, 2000). Even though social environment and its effect on PA have been a subject of interest in these countries, attempts for deeper insights and interpretations are lacking.

It has been widely confirmed that being physically active has numerous physical as well as psychological health benefits (Aaron, Jekal, & LaPorte, 2005). The tendency of being physically active however, is influenced by a number of variables including the social environment which is the main focus of this study. Examining the results of the Eurobarometer, it can be argued that Greece and Finland reach different levels regarding PA with Finland belonging at the top physically active countries while Greece at the bottom (European Commission, 2018). What still remains unanswered is the "why" Greece ranks as one of the least physically active countries while Finland on the other hand is at the top of the list. There can be various approaches to answer that but this study has its centre around the social environment. Thus while maintaining the focus on the social environment and its influence on PA, this study seeks to clarify the characteristics of the social environment of Greece and how it eventually differs from that in Finland. In addition, an attempt has been made to understand why the Greek social environment has reached its current state, which in turn contributes to the PA results

The data for this research were acquired by the Eurobarometer study, the Social determinants of health and well-being among young people research, as well as the HBSC (Health behavior in school aged children) study. The analysis of such data was performed according to the thematic content analysis method as described by Mayring (Philipp, 2014) in the chapters to follow.

The chapters to follow include the literature review providing background information as well as the theoretical background which guided this research. Chapter 4.3 consists of the methodology of collecting data and the analysis techniques. The results can be found in chapter 5 and the discussion with conclusions of the study can be found in chapter 6.

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2. HEALTH AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN DAILY LIFE

This chapter serves as background information in order to establish a clear idea regarding the studies that have already been conducted about the factors that influence physical activity (PA). Furthermore, it sets the foundation upon what this research is based on and the contribution it has to the existing literature. In the beginning, the general importance of PA is outlined followed by specific information on the PA during the adolescent years. To conclude the chapter, the influence of the social environment on PA and the psychological factors having a prominent role during adolescence are highlighted.

2.1. Health benefits of physical activity

Since the early stages of life humans have been physically active. This is due to the fact that humans are biologically made to follow an active lifestyle (Astrand, Rodahl, Dahl, & Stromme, 2003). From an evolutionary perspective humans were designed to move and engage in manual labour throughout the day. Such a lifestyle was essential to our survival as a species. From ancient times humans came up with different methods in order to stay active but not just for the sake of it but through doing something that they enjoyed (Demirel & Yildiran, 2013). Staying active was a result or a by-product of the so called sport. Sport is defined as a game, competition or activity, which requires physical effort and competence played according to a set of rules for enjoyment or as a profession (Cambridge, 2018). PA is defined as 'any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure' (WHO, 2018). Even though the whole existence of human beings has been based on outdoor activity, people ended up developing a destructive sedentary behaviour as a result of modernization, technological developments and industrialization (Owen, Sparling, Healy, Dunstan, & Matthews, 2003).

Sedentary behaviour, such as spending time in front of a television, gaming consoles, sitting at work and the time spent in automobiles are some examples of an everyday sedentary lifestyle (Owen, Healy, Matthews, & Dunstan, 2012). Unfortunately such behaviour does not contribute to the physical and mental health. On the contrary, when approached from the perspective of PA it contradicts the very existence and function of human beings and it even

has devastating effects in the long term. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that there are 1.9 million deaths worldwide which are attributed to the decline of physical activity (WHO, 2010). In addition, at least 2.6 million premature deaths are the result of obesity (WHO, 2010). Despite the various factors contributing to obesity, research shows that increased sedentary time directly affects the levels and developing rate of obesity (Hills, King, & Armstrong, 2007; Lavizzo, 2007). Moreover, an updated version of the WHO estimates that global levels of obesity have doubled since 1980 (WHO, 2016).

On the other hand, there are numerous positive effects for those who are physically active. Regular physical activity during childhood and adolescence is associated with several physical and psychological benefits (Aaron, Jekal, & LaPorte, 2005). Physical activity is also associated with enhanced mental health, improved self-esteem and self-identity (Fitgerald, Fitzgerald, & Aherne, 2012). Regardless of the diverse benefits of PA certain dangers exist especially with poor techniques and not proper knowledge or guidance. Physical activity is also the number one cause of injuries particularly in adolescents (Emery, 2007). There are numerous advantages that physically active individuals (especially children and adolescents) experience, with the importance lying on physical and mental health as well as social benefits (Boreham & Riddoch, 2001; Suter & Hawes, 1993).

2.2. Physical activity and adolescence

Until this point it seems quite clear that not only are humans meant to be physically active but also not following such a lifestyle can have devastating effects to our health and wellbeing. In addition to that, PA seems not only to be the cure but also means of prevention when it comes to diseases. Regrettably there is a prominent decrease in PA by youth as they progress over the school years (Barnett, O'Loughlin, & Paradis, 2002; Sallis, Prochaska, & Taylor, 2000). As people grow older they become even more physically inactive with the starting point near the adolescent years (from 11 – 18) (Allison, Adlaf, Dwyer, Lysy, & Irving, 2007; Sallis 2000). This universal decline of PA varies according to the race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and sex (Andersen, Crespo, Bartlett, & Cheskin LJ, 1998).

Regarding the differences between the genders, a five year longitudinal study by Brodersen et al. (2007) revealed that adolescent boys persistently engaged in more PA than girls. This

can be attributed to a certain feminine norm created by society which the adolescent girls are trying to follow and which does not include sport or PA. In addition to that, there was a connection between school year and sex with a greatest drop in girls than in boys. Concentrating also on the racial differences, the same research identified Asian and Black students as less active than their White peers in the UK. Regardless of the ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender and race the levels of PA of the participants in this research decreased during the period of five years. Yet two other longitudinal studies confirm the findings regarding the decline of PA during the adolescent years. Gordon-Larsen et al. (2004) noticed a dramatic drop in the percentage of adolescents (the majority of males and especially females) who engaged in moderate to vigorous PA five times or more per week and kept this behaviour during adulthood. Cleland et al. (2010) agree with the previous findings of Gordon-Larsen – on the change of behaviour during adolescence and towards adulthood – having themselves reported that boys and girls had a 70 percent and 73 percent decrease correspondingly.

From the psychological perspective the research seems to contradict the previous results of Gordon-Larsen. For example findings of Hirvensalo and Lintunen (2011) are the exact opposite claiming that humans are creatures of habits and their behaviour during adolescence will determine their choices in adulthoods. A reason for that might be the viewpoint of the researchers. While Gordon-Larsen et al. viewed the subject from a physical perspective by measuring BMI, Lintunen & Hirvensalo (2011) approached it from a psychological perspective. Advocates of the same belief as Lintunen & Hirvensalo are Pajares and Urdan who summarized the notion stating that unless adolescents pick up smoking during these years it is unlikely that they become smokers in adulthood (Pajares & Urdan, 2006). In 1992 the same notion was defended by Sallis et al. (1992) stating that sport behavioural patterns established in youth and adolescence may persist also during adulthood (Sallis, et al., 1992). It seems, that the adolescent years are quite sensitive in terms of the shift in behaviour that takes place but also regarding the habits that are being created during that period. These habits play a crucial role, since it is extremely challenging to change them after that period.

It is quite intriguing why humans change their behaviour, from being physically active and practicing outdoor activities in our early years, to a more inactive attitude. The beginning of

such change can be traced to the research of Goldscheider et al. (2004) concluding that during adolescence and adulthood major life events take place such as the residential independence of the individual and the introduction of him to other parties of influence reducing the effect of the family circle. To emphasize this specific shift in the life of the individual, Gordon-Larsen et al. (2004) revealed that there was a high obesity incidence and maintenance taking place in the transition from adolescence to adulthood (Gordon-Larsen, Adair, Nelson, & Popkin, 2004). Acknowledging the findings of Gordon-Larsen et al. cross sectional studies have demonstrated that sedentary behaviour starts becoming a habit at the ages of 10-12 with a peak being reached in the adolescent years (Kristjansdottir & Vilhjamsson, 2001; Caspersen, Pereira, & Curran, 2000; Sproston & Primatesta, 2003).

2.3.   Physical activity and the social environment

There is a number of other factors that need to be taken into consideration when encountering the challenging subject of behavioural change (also in the case of PA) such as social, psychological, cultural and environmental aspects (Lee, Sallis, & Biddle, 2010). They are all interconnected with multiple sub-categories exerting constant influence onto one another and ultimately contributing to the individual's final decision-making. Research conducted by Fan et al. (2015) indicated that adults who regularly engaged in organized sport, exhibited increased social integration than their equal counterparts. In addition, organized sport participation showed an increased impact on social trust and social interaction. Spaaij (2009) agreed with the previous findings of Fan et al. (2015) and highlighted that sport participation can assist in developing competence regarding social inclusion or exclusion. Furthermore, research by Caruso (2010) indicated a negative association between sport participation and property crime as well as sport participation and juvenile crime. He concluded that when taken part in regularly, sport has a significant effect on the societal environment. Examining the psychological aspects and the effect they have on the individual during the adolescent years, Biddle et al. (2005) discovered that the view of someone's own competence on a certain activity was linked to PA.

In addition, positive psychology can reinforce that view. Bauman et al. (2012) supported the previous findings of Biddle et al. (2005) by stating that self-efficacy had a positive

association with children's and adolescent's PA levels. Moreover, in the research of Schmitz et al. (2002) psychosocial factors, assisted in concluding whether the children and adolescents of both sexes would engage in PA. In order to reach the root of the problem of the decline of PA one has to have a broader vision and take factors into consideration that are common to all of us regardless of so called differences (e.g. race, colour and sex).

What all humans have in common, is the ability to communicate and thus socialize with the individuals around them. Humans have been doing that since children, at first with the parents and then kept on broadening the circle of contacts and thus the variables that influence the decision making and finally themselves. A role and function in the society is something we all have in common from a very young age. Brustad et al. (2011) identified several social antecedents that influence children's PA and sport participation. These consist of peers, coaches/teachers and parents. From the beginning research has identified family (siblings and parents) as the first socialization point for the individual, making it a subject of great importance.

2.3.1. The influence of family and peers on physical activity

Family has an important social aspect on a child. That is due to the fact that children/adolescents spend their early years solely in that context (Greendorfer, 1992) (Finni, Sääkslahti, Laukkanen, et al. 2011). Research seems to suggest that children's self-belief as well as the image that they hold regarding PA assisted greatly on their actual behaviour (Bois et al. 2005; Dempsey 1993). Since the individual is in so close contact with the family which is a major part of the social environment, her behaviour would be greatly influenced by it and the values it holds. Society then influences individuals through various social factors and the social environment. The effect of the social environment, is extensively observed in research regarding health behaviour and it is officially recognized as an antecedent of health (Department of Health and Human Services, 1996). Although there is no universal term for "social environment" the environment in which an individual functions is imposing certain patterns of social control, granting or impairing chances to present certain behaviours, diminishing or generating stress, and imposing boundaries on individual decisions (Greiner & Knebel, 2003). That is exactly why the social context serves as one of the most versatile

aspects regarding youth PA. Berkman and Glass (2000) examined the interactions and interpersonal relationships that take place in that social context (at first within the family and then with peers and other associates) and concluded that they play a crucial role and are even decisive to the individual's health.

The amount of influence that the parents exercise on the behaviour of the child has been widely studied with results pointing in both directions. Research conducted by Felson and Reed (1986) concluded that the parents' opinions regarding their children's competence, played a crucial role in concluding what the children's actual behaviour would be both in sport and academic performance. Even though this research was conducted in 1986 it shows the attention that the family context has had from early on. Later research conducted by Heitzler et al. (2006) on the subject confirmed the original findings of Felson and Reed. In contrast, Sallis et al. (2000) pointed out that there was not enough evidence to support the effect of parental influence on the attitude of their children. An explanation for this might be the way these two researches were conducted. Sallis et al. conducted a literature review while Heitzler et al. had a more direct approach through a parent – child pair survey. The questions in that survey examined the organized free-time PA and various psychosocial and environmental factors that were potentially linked to PA. On the other hand Neumark-Sztainer et al. (2003) outlined that support from parents, teachers and peers was positively correlated with the practice of PA.

In addition, it seems that parents influence children in various ways and not only by acting or displaying a certain type of behaviour themselves. Contradicting the previously mentioned opinion, there have also been other studies which do not support the parent-child link that has been previously described. Analysing the subject in an eight year longitudinal study, Anderssen et al. (2002) agreed with the previous findings of Sallis et al. (2000) that there is no direct relationship between parents and children. Nevertheless, Biddle et al. (2005) discovered that the multifactorial role of the family and especially the support and the involvement of family members in PA had a strong relationship in predicting the individual's behaviour. These encouraging results out of Biddle's (2005) research, came forth after the analysis of a variety of variables, such as demographic, biological, psychological, behavioural and social. Bois et al. (2005) agreed with Biddle about the role of the family and

even reinforced the importance of that role when concluded that there is a strong relationship between the mother's PA behaviour and the child's related behavioural patterns. Furthermore there was a clear link established, between children's opinion of their own competence and their involvement in PA. However Bois (2005) and Biddle (2005) disagreed about the father's PA and the effect that his behaviour has on the child's PA habits. Namely they concluded that there was no link connecting the two (Bois, Sarrazin, Brustad, Trouilloud, & Francois, 2005). The same research also indicated another important factor of influence in sport participation. Namely, children's impression on their own capability to perform a certain type of PA. Nonetheless, Bauman et al. (2012) disagreed, pointing out that children's impression on their own competence were no determinants of PA. But how are these impressions formed to begin with? The majority of them comes from parent's view on the capability of their children. By communicating with their children what they believe regarding their ability (the children's) they influence the impression of the children about themselves. Another factor are also the teammates, classmates, coaches and teachers which will also contribute by feedback and compliments which will increase or decrease the confidence of the child and the perceptions about itself.

Furthermore, the findings of Bauman et al. (2012) questioned also the effect that the PA of the parents has on children and adolescents. Their findings concluded that there was no link between these two. Gustafson and Rhodes (2006) who reviewed the topic of parental influence regarding PA, pointed out that various results from existing studies widely varied and are inconclusive. A probable answer for this volatility of the results is that the majority of the studies depended on personal-view reports of both children and parents while the use of accelerometers might have presented more stable results (Jago, Fox, Page, Brockman, & Thompson, 2010).

Kimiecik and Horn (2011) concluded that both the parent's beliefs about their children's competence as well as the children's perceptions about their own competence, were positively correlated with an increase in PA behaviour. The same research also discovered that the perceptions of the children regarding the parenting style of their parents – whether they were warm, caring and supporting in acquiring new skills – was highly correlated with the children's beliefs and actual participation in PA (Kimiecik & Horn, 2011). As the child

grows up and moves into adolescence the influence of classmates and peers steadily increases and can sometimes overtake that of the family and the teacher's.

Thus peers are part of the crucial social environment that influences the individual. There is a considerable amount of studies that highlight the effect of friends on the PA levels of the individual (Smith, Ullrich-French, Walker, & Hurley, 2006). Especially social support and social networks are two frequent factors that shape the interpersonal connections between the individual and the environment (Berkman & Glass, 2000). Social support can be explained as means administered by others and social networks point to the system of social relationships that envelop the individual and provide information regarding his level of integration in a group (Institute of Medicine, 2001). A review of PA determinants concluded that there was a significant relationship between social support (especially "buddy systems") and the amount of time spent on PA as well as the frequency (Kahn, et al., 2002). In addition, McNeil et al. concluded that the support of peers was undoubtedly correlated with a rise in PA (McNeill, Kreuter, & Subramanian, 2006). Allender et al. (2006) discovered that especially for girls, the presence of peers while practicing activities was highly valued and played a crucial role on the behaviour of the individual. Smith (2003) agreed with the previous findings of Allender et al. (2006) and also highlighted the importance that the peers have in forming and developing self-image regarding the competence of the individual. However Allender also presented the negative influence that peers exert. Starting from the middle point of adolescence and continuing to the last years of it, adolescent girls had trouble between wanting to appear more famine and practice PA. In addition impressing the opposite sex has a higher priority than practicing in PA. Moreover, a failed attempt on presenting a certain level of skill during physical education classes created awkwardness which led in non-willingness to pursue that type of behaviour (Allender, Cowburn, & Foster, 2006). As a logic outcome to that there was a reduction in PA participation. It seems that the social environment with its social support and social network influence the individual during the adolescent years. But what is it that makes the individual and especially during the adolescent years so vulnerable to influence?

2.3.2. Psychological factors during adolescence

An explanation to the susceptibility of the individual during the adolescent years can be found by looking inside the individual on a psychological level. The individual is subconsciously looking for the gratification of four psychological needs during that period. This topic has long been studied by experts in the field such as Freud (1905), Adler (1917) and Maslow (1954). These needs are most prominent during the adolescent years but residues can pass on during adulthood too. Michael Borg-Laufs (Borg-Laufs, 2013) sums them up as:

1) Need for orientation and control;
2) Need for the gain of pleasure and avoidance of distress;
3) Need for self-esteem protection;
4) Need for attachment.

Need for orientation and control

This need refers to a general wish to understand and influence the world around us. We do not want to find ourselves victims of a situation that we have no influence on. If that was the case, feelings of weakness and defeatism would be prominent in approaching life. To support this need there have been various theories such as Bandura's concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and the sense of coherence illustrated by Antonovsky (1987). Furthermore there is a thin line between this need and the biological needs. Children and adolescents need caregivers to guide them in this world while on the other hand, on a psychological level, they need to be given the power to make their own choices. This can be an explanation of the rebellious behaviour that children display during the adolescent years. The loss of orientation while growing up can result in mental health problems such as posttraumatic stress disorders, anxiety disorders etc. as Grawe has presented in his book on neuropsychotherapy (Grawe, 2006). While searching for orientation they are looking for all sorts of idols to identify themselves with or even people from the same age group. While on the contrary they do want to reach a state of autonomy having some sense of control. This internal struggle is externalized in their behaviour towards their parents, teachers and other people who are depriving them of the control they are seeking to obtain from them while at the same time being dependent on them.

Need for the gain of pleasure and avoidance of distress

The need for the attainment of pleasure or avoidance of distress comes from the evaluation of one's own experiences and the categorization of them as "good" or "bad". This in turn progresses in maximizing the "good" and reducing the "bad". This perception of satisfaction or dissatisfaction is not regulated by unbiased factors. On the contrary, it is personal and a result of past experiences and the general view that the individual holds of this world. However there are biological and cultural factors as to what is perceived as likeable or not. This can be also viewed as an explanation on why reward-plans are doomed to fail when they are not individualized (Hungerige & Borg-Laufs, 2007).

This need is related to the need for orientation and control. By attempting to gain control of the world the individual is in the end aiming to control the type of gain she is going to receive. Focusing on short term goals that feel "good" and avoiding the unpleasant ones the individual is a trait of adolescence. This need for the gain of pleasure is the highest during adolescent years aiming for short term gratification. On the other hand when the individual grows older, she is willing to undergo through some distress first knowing that there will be long term gratification.

Need for self-esteem control

It is quite probable that a negative self-esteem advances to mental discomfort since it might generate more of the "bad "experiences that the adolescent is trying to avoid. The majority of the individuals especially during the adolescent years, estimate them-selves better than they actually are when viewed by an objective someone (Grawe, 2006). What people tend to do, is attribute a failure or a bad performance to situational factors. That way they reduce the responsibility they have to take. It is also a defence mechanism, since a continuous negative self-perception can lead to depression or anxiety. Children and adolescents are in direct need of positive feedback from characters of importance such as parents and friends in order to develop properly. Consistent criticism, decrease of personal worth and abuse by caretakers

are opposing to this need. It has been shown that children who experience physical abuse do not view their caretakers as bas since their existence depends on them. Quite the opposite. They choose to view themselves as bad, blaming themselves and not their parents for the abuse. Placing this need in the context of PA, the children who have bad experiences with performing on PA are choosing to stop participating in order to protect their self-esteem and their "reputation" towards their environment (Allender, Cowburn, & Foster, 2006).

Need for attachment

Attachment refers to the profound relationship with the almost non-changing caretakers. Ainsworth et al. have named three subcategories within attachment (Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton, 1978).

Individuals with a secure attachment style are approaching their secured ones to be comforted by them. The parents of these type of children, they view their child's needs as important and they try to fulfil their needs as soon as possible. This has as a result that the child calms quickly and continues to test the environment. This type of attachment to evolve, requires the emotional availability of the caretaker when needed. Individuals with an insecure-avoidant attachment they don't result to their caretakers when they find themselves in emergency positions. Past experience has taught them that their caretakers will not be there when needed. To counter that they place themselves as "cool" in the context of peers. This type of attachment is the exact opposite of the secure type providing no emotional assistance to the individual (Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton, 1978).

The third type that, Ainsworth (1978) described was that of the disoriented attachment style when the individual behaves in an aggressive manner. This is a result of exploitation, carelessness and constant change of caretakers developing no attachment with them at all. With no attachment, adolescents can never get support from their parents on PA. Acquiring the needed equipment might seem impossible let alone the important role of the caretaker when it comes to transportation and facilitation of these types of activities.

Up to this point it is hard to deny the effect that the social environment has on the psychological processes of the adolescents, influencing their basic needs and thus their

behaviour regarding PA. The social environment includes various factors besides the ones mentioned above (family, peers, and teachers/coaches). In an attempt to define it Barnett and Casper included the physical setting, social relationships and cultural environments within which designated groups of people operate and socialize with one another (Barnett & Casper, 2001). The aspects of the term above (e.g. social relationships and cultural environments) are brought to life by the individuals themselves. The social environment is thus a product of collective consciousness of the individuals involved. Smolicz referred to this as the double dilemma (Smolicz, 1979).

"The dependence of the individual upon the social environment – the dependence of the social environment and culture on the individual. "(Smolicz, 1979)

By keeping the above mentioned variables in mind, it is clear that different countries would possess different types of social environments. This then in turn, would exert a different type of influence on the individual, creating a different result regarding the participation on PA. Greece and Finland are the exact opposites when it comes to PA with Finland being at the top most active countries and Greece scoring one of the lowest percentages (European Commission, 2018). The social environments of these two countries vary and thus a number of the most influential parameters of PA differ (family, peers and media).

3. THE GREEK CONTEXT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Greece is a small country in south Europe with its population adding up to 0,139 percent of the global amount (World Health, 2015). Even though the past contribution of Greece in politics, science and arts is undeniable, the recent years Greece has been struggling to keep track of the reforms and changes on the societal level. In addition, the economic crisis in combination with the lack of consistent effort and willingness to improve the current situation, has had an impact on the social environment of the country.

3.1. The structure of physical activity in Greece

It is quite sarcastic that the birthplace of sports and the Olympic Games finds itself within the top European countries regarding obesity, inactivity and related diseases (Currie, et al., 2012). It seems a natural step to first examine the structure regarding the PA before assuming that the population does not take advantage of the possibilities provided (if there are any provided). Sport in Greece is organized by the public, voluntary and commercial sectors. There is however an absence of issued facts concerning the design, goals and the financial significance of each sector (Balaska & Kouthouris, 2014).

At the top of the public sector is the Minister of Health, Nutrition and Sports which is accountable for the creation and distribution of sport policy throughout the country. The General Secretariat of Sports is the next level of authority that directs sports in Greece. The core aims of The General secretariat of Sports consist of the development of sport throughout the country, promotion of elite sport, managing of facilities, advising sport initiatives and the sport federations. The funding for these endeavors is received by the Central Government budget, The Greek Organization of Football Prognostics as well as the Hellenic Horse Racing Organization (Balaska & Kouthouris, 2014).

The voluntary sector consists of sport clubs whose main funding is received by the subscriptions of the members as well as by The General Secretariat of Sports with financial support received by the federations (Balaska & Kouthouris, 2014). What is worth mentioning however, is that the amount that the sport clubs receive from the government bodies, relies upon the outcome of promotion sports for excellence. That translates to the number of the

elite athletes that they produce. This means that the sport clubs and the policies they follow are performance oriented and have little to no concern for mass participation. In addition, very few sport clubs exist that provide exercise groups for adults in recreational sports that stand independent of regional or national competitions (Scheerder, Breedveld, & Borgers, 2015). The last years there has been a shift towards the advancement of mass participation which gives hope for future development if that path is pursued (Balaska & Kouthouris, 2014).

3.2. Greek society

Greece took the 51st place in the ranking of the 178 most stable countries in the world (Index F. S., 2018), barely escaping the 'warning zone' as the research of the fragile states index confirms. The study explored conditions such as, socio-economic classes, state legitimacy, and the overall safety of the country. These are not surprising results, taking into consideration the volatile situation Greece has been in the past seven years. Constant protesting and radical reforms in the government as well as towards the public have contributed in reaching that result. These situations have again contributed in Greece's ratings in terms of freedom. Greece finished 52nd according to the latest Freedom in the world report (Freedom, 2018).

The governing issues that Greece has been facing during the past years were also reflected in the position that the country was placed in terms of best governance.

 Research conducted by The Legatum Institute (2017) placed Greece in the 53rd position in terms of best governance also stating that Greece's weakest point is its social capital. This research's main points of focus were wealth and wellbeing and the variables that played an important role on influencing them. Moreover, the governing issues of Greece have also had an impact on the levels of the organized crime that currently takes place in Greece. According to the World Economic Forum (2017) the organized crime rate in 138 countries and positioned Greece at the 55th place. The financial difficulties that Greece is facing have provided the opportunity for such aspects of society to come to life. A predecessor of the increase in the organized crime rates, is a weak judicial independence as the same research of the World Economic Forum concluded (2017). Greece found itself in the 71st position (out

of 138) when the judicial independence was examined. That aspect of the research, focused on how independent the judicial system is and being able to operate without being impacted by the government or individuals. In addition, the police and internal security of the country is in direct relationship with the organized crime rates and the judicial independence.

The report of the World Internal Security & Police Index placed Greece's police practices and internal security at the 48th position out of 117 countries (Abdelmottlep, 2016). These three factors were weak judicial independence, high organized crime and low internal security they have generated a sense of fear and uncertainty within the Greek society. All the above mentioned aspects of the Greek society contributed in the overall satisfaction and human wellbeing. The results of the sustainable society index placed Greece 34th in terms of human wellbeing (Index S. S., 2016).

3.3. The Greek economy

Greece's GDP annual growth rate was marked at 1.90 increasing 0.50 since the last measurement but still remaining at low levels. When the wealth of Greece was analyzed by the Legatum Institute the overall levels of wealth placed Greece at the 49th position out of 149 countries (Institute, 2017). Following Greece's position in the rankings, it can be concluded that wealth and prosperity situation in Greece has been worsening since 2006. Greece has moved down a total of 11 places in the global scale since that year. However, the same research considered wealth to be a result of various factors such as economic quality, business development, governance, education etc. when the economic quality of Greece was examined solely it took the 83rd place in the ranking (Institute, 2017). The worsening economic situation has also had an impact on the quality of the banks with the lowest point starting in June 2015 when capital control was introduced. That type of austerity measure limited the cash withdrawals to only 60€ per day which influenced the credibility of the Greek banks. According to the World Economic Forum on the soundness of banks Greece was placed at the 134th position finishing fourth from the bottom (Forum, 2017). In addition, the same research placed Greece 83rd in the protection of property rights (Forum, 2017). This is not surprising taking into consideration the overall economy and the credibility of the banks.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

This section includes the theoretical background, research model and research questions that provide a theoretical base for the study. Furthermore additional insights are provided regarding the method used for the analysis of the data.

4.1. Adapted ecological model of physical activity

Since physical activity (PA) is influenced by different antecedents, various behavioral models are used in order to filter the variables to study (Bauman, Sallis, Dzewaltowski, & Owen, 2002). Thus an assimilation of multiple unique ideas into an ecological model is nowadays a frequent phenomenon (Sallin, Owen, & Fisher, 2008). Such ecological models suggest that determinants at all levels are contributing to PA. By keeping the various variables in mind one can be better informed and thus have a greater chance of success. The model below presents a wide range of PA variables part of which guided my classification in this report. This model qualifies as ecological because it includes the interrelations among individuals and their social as well as physical environments.
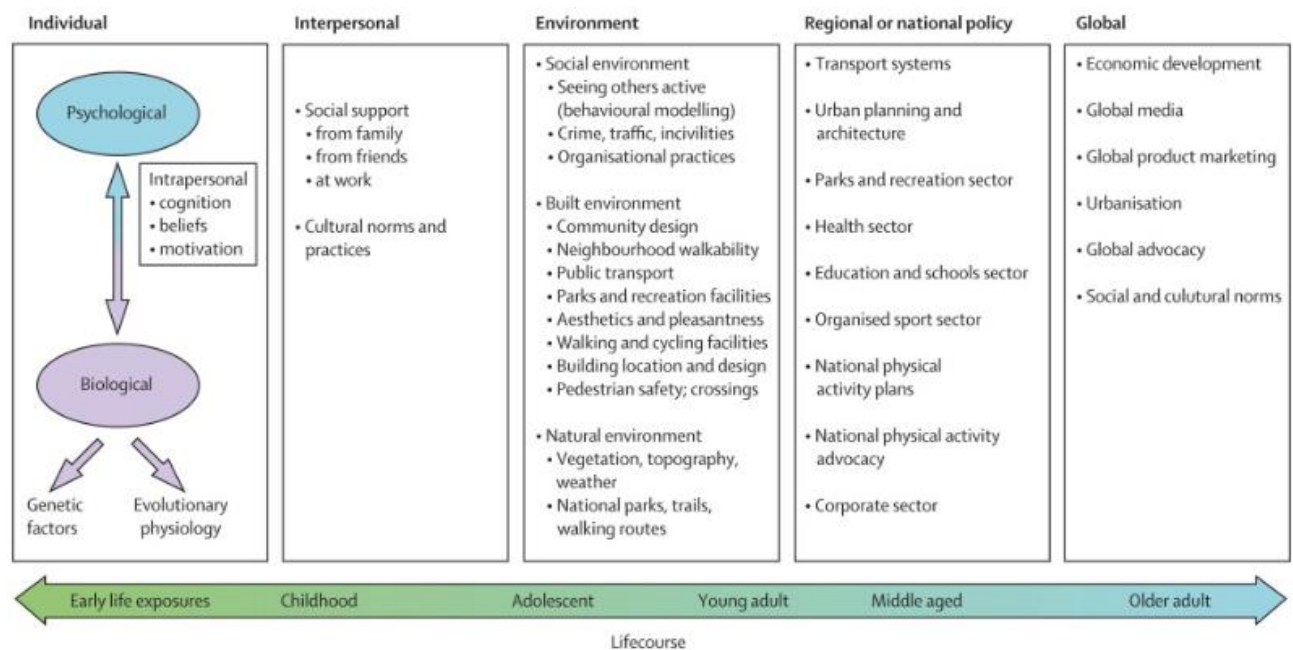

Figure 1. Adapted ecological model of physical activity (Bauman, et al., 2012)

This study focuses mainly on the social support, cultural norms and practices and the social environment depicted under the interpersonal and partially the environment column. Specifically on how the above mentioned factors can be seen to be related with the PA levels during the adolescent years in Greece. As emphasized also during the introduction, the influence of the social environment is most prominent during the adolescent years due to the psychological changes that take place within the individual. These facilitate the need for social acceptance and render the individual susceptible to social stimuli. In order to provide additional insights and attempt to answer the 'why' Greece is one of the least physically active countries, a deeper understanding of the society and the ideology promoted is crucial.

Furthermore the ecological model (Fig. 1) provides an extensive example of the various aspects that exert influence on the individual's decision making process regarding PA.

4.2. Aim

As it was highlighted in chapter 1, Greece is one of the least physically active countries while Finland on the other hand find itself at the top of the rankings. There has however been no attempt to pursue that path even further by answering the why Greece finds itself at the very bottom regarding PA. Thus the aim of the present study in detail is:

1) To describe PA in Greece and Finland, especially the social environment of PA currently and in the past

2) To describe the Greek social environment and its contribution to the PA results

An answer and interpretation to the above formulated questions will provide a deeper explanation as to why Greece is one of the least physically active countries in Europe.

4.3. Methodology

This part describes the research method used for this study. First I will describe how the data was collected and what the characteristics of the participants are. Second a description of the data analysis will be provided. The scope of this study is theoretical since I am utilizing already existing data focusing on the PA levels and social environment of Greece.

4.3.1. Data collection

The data for this study was collected from the Health Behavior in School – aged Children (HBSC) database as well as the latest Eurobarometer (2018) report. Data from the World Health Organization about the social determinants of health and well-being among young people were also utilized for this study.

In addition, a thorough literature search on the Greek culture and society was conducted in pursuit of a clearer understanding in an attempt to understand the characteristics of the Greek society. The HBSC reports from Greece were firstly translated to English before being analyzed. In the course of 30 years HBSC has been the leader in acquiring information into young individual's well-being, health habits and their social background. This research is conducted every four years in 48 countries in collaboration with the WHO Regional Office for Europe (HBSC, 2018).

The HBSC survey consists of self-completion questionnaires conducted in a classroom in various schools around the world. By using an internationally accepted questionnaire the collected data can be assessed of patterns of health attitude and contextual variables. That process enables cross-national comparisons to be established. In addition a different research protocol is formed with every survey cycle.

4.3.2. Data

The participants of the surveys were young individuals (both males and females) in their adolescent years (11 – 13 and 15 years old) from Finland and Greece (Roberts, et al., 2009). These age groups were selected due to the challenging physical and emotional transitions they experience and the crucial decisions they are starting to make on their future. Cluster

sampling was used in HBSC to gain a dominant sampling group at the school class. The suggested size of the sample is roughly 1,500 students. In order to deal with the peculiarities of the various national schools systems (students repeating a grade) the HBSC had as central priority the age of the children and not the class they were attending. In addition, another challenge was encountered when the target population was separated over different stages of schooling being primary and secondary. In the case that the number of classes was unrecognized probability proportionate to size (PPS) sampling was used according to the school size (Roberts, et al., 2009). Countries were administered with guidelines regarding sampling providing information over the portion of the students held back, whether PPS was used etc. The table below provides additional information regarding the origin of the material involved.

Table 1. Origins of the acquired data

Title	Author	Acquired date	Information on
LASTEN JA NUORTEN LIIKUNTAKÄYTTÄYTYMINEN SUOMESSA 2016 Pages: 90-95	Sami Koko & Anette Mehtälä	3 – 9 – 2018	PA and social environment in Finland
Special Eurobarometer report: Sport and physical activity	European Commission	10 – 9 – 2018	PA between European countries
HBSC – Adolescents and their family (in Greek language)	Kokkevi, A., Stavrou, M., Kanavou, E., Fotiou, A.	15 – 9 – 2018	Adolescents in Greece and their family
HBSC – Adolescents in the school environment (in Greek language)	Kokkevi, A., Stavrou, M., Kanavou, E., Fotiou, A.	15 – 9 – 2018	Adolescents in the school (performance, bullying etc.)
Book: Uses and abuses of culture: Greece 1974 – 2010	Karaiskou, Vicky	8 – 10 – 2018	The diachronic cultural and social changes in Greece and the Greek families.
Social determinants of health and well-being among young people (2009/2010 survey)	World Health Organization	17 – 10 – 2018	The social environment and health among European countries

4.3.3. Data analysis

The chosen technique for analyzing the data for this master's thesis was the model of thematic content analysis proposed by Mayring (Philipp, 2014). Mayring advocated that the strength of qualitative and thematic content analysis, compared to other approaches of interpretation, dwells in the fact that the analysis is segregated into specific foreordained steps of action (Philipp, 2014). As a result, the course of the research is made understandable to others and can be replicated, rendering it a scientific method (Philipp, 2014). The afore mentioned model, is depicted below as well as a detailed explanation and the application of it in this research.
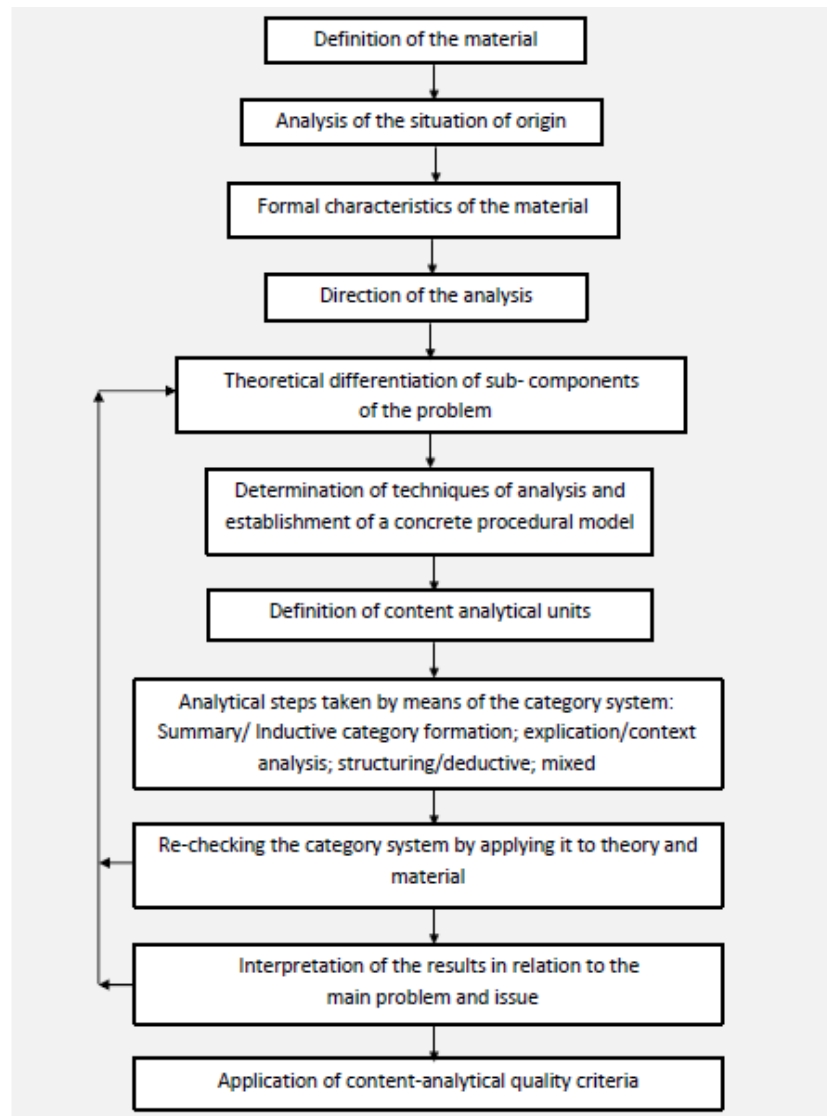

Figure 2. General content-analytical procedural model (Philipp, 2014)

4.3.3.1.   Definition of the material.

The necessary materials for this research were obtained from Health Behavior in School – aged Children (HBSC) database and the latest Eurobarometer report. The term 'social environment' of this research consists of, family, friends and social media/television. According to the adapted ecological model of PA presented in chapter 2.1 the main focus of this study resides in the interpersonal and partially environmental aspects of the model. The definition of the social and cultural environment for this research originates from the National Institute of Health defining it among others as family, peers and television (Health, 2000). Firstly, the most recent Eurobarometer report was used in order to depict the difference in PA engagement between Greece and Finland. Subsequently, the HBSC reports provided deeper insights in the social environment of these two countries, considering the importance that the social environment and culture has on PA. Lastly, an attempt was made to discover and connect the roots/crucial events that shifted the Greek social environment and culture towards the direction it is today which contributes to the production of the PA results seen on the Eurobarometer.

4.3.3.2.   Analysis of the situation of origin.

The data used in this research was gathered from international reports on physical activity (as well as from literature concerning societal and cultural aspects of the countries involved). These reports satisfy the quality criteria since they were based on research conducted by the European Commission and the HBSC. The majority of the data used in this research can be found online rendering it reproducible

4.3.3.3.   Formal characteristics of the material and direction of the analysis

In regard to the formal characteristic of the material, it existed in a digital written/transcribed form. Due to the nature of this research, no transcription of the material occurred. The original language of some of the material however was Greek (researcher's mother tongue), and there was one Finnish report from which only English written parts were used.

This theoretical research is oriented towards social sciences of sport. The collected material used in the analysis was intended to firstly create a clearer picture of the current extensive gap that exists between European countries regarding PA levels. Subsequently to go deeper into the roots (cause) of this effect we are experiencing having a central viewpoint the societal context. Having as base the content analytical communication model of (Mayring, 2014) the direction of the analysis is to acquire a deeper understanding of the profound elements that set the foundation on which the current Greek society was built and operated from.

4.3.3.4.   *Theoretical differentiation*

The material used in this research stems from various subjects. Firstly the PA activity levels among European countries drew a clear picture of the problem. Secondly various materials were used in order to highlight the difference in the social environment among Finland and Greece. Lastly a deeper insight of the Greek culture was acquired through books and researches conducted on the topic. The social environment and its effects on behavior has been cited with conflicting notion in the existing literature, as presented in chapter 1 of this document. The importance of PA has been outlined in various works of researchers in the field and it is determined by a wide range of variables of volatile nature shifting throughout the life of the individual as presented in chapter 2 (figure 1). Due to the complexity and the gradual but subtle constant change in which the social environment is subject to, it provides a challenge and raises the interest of studying it. In a certain sense it encompasses the majority of the other variables since they are all part of society. This research however is limited to the social environment defined in the chapters above and the culture. Hence, the focus of the analysis is on identifying the differences in the social environment among Finland and Greece and attempting to discover why the social environment is the way it is especially regarding Greece. Consequently the collected material has been analyzed with the above mentioned angle of approach.

4.3.3.5.   *Analysis techniques*

Having a common goal of analyzing, evaluating and examining the individual text segment, the existing techniques of interpretation do not vary that much from one another (Mayring,

2014). Mayring discerns three specific techniques for analyzing and interpreting qualitative content. These are summary, explication and structuring (Mayring, 2014). For the present research, the techniques of mostly explication and structuring are used as they fit best the nature of this study (theoretical research). Thus in this case a deductive approach has been chosen even though it is a qualitative work. Through explication additional material is used in order to fully understand and interpret the text while via structuring the material is filtered out to provide sub – groups and categories in either ordinal or nominal scale. Summary on the other hand is more suitable for an inductive type of study since the categories are formed while analyzing the material and not beforehand from the theory. According to Mayring, categories consist out of context units (largest piece of data to be appointed to a category) and coding units (smallest piece of data). Below follows the detailed model for the deductive approach as highlighted by Mayring.
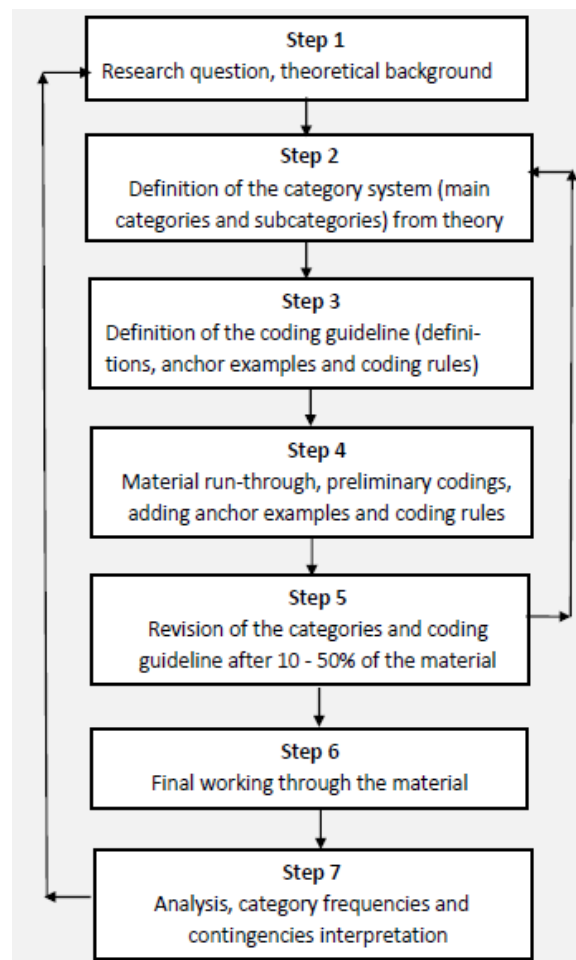

Figure 3. Steps of deductive category assignment (Mayring, 2014)

Step 1: Research question and theoretical background: This step has been presented in the previous chapters (chapter 1 & 2)

Step 2: Definition of the category system: The main categories for this research have their roots primary in the theoretical model presented in chapter 4.1 (Fig. 1) and subsequently in the way the social environment has been defined for this research. Furthermore the category assignment was performed according to a nominal structure. Meaning that the categories formed are independent from one another but still belong under the same umbrella definition.

Step 3: Definition of the coding guideline: The definition of the coding guideline took place as follows.

Table 2. Coding guideline

Category label	Category definition	Coding rules
Family	A group of individuals living under one roof and usually under one head. (Oxford, Definition family, n.d.)	The words, actions and general attitude and behavior of those regarded as family.
Peers	A person who is the same age or has the same social position or the same abilities as other people in a group. (Oxford, definition peer, n.d.)	The words, actions and general attitude and behavior of those regarded as a peer.
Media	The main means of mass communication (broadcasting, publishing, and the Internet) regarded collectively. (Oxford, n.d.)	The amount spent, and the influence that the media exert on the individual.
Culture	The way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time. (Cambridge, Definition of culture, n.d.)	Information regarding the behaviors, customs, beliefs of the individuals.

Step 4: Coding: The material was coded line by line from the beginning. Whenever a passage was encountered that fitted one of the above formulated categories it was marked. Furthermore, in the case of it being a prototypical piece for a category it was added as an anchor example.

Step 5: Revision: A revision of the categories took place after reaching between 10 – 50 percent of the material to check whether the categories needed to be reformulated in order to provide the necessary accuracy and eventually answer the research questions.

Step 6: Final work through: In the case that there were no issues discovered in the previous step then the coding of the rest of the material continues. Otherwise the coding starts from the beginning after the new category formation.

Step7: Analysis: The initial result originates from the dispersion of categories per recording unit. Having coded the whole material and placed it into categories it can then be used and analyzed in order to provide answers to the research questions.

4.3.3.6. *Application of content – analytical quality criteria*

For the qualitative content analysis to be considered as a valid scientific method it must fulfill certain criteria and be subject to quality controls in order to evaluate the objectivity, reliability and validity of this method. According to (Mayring, 2014) reliability stands for the stability and precision of the measurement and validity as to what is measured is relevant to the subject of the research. In addition, (Gerbner, et al. 1969) and (Rust, 1981) are advocates of the same notion, that the coding of the material as well as the construction of the categories must be performed with caution and meet certain quality standards. That increasing need for initially ensuring measuring and subsequently guarding the quality of a work was narrowed down and developed by (Krippendorff, 1980). He outlines eight concepts which originate from validity and reliability. The figure below depicts these quality criteria and their sub-categories.
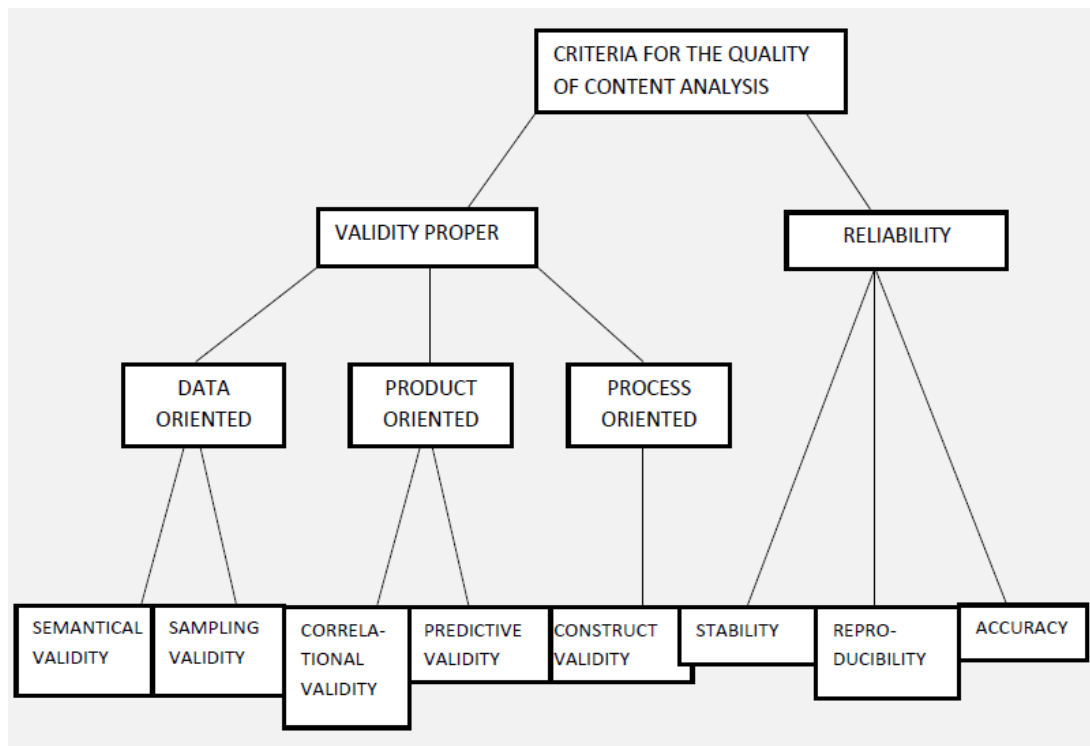
Figure 4. Content analytical quality criteria according to Krippendorff (Krippendorff, 1980)

According to Krippendorff, semantical validity consists of the manner in which the material is interpreted and reconstructed. It is indicated by the way the categories are defined. The semantic validity can be checked by collecting all of the coded passages and testing the homogeneity of them. The sampling validity on the other hand is ensured by making use of the already existing sampling criteria (Krippendorff, 1980).

However when the validation is being performed in relation to an external criterion it qualifies as correlation validity. A precondition for this type of validity is the comparison to an additional study with a similar object and line of inquiry. Krippendorff also highlighted three criteria regarding the construct validity. Primary, the success rate of comparable situations, the experiences with the context of the material and lastly the interpretations of the experts. The stability is achieved by applying the instrument of the analysis anew to the material while the reproduction of the same results ensures the reproducibility of the work.

In this study, with the information provided regarding the collection of the data the reliability is ensured. The thorough details and the accessibility of the data renders the current research reproducible by a third party.

5. RESULTS

The previous chapters illustrated the importance that the social environment possesses in the context of PA. In this chapter I am first highlighting the PA levels of Greece and where they stand when placed next to other European countries. Secondly I am examining the social environment of Greece and seek out the eventual differences when placed next to a much more physically active country of Finland. Lastly I am attempting to clarify the possible reasons the social environment of Greece is shaped the way it is. The promotion and the participation on PA has been a topic of interest throughout the world and especially in Europe. The results of the latest Eurobarometer (2018) concluded that there were major differences between the northern European countries and the southern with the former being on the top as regards to PA participation (European Commission, 2018). An astounding 46 percent of all Europeans claimed that they never exercise or play sports, but the differences on PA participation grow larger when we place one of the most physically active countries in Europe (Finland) next to one of the lowest performing ones (Greece).

5.1. Main differences in sport participation

Finland was the top country with the least percentage of people that never exercise or play sports (only 13 %). Greece on the other hand was the second from the bottom of the list with 68 percent of the respondents never engaging in sports (European Commission, 2018). When asked about the regularity in which they play sports, 17 percent of the Finnish respondents answered at least five times per week while the Greek equivalent was barely two percent. More than half of the Finnish respondents (52 %) engage in sporting activities one to four times per week while the Greek percentage reached a 21 percent (European Commission, 2018). Besides the fact that the Finnish respondents are more active in sports than the Greek are, they are also more physically active in their daily life. When asked about the frequency that they engage in physical activities other than sports, a 17 percent of the Finnish respondents answered at least five times per week, 48 percent responded one to four times per week, 23 percent said three times per month and 11 percent answered never. From the Greek responses on the other hand it was clear that the gap between the two countries is huge

and still growing. A small six percent of the Greek respondents answered that they are at least five times per week active, 28 percent remained active one to four times per week and 45 percent never engaged in PA at all.

A thought-provoking finding emerged when the respondents were asked where they engage in PA outdoors or commuting to work. The 67 percent of the Finnish population prefer staying active in a park or outdoors while Greece scored a 32 percent. Greece however had the highest percentage in Europe of people claiming to be active while commuting (42 %) while Finland scored a 29 percent. From the above mentioned information it can be highlighted that the majority of the Greeks do not reserve a special time in their day for PA to go for example to a park or a fitness center. What they do is hoping to remain physically active while commuting from one place to the other. Something that in most cases does not meet the PA norm as we saw from the general PA measurements. Finnish people on the other hand, even though they don't score a high percentage while commuting they do reserve time especially for physical activity and sports. That illustrates the prominent role that sport and PA have in the Finnish society. Being physically active is something of importance for the Finnish population. It is assigned a designated time and focus within their day. It is not something that is just thoughtlessly done while commuting. This is an example illustrating the tip of the iceberg when comparing the social environments of these two countries.

Moving on to the reasons as to why people engage in PA Finland and Greece both countries had as reason the increase of fitness with 67 percent and 57 percent respectively. On the contrary, the barriers preventing the participation of the respondents were the lack of time (29 % for Finland and 40 % for Greece). In addition to that, there was a prominent lack of motivation (30 %) on the Greek respondents. When faced with the statement whether the local sport providers offer many opportunities to be physically active 39 percent of the Finnish respondents agreed totally, 44 percent tended to agree and a small two percent totally disagreed. In contrast, 12 percent of the Greek respondents totally agree, 46 percent tend to agree and 10 percent totally disagree.

Another compelling question that starts to reveal the differences in the social environments regarding PA was the engagement in voluntary work that supports sporting activities. Finland scored 11 percent (within the top five countries) and Greece scored three percent (sixth from

the bottom). Since there are no concrete reasons as to why Greeks do not volunteer in sporting activities, there can be no claim made without evidence. Regarding the Finnish results on the other hand it seems that sports and PA are higher in the priority list of Finnish people. That can be derived by the fact that they make time to volunteer and remain active even when they are not participating. The Finnish population clearly recognizes, stimulates and facilitates sport engagement through their volunteering culture. The results concerning the PA levels of these two countries reveal vast differences on the subject. From sport/physical activity engagement to – the not so direct role of the individual within the sports – volunteering, Finland seems to outperform almost all other European countries let alone Greece. However, as it has already been established and presented in chapter 1 & 2, PA is determined by a wide assortment of variables of different origin and nature. This study is narrowed to the effect of the social environment on PA. Since there is such a considerable difference on PA between Finland and Greece, one of the causes might be able to be located within the social environment of these two countries.
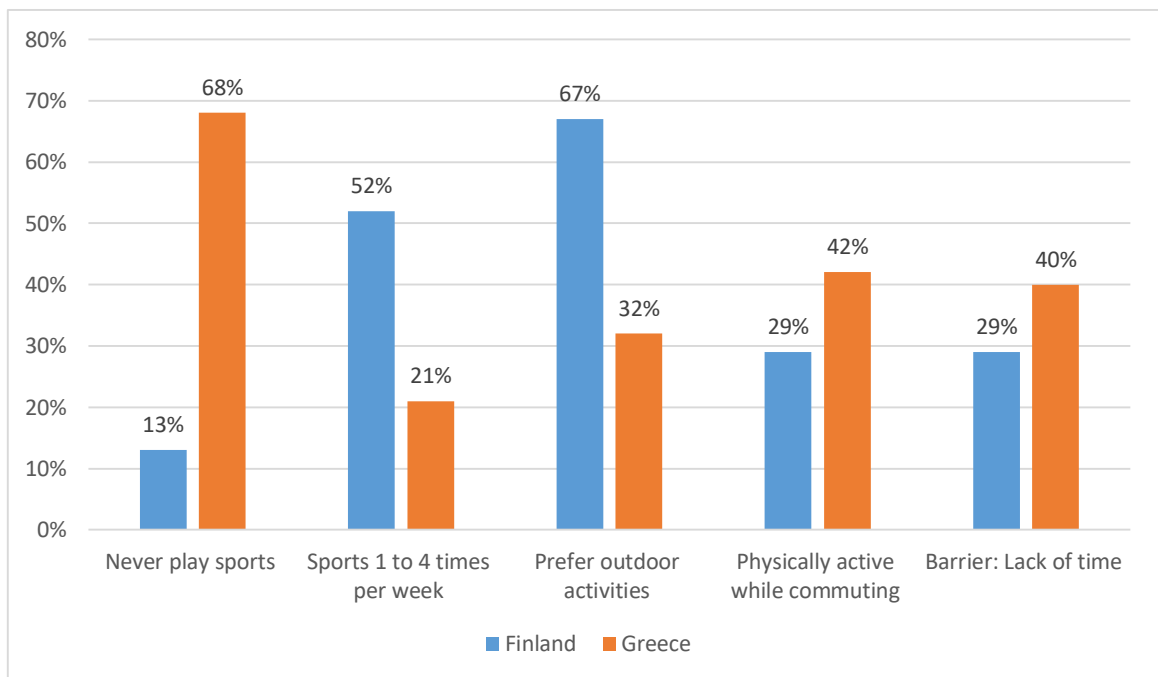

Figure 5. General data on physical activity (European Commission, 2018)

5.2. Main differences of the social environment

The social environment for this study was defined by three sub-components of family, peers and media. Engaging into deeper research regarding the social environment will provide insights relevant to the subject of the PA.

5.2.1. Family

As advocated in chapter 1 the family context is the first and up to a certain age the most prominent source of influence for young adults. The current state and possible differences of the family context for Finland and Greece are provided in the following pages.

Family composition in Greece

According to a survey conducted in 2015 about the structure of the family, the relationship between the family members and the way that has changed in the recent years, 84 percent of the adolescents lives with both their biological parents (Kokkevi, Stavrou, Kanavou, & Fotiou, 2015). A percentage of 11.8 resides within a so-called single parent family where only one of the caretakers is present, while the lowest percentage two point three percent lives in a reconstructed family where one biological parent is present. What seems to be typical for a Greek family is the term extended family where either both or one of the grandparents are present within the direct family context. 18 percent of the participants lived in such a family construct. Until 2006 the reported amount of children living in a single and a reconstructed family doubled and since then there have been no major shifts in the trend (Kokkevi, Stavrou, Kanavou, & Fotiou, 2015).

Regarding the nationality of the participants and their parents, 95.3 percent reported being born in Greece and a 76.9 percent stated that both their parents have a Greek nationality. Furthermore, 23.1 percent reported to have at least one parent of foreign origin, while 12.1 percent had both their parents originating from other countries that Greece. In addition, having a foreign mother was more common than having a foreign father. The amount of children having foreign parents is increasing in the course of the years which is only natural, taking into consideration the position of Greece in the map and the recent refugee crisis.

The financial capital of the Greek household has a negative effect on children.

Even though the economic situation of Greece and Finland was not part of the predefined terminology of the 'social environment' used for this research, there had to be a certain reference to the subject taking into consideration the harsh economic times Greece is going through and the prosperity Finland is experiencing. The financial means are crucial for sport participation which might, in the case of Greece provide an additional barrier if not subsidized by the government or other organizations. Furthermore, in the current construct of society financial means are also vital for the wellbeing and survival of the household which as presented in chapter 1 plays an important role in shaping children's behavior and habits. Such financial uncertainty might cause problems within the family context which in turn have an impact in the adolescent's health and wellbeing.

From the respondents of this longitudinal survey, originally 48.2 percent of the adolescents reported their family financial situation as "good" or "very good". A percentage of 37.3 percent ranked it as "average" while 14.5 percent assessed it as "not good at all". Respondents at 11 years of age ranked their family situation as "good" or "very good" (60.2 %), in contrast with 13 and 15 year old respondents ranking it 49.3 percent and 34.4 percent respectively (Kokkevi, Stavrou, Kanavou, & Fotiou, 2015).

The trend across the years from 1998 to 2006 signaled an original increase in the adolescents viewing the financial situation of their family as "good" or "very good". That percentage however started changing gradually after 2004 (the start of the financial crisis) reaching the lowest point since the beginning of this research.

In the survey of 2014, there was an increase in the percentage of the adolescents that placed the financial situation of their family as "not so good" or "not good at all". As the adolescents grow older there is an increasing trend of adolescents ranking the financial situation of their family negatively. A reason for that might be the involvement and the changing role in the house as well as the understanding of more complex matters that occur during the aging period (Kokkevi, Stavrou, Kanavou, & Fotiou, 2015).

The negative effect of unemployment on the Greek families.

The responses of the adolescents about the employment of their parents differed. Generally the father works more than the mother (87.6 % and 65.5 % respectively). A percentage of 56.8 percent reported that both of their parents are employed, while 14.6 percent reported having one caretaker who is not employed but searching for a job). As far as the reasons are concerned, 43.1 percent of the fathers attributed it to unemployment while 24.8 percent was retired. The reasons for the mothers to be unemployed was the unemployment situation caused by the financial crisis (24.4 %) and more than half gave as a reason taking care of the household (56.6 %). The latter can be traced back to the position of the women in the Greek society that was shaped already in the past. In such a patriarchic type of society women are still struggling to leave behind the typical role of the housewife and engage into other roles as happens in most other European countries. The financial crisis however has dissolved these hard shaped roles a little bit with both parents trying to find sources of income and becoming flexible into switching the predetermined roles.

During the years the number of adolescents having unemployed parents was significantly increased 3.2 percent in 2002, 6.8 % in 2010 and 14.6 % in 2014. The percentage of adolescents reporting in 2014 of having one or both parents unemployed was double comparing to 2010 and five times more comparing to 2002 and the situation is still deteriorating (Kokkevi, Stavrou, Kanavou, & Fotiou, 2015).

In addition, the results that were most reported were the inability of the family to go on vacation trips (27.9 %) the creation of conflict and heated arguments within the family (27.3 %) and that one of the two parents lost his/her job (21.3 %) (Kokkevi, Stavrou, Kanavou, & Fotiou, 2015).

In general, older adolescents have a higher chance of experiencing the consequences of the economic crisis, comparing it to the younger ones. In addition more adolescent girls than boys realize the family conflicts within and the newly limited capabilities of their family.

The family relationships in Greece remain strong

The respondents were asked about the degree of satisfaction regarding their relationships with the family. The majority of the adolescents confirmed that their relationships were "very good" to "perfect". A higher percentage of the 11 year old respondents claimed their relationship to be "very good" to "perfect" (92.6 %) comparing to 13 year old (80.1 %) and 15 year old (72.3 %) adolescents. In addition a higher percentage of boys than girls claimed they had "very good" to "perfect" relationship with the family (84.7 % and 78.8 % respectively). In the course of the years, there are no significant changes on this aspect (Kokkevi, Stavrou, Kanavou, & Fotiou, 2015).

Family emotional support reduces in Greece

Regarding the emotional support that Greek adolescent children receive from their family the results showed that girls have less support than the boys (82.1 % and 88.2 % respectively). Furthermore, as the adolescent children grew older they felt the support from their family being gradually reduced. Starting at 92.1 percent at the age of 11, 84.2 percent at the age of 13 and 79.1 percent at the age of 15 (Kokkevi, Stavrou, Kanavou, & Fotiou, 2015).

In addition, there has been an established relationship between the physically active support of the caretakers and peers and adolescents' PA levels. Maintaining the PA is a result of a broad spectrum of support throughout the life especially in adolescence (Kokko, et al., 2016). Research reveals that the majority of the Finnish parents support their children in PA through means of encouragement and financial assistance regarding the costs. Besides that, being physically active with peers was of high importance for the Finnish teenagers. The recent years there was a noticeable increase in the assistance and support of the Finnish parents regarding transportation and payment of the costs, which resulted to increased sport participation and PA levels (Kokko, et al., 2016).

The Greek fathers do not know the activities of their children

The adolescent group was also asked about the grade their parents knew their daily activities. The following examples qualify as daily activities: Where they were after school, where they were going during evening times, who their friends are and how they were spending their money. According to the responses a higher percentage of the fathers don't know about their children's activities comparing to the mother. Specifically, the fathers of two out of five adolescents don't know who their children's friends are (43.2%), what they do in their free time (39.4%) or where they spend their money (39.7%) (Kokkevi, Stavrou, Kanavou, & Fotiou, 2015).

Finnish adolescents communicate better with their family than Greeks

In an international comparison, the same age groups (11, 13, 15 years old) were asked about the quality of the communication with each of their parents. Regarding the communication with the mother, it seems that the Finnish adolescent boys, rate higher than the adolescent girls. Specifically, 95 percent of the 11 year old boys find it easy to talk to their mother while the percentage for girls was 92 percent. The same trend is noticed also in the other two age groups with boys and girls scoring 91 percent and 83 percent respectively at 13 years of age with 83 percent and 77 percent respectively at 15 years of age (Currie, et al., 2012).

Greece on the other hand scored slightly lower in some cases than Finland with the girls finding it easier than boys in general to communicate with their mother. Precisely, 93 percent of the 11 year old girls found it easy to talk to their mother while the percentage for the boys of the same age was 90 percent. For the ages of 13 years old there was almost no difference with girls scoring 82 percent and boys 81 percent while at 15 years of age girls and boys scored 80 percent and 73 percent respectively (Currie, et al., 2012).

Additional insights were achieved on the subject by extracting information regarding the communication with the father. In both countries the boys scored much higher than the girls with Finland achieving higher percentages than Greece in all three age categories. The data from the report display that 78 percent of the 11 year old Finnish girls found it easy to talk

with their father while the percentage for the boys of that age group was 90 percent. The age groups of 13 years old scored 59 percent and 84 percent for girls and boys respectively while girls at the 15 year old age group scored 49 percent and boys 76 percent (Currie, et al., 2012).

The situation in Greece is quite similar with boys scoring higher than girls. In detail, 85 percent of the 11 year old boys found it easy to talk to their father while the percentage for the girls of the same age group was 63 percent. At the age of 13, 77 percent of the boys responded positively with female counterparts scoring 47 percent. At the last age group of 15 years old, boys scored 69 percent while girls 42 percent.

The communication with the mother was slightly better in Finland than in Greece while the percentages remained high for Finland concerning the communication with the father. A decrease in communication with both parents while growing up is a normal occurrence with the peer influence increasing at the same time (Santrock, 2007).
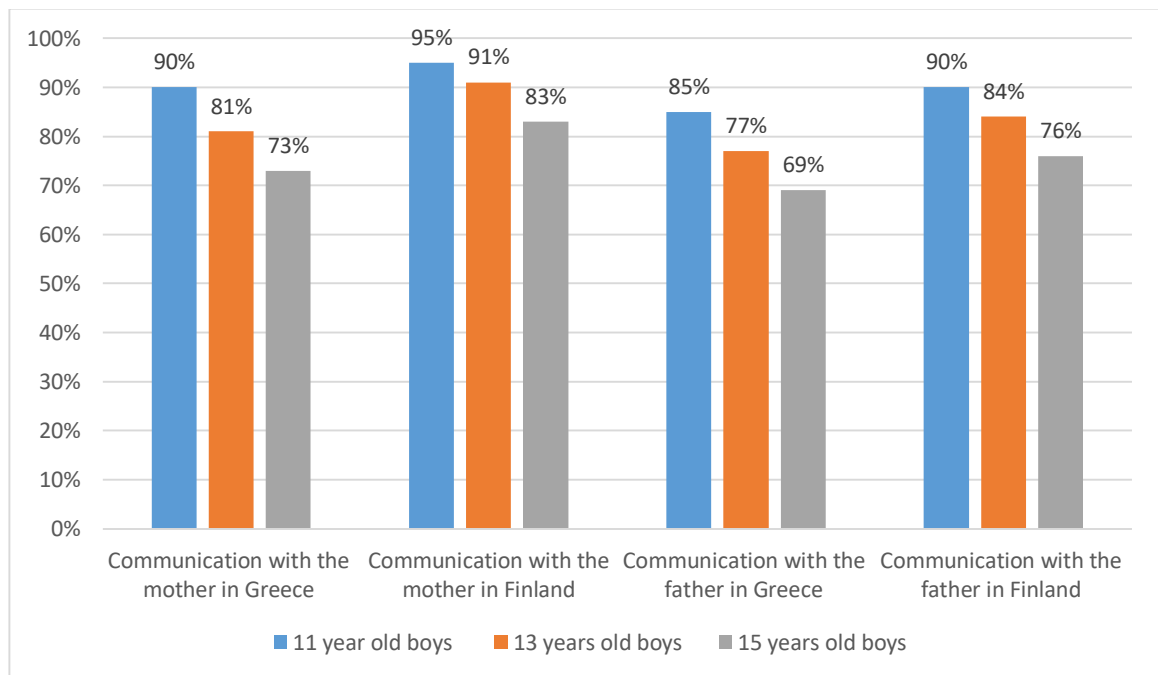

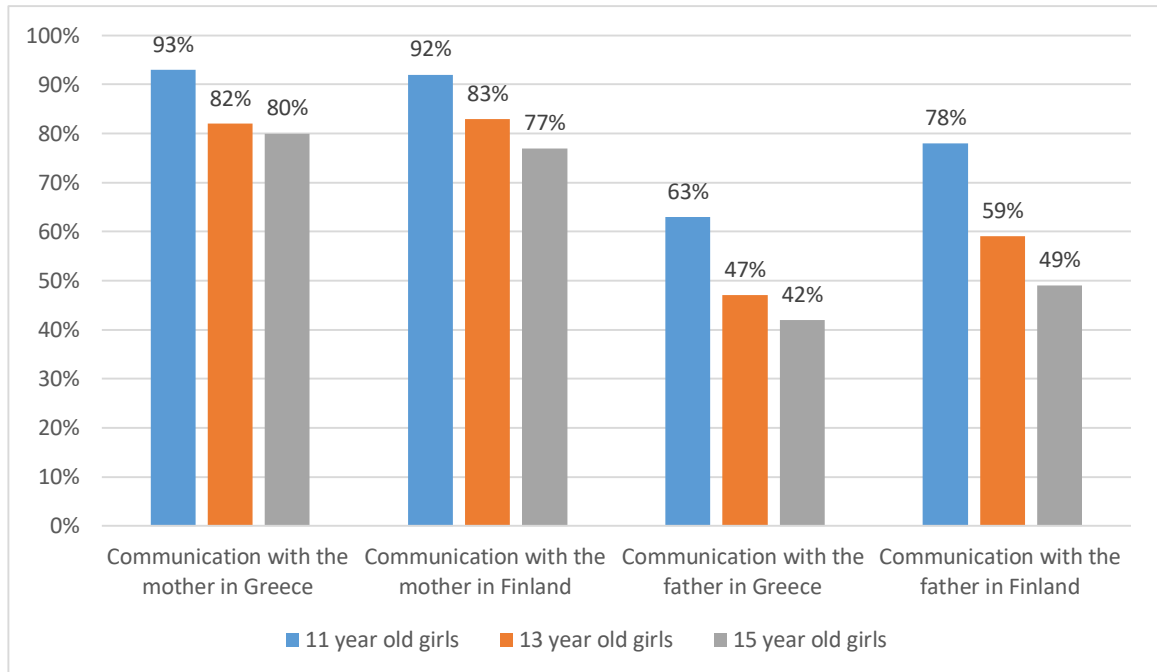Figure 6. Boys' communication with the parents (Currie, et al., 2012)

Figure 7. Girls' communication with the parents (Currie, et al., 2012)

5.2.2. Peers

The second most influential source after the family are the peers who contribute into shaping the beliefs and eventually the behavior of the individual. As the individual grows older the initial family influence is reduced and mostly replaced by the peer influence. For that reason this chapter examines data regarding the peer behavior as well as the school environment which is where the interaction and socialization mostly takes place.

Finnish adolescents have more close friends than their Greek counterparts

The respondents of both countries were asked on the amount of close friends they have (three or more close friends of the same gender). Finland scored higher than Greece in all 3 age groups (11, 13 & 15).

Specifically, 85 percent of the 11 year old Finnish girls and 84 percent of the boys had three or more close friends. Greece on the other hand scored 57 percent for the girls and 71 percent for the boys of the same age. The gap widens even more as the respondents grew in age. In

the age group of 13 years old, 86 percent of the Finnish girls reported having three or more close friends as opposed to the 59 percent of the Greek female respondents. Finnish boys on the other hand, scored 85 percent while their Greek peers scored 68 percent. In the next age group of 15 years old, Finnish girls as well as Finnish boys scored 79 percent while the percentage for Greek girls was 52 percent and for the boys 60 percent (Currie, et al., 2012). Finnish adolescents seem to have more close friends than the Greek teenagers.
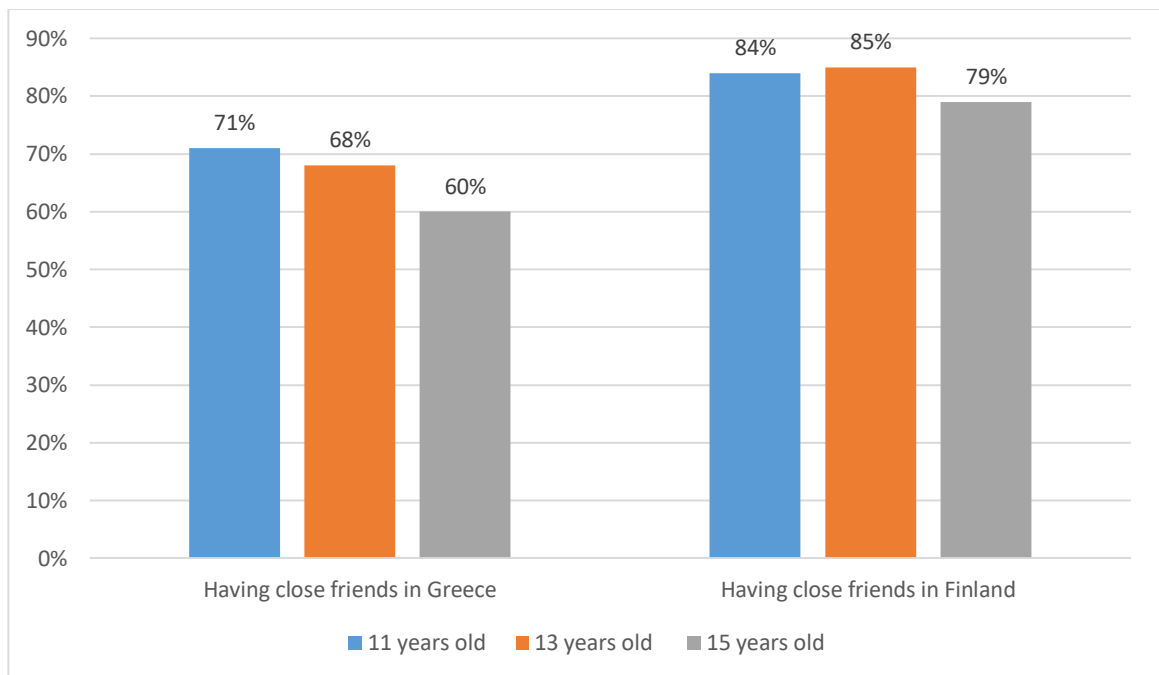
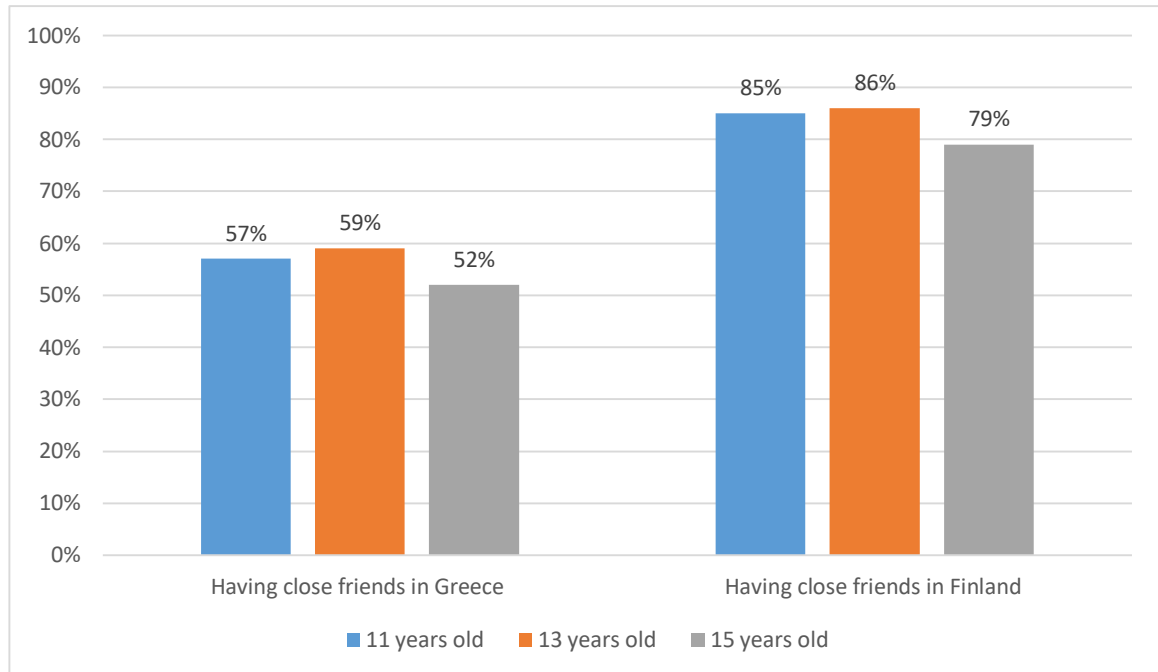Figure 8. Friends among boys (Currie, et al., 2012)

Figure 9. Friends among girls (Currie, et al., 2012)

Finnish adolescents spend more time with friends than their Greek counterparts

Respondents were also asked about the frequency they spend time with their friends (four or more evenings per week). At the age group of 11 years old, 39 percent of Finnish girls and 44 percent of the boys responded that they spend four or more evenings per week out with friends. The percentage of the Greek adolescent girls of the same age group was seven percent while for the boys was 14 percent. Finnish adolescents boys aged 13 years old scored a 45 percent while the girls scored 40 percent. The Greek boys of the same age on the contrary scored 16 percent and the girls 11 percent.

In the last age group of 15 years old, the Finnish girls scored 45 percent as opposed to the Greek adolescent girls who scored 11 percent. A percentage of 46 percent of the Finnish boys replied spending four or more evenings per week out with friends while Greek boys scored just 26 percent (Currie, et al., 2012).

It seems that Greek adolescents gradually as they get older gain the freedom/permission from their family to spend more time with their friends. While the percentages scored by the

Finnish adolescents did not fluctuate greatly there was a noticeable increase as the Greek adolescents grew older.
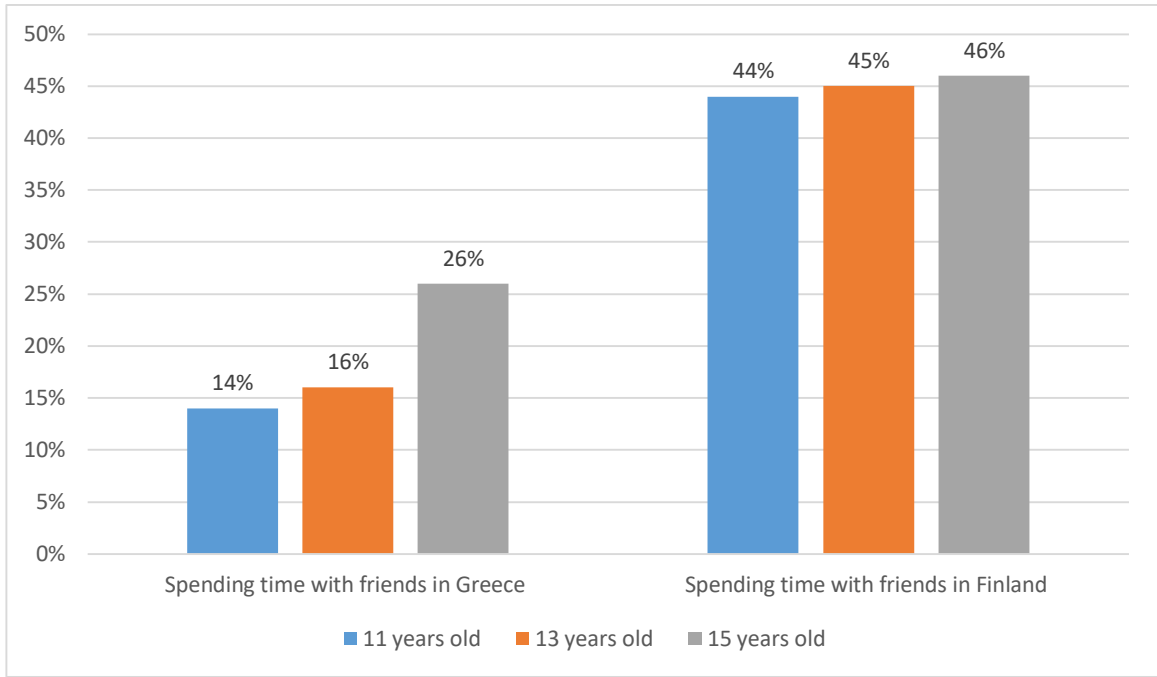

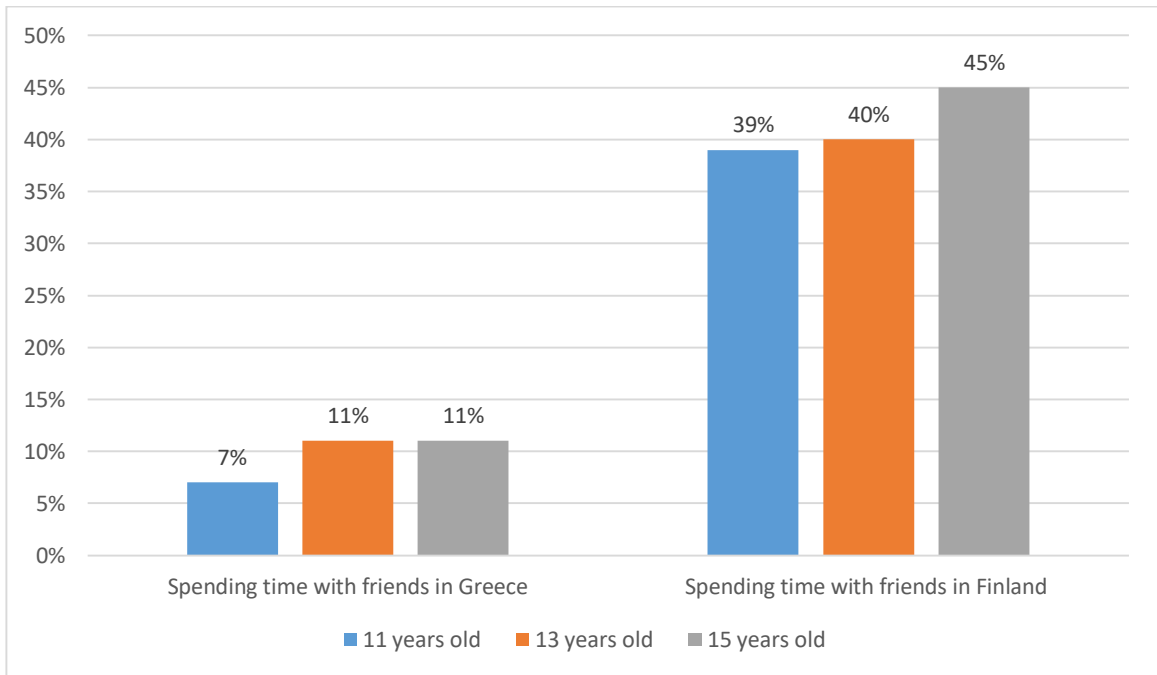Figure 10. Boys spending time with friends (Currie, et al., 2012)

Figure 11. Girls spending time with friends (Currie, et al., 2012)

School in Greece

Adolescent children were asked about their perceptions of school in general. Two out of three (63.3 %) reported that they "like" school. The responses from the girls (66.2 %) were in a significant higher percentage than the boys (60.4 %). Taking the broader picture into consideration, there is a trend of the satisfaction levels being reduced in the course of the years. This was observed by the adolescents at 11 years of age reporting their satisfaction (83.9 %). At the age of 13 years old, the percentage was reduced to 57.1 percent and even lower 48.9 percent for respondents aged 15 years old (Kokkevi, Stavrou, Kanavou, & Fotiou, 2015).

Within the course of the years and especially after 2002 there was a severe reduction in the percentage of adolescents that reported that they "like" school. In addition, the respondents were asked about their thoughts on their perceived performance by the teacher comparing to the classmates. Three out of four (76.5 %), reported in 2014 that their teacher considered their performance "better" than their classmate's with the highest percentage being achieved by girls (79.1 %) comparing to boys (73.8 %) (Kokkevi, Stavrou, Kanavou, & Fotiou, 2015).

Greek adolescents do not feel pressured about schoolwork

The results about the pressure generated from schoolwork did not vary that much. Specifically, at the age of 11 years old, 23 percent of the Finnish girls felt pressured by schoolwork while the percentage for the Greek girls was 21 percent. The percentage of the Finnish boys of the same age on the other hand reached 30 percent while the equivalent for their Greek peers was 26 percent. As both adolescent groups (Finnish and Greek) grew older there was a noticeable increase in the schoolwork pressure that they experienced. Particularly, 46 percent of Finnish girls aged 13 years old, felt pressured while the percentage for Greek girls was 49 percent. Finnish boys of the same age group on the other hand, reached a 44 percent while the percentage for Greek boys was 47 percent. In the last age group of 15 years old, an astounding 67 percent of the Finnish girls felt pressure by schoolwork while the percentage for the Greek girls was 56 percent. Finnish boys reached 54 percent while 43 percent of the Greek male adolescents felt pressured (Currie, et al., 2012).

Classmates are more helpful and kind in Finland

Regarding the support that the individuals receive from their classmates, Finland scored higher than Greece in every age group. To be exact, 73 percent of the Finnish girls reported that their classmates are kind and helpful while the percentage for Greek girls of the same age group was 50 percent. The percentage of the Finnish boys who viewed their classmates as kind and helpful was 65 percent while Greek boys scored 58 percent. In the next two age groups the gap between Finland and Greece keeps on increasing. The percentage of the Finnish girls at the age of 13 years old was 65 percent while Greek girls scored 35 percent. Finnish boys scored almost equally high (62 %) while the percentage for Greek boys was 43 percent. The last age group of 15 years old respondents had the following results. 64 percent of the Finnish girls reported that their classmates were kind and helpful while the percentage for the Greek female respondents was 34 percent. Finnish adolescent boys on the other hand scored 68 percent while their Greek peers scored 45 percent (Currie, et al., 2012).
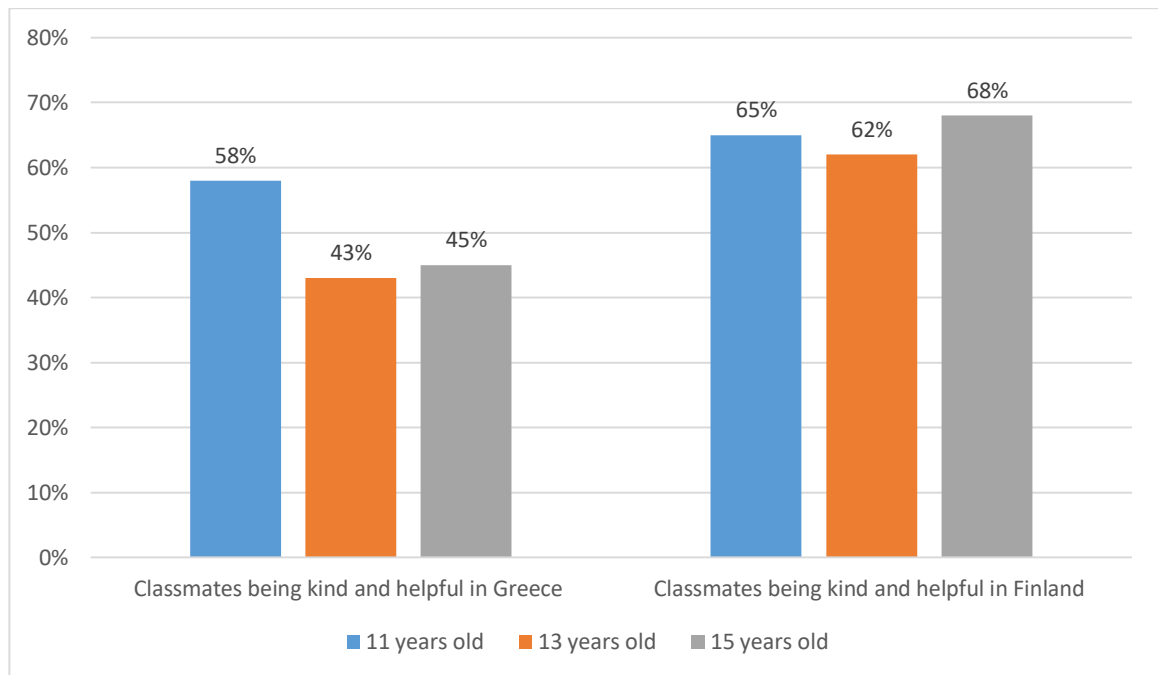

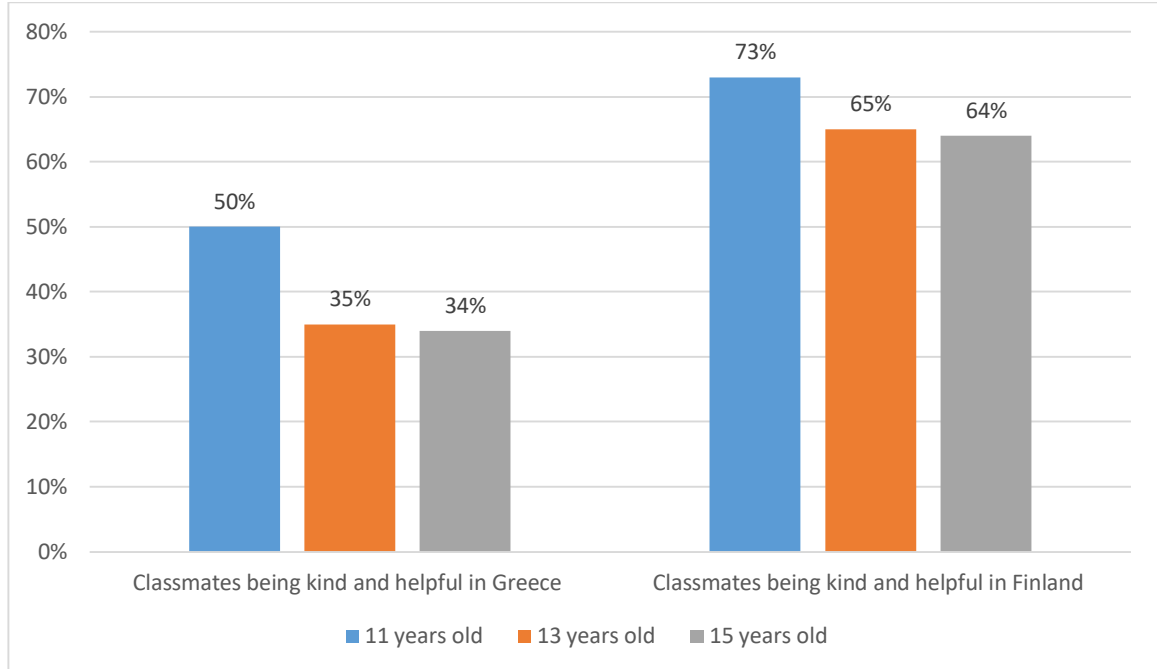Figure 12. Boys' views on classmates' support (Currie, et al., 2012)

Figure 13. Girls' views on classmates' support (Currie, et al., 2012)

Greek adolescents are bullied less

Information regarding bullying can provide insights on the relationships of the peers as well as the quality of the social environment. The percentages on the two first age groups are quite similar with Greece having a bit lower bullying percentages than Finland. To be precise, 11 percent of the Finnish girls aged 11 years old reported being bullied at least twice in the past couple of months while the percentage for Greek girls was seven percent. Finnish boys of the same age group scored 13 percent while Greek male adolescents scored eight percent. At the next age group of 13 years old both the percentages of Finnish boys and girls were 12 percent. Greek girls on the other hand scored seven percent while boys scored nine percent. In the last age group (15 years old) the bullying in Greece was more prominent than that in Finland. Seven percent of the Finnish girls reported being bullied at least twice in the last couple of months, while Greek girls reached nine percent. Finnish boys of the same age group scored eight percent while Greek boys scored 12 percent.

Bullying others higher within Greek adolescents

Another question was if the respondents had bullied others at least twice in the past couple of months. Greece scored in general higher than Finland and in some cases even three times the percentage of the Finnish responses. Namely, in the age category of 11 years old, just a two percent of the Finnish girls reported bullying others while it was double the amount for the Greek girls of that age. Finnish boys on the other hand, reached seven percent while Greek boys had almost double that amount 13 percent. The percentages kept rising at older ages, especially in Greece. The responses from Finnish girls at the age of 13 years old was six percent while Greek girls reached nine percent. The percentage of Finnish boys bullying others reached 11 percent while for the Greek adolescent boys was 22 percent. The same trend is noticed in the last age group where just six percent of the 15 year old Finnish girls reported bullying others while Greek girls reached 13 percent. Finnish boys had a slight increase to 12 percent while Greek male respondents reached 34 percent.
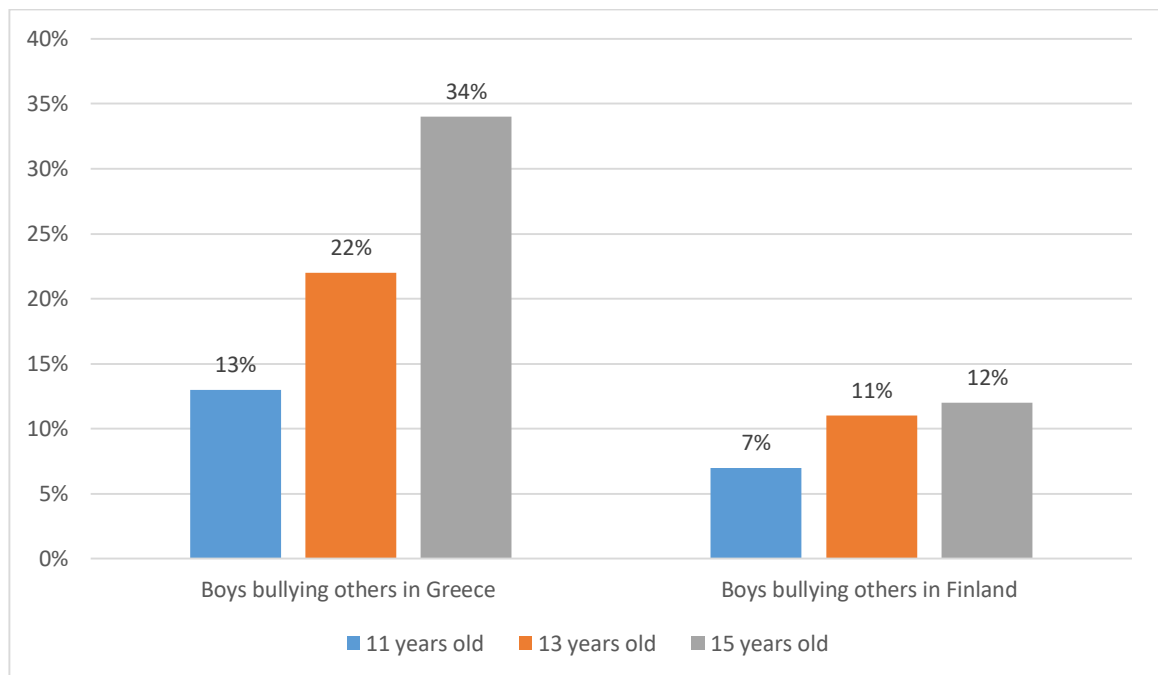

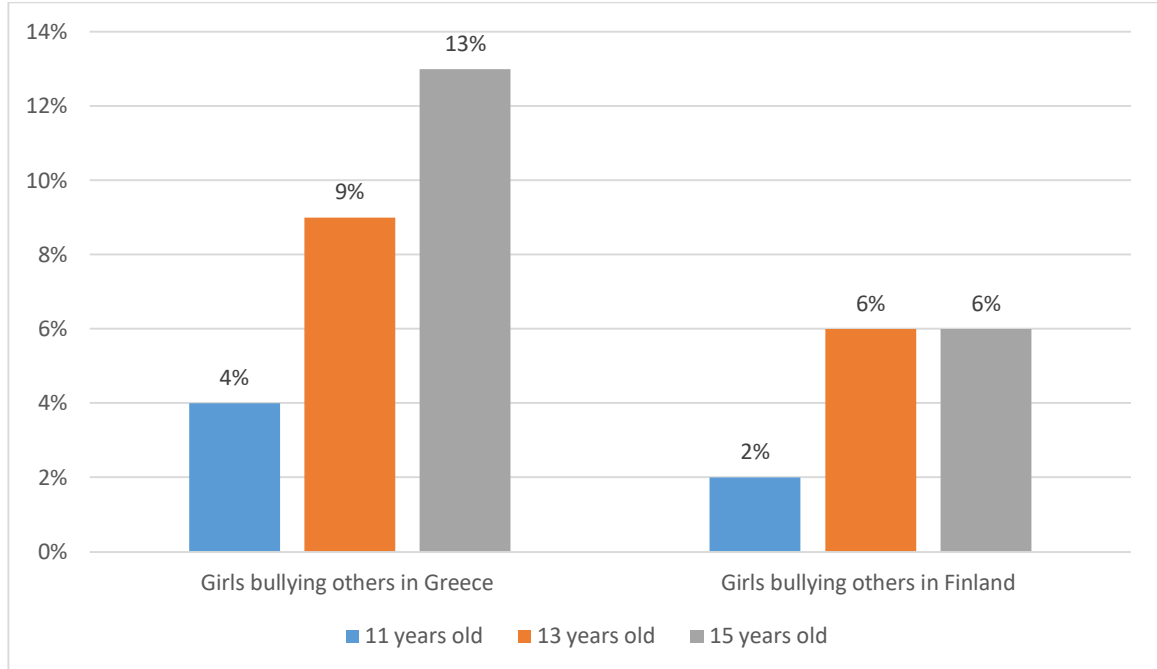Figure 14. Boys bullying others (Currie, et al., 2012)

Figure 15. Girls bullying others (Currie, et al., 2012)

5.2.3. Media

Media is another factor that contributes into shaping the individual's behavior. Especially while the individual grows older and attains an increasing amount of freedom and independence. The time devoted in television, social media and electronic media contact with peers has a prominent role in the everyday life.

Daily electronic media contact (EMC) and watching television

Respondents of the three age groups were also asked on their electronic contact that they keep with their friends. Finnish girls (37 %) at the age of 11 years old reported having daily electronic contact with their peers, while Greek girls were at 29 percent. Finnish boys of the same age group reached 24 percent of daily electronic contact while Greek boys were at 28 percent. At the age of 13 years old, 54 percent of the Finnish girls reported having daily EMC while Greek girls reached 61 percent. Finnish boys at the same age group reached 38 percent as opposed to Greek boys reaching 41 percent. 61 percent of the 15 year old Finnish girls

have daily EMC with their peers while the percentage for Greek girls was 67 percent. Finnish boys were at 50 percent as opposed to 45 percent reached by the Greek male respondents (Currie, et al., 2012).

Furthermore adolescents were asked to report whether they watch television for two or more hours on weekdays. More than half of the 11 year old Finnish girls (58 %) reported watching television during weekdays with the percentage for Greek girls of the same age reaching 64 percent. The percentage of Finnish boys was 61 percent and for the Greek boys 69 percent. Greek percentages kept rising as the individuals grew older, with Greece finishing at the top 5 countries watching the most television. Finnish girls aged 13 years old reached 59 percent while Greek girls were 74 percent. Finnish boys scored similarly to Finnish girls (60 %) while Greek boys were at 73 percent. At the age of 15 years old, Finnish girls were at 50 percent while Greek girls reached 70 percent. Finnish boys were similar to Finnish girls reaching 55 percent while Greek boys reached 71 percent. It is clear that Finnish adolescents spend less time in front of the television as they grow older while the situation in Greece is the exact opposite.
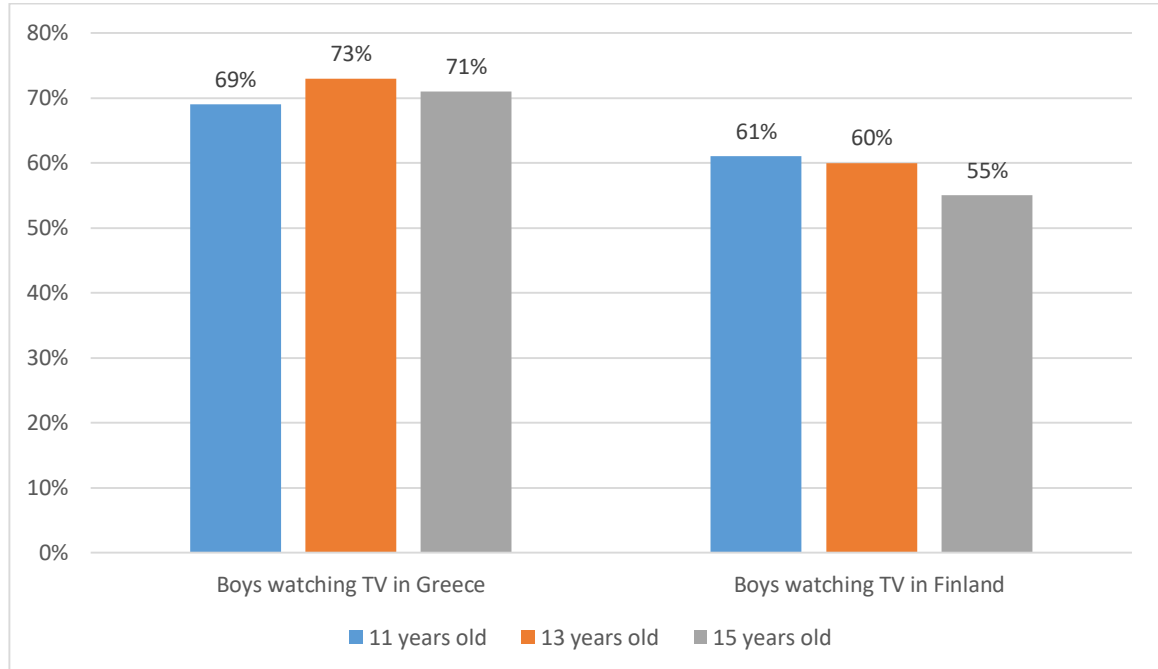

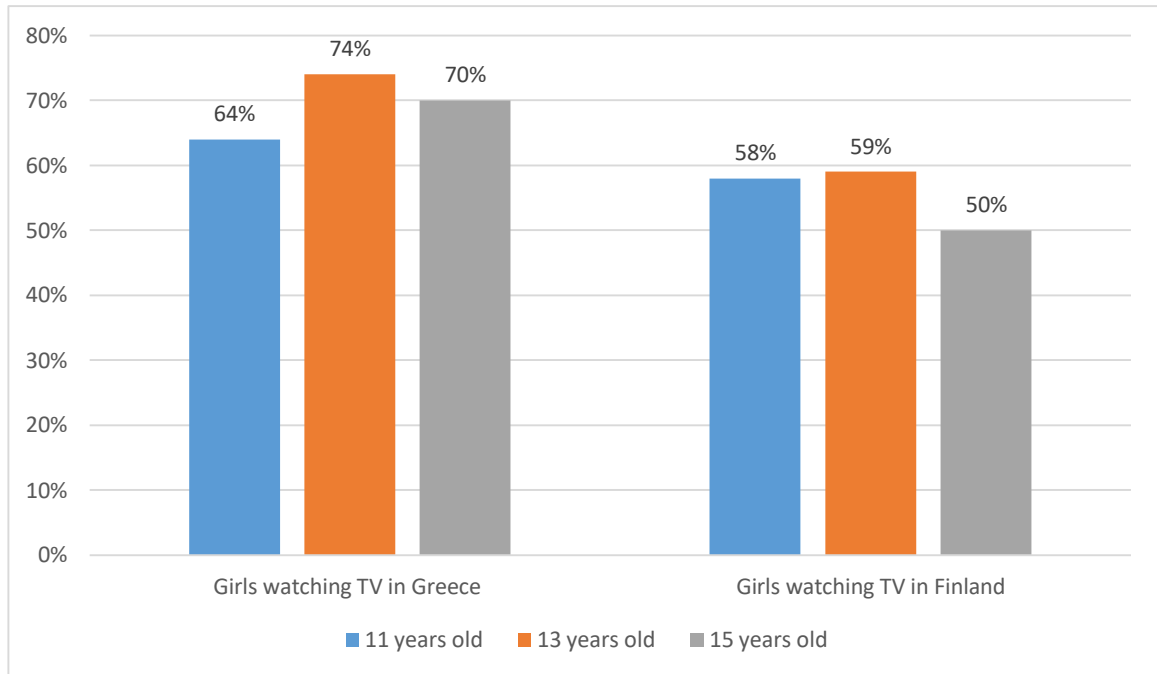Figure 16. Boys watching TV on weekdays (Currie, et al., 2012)

Figure 17. Girls watching TV on weekdays (Currie, et al., 2012)

5.3. Cultural interpretation of Greece

The preceding chapters, have pointed out the differences about the social environment, which can be proven to be either barriers or motivators towards PA. How did the social environment of Greece reached its current state and what is the role and effect of the current ideologies of the Greek society nowadays? In this chapter I am interpreting the current state of the social environment in Greece taking into consideration the path it has followed until now.

5.3.1. The shaping of the current social environment in Greece

It is not an overstatement to argue that modern Greeks have lived and are still living in the shadow of their ancestors (Papakonstantinou, 2010).

Greece is known worldwide as the birthplace of sport and the Olympic Games. Especially in ancient Greece sport was considered a cultural as well as a religious incident of great importance, which defined and still – in theory at least – defines the Greek identity (Sansone, 1992). The Greek identity has been shaped throughout the years through various series of

hardships and challenges. These hardships have had a substantial effect on the behavior of the Greeks which echoes until today. One of the prominent traits still visible today is the heroic model which was brought to life during these hardships. A vast 400 year oppression from the Turkish authority was detrimental in the shaping of the Greek behavior and ideology. An example of the heroic model of that time is Digenes Akrites, who was a hero in the Greek legends and up until this day arouses recollections of Byzantium's lost glory. It stands as a symbol of resistance, superhuman powers, perseverance and hope which form crucial elements of the Greek identity (Karaiskou, 2015). These traits are being channeled through the family producing habits that run deep within the Greek society. In addition there is a strong sense of victimhood and loss engraved within the psychology of the Greeks which still has an important role in their daily actions (Karaiskou, 2015).

The harsh living conditions and the fear instilled within the Greek population by the Turkish authority had an impact on the heroism described above. The term shifted towards survival, focusing on landholdings, income and status instead of the noble character traits (Mc Neill, 1978). During these challenging times the accumulation of wealth and the demonstration of material possessions was viewed as a sign of heroism which stood equal to not only survival but even prosperity especially in a context providing little to no opportunities. Another considerable sign of that adapted heroism were the social connections established with powerful and influential individuals. Such relations served as a protective measure for the family (Karaiskou, 2015). The glorification of wealth through the course of its accumulation (physical work, ingenious decision, family sacrifices) entail the evolution out of the standard which in those times represented the value of the individual. This type of behavior facilitated the underlying competition within the oppressed Greek society and unavoidably the preeminence of one over the fellow citizens (Karaiskou, 2015).

Under the Turkish oppression, a constant struggle took place for the preservation of Orthodoxy and the Greek language. The bonds of those who shared these cultural traits got reinforced sustaining the internal cohesion. In order to preserve the Greek ideology the notion of a defensive "us" as opposed to "them" was brought to life, followed by the distinction of "philhellenes" and "Anti-Hellenes" (Diamantouros, 2000). The general view of the Orthodox Church which prefers conceptual designs and ideologies while disputing logic and research,

generated a Greek tradition characterized more by what it is not than what it is (Mc Neill, 1978). The Greek family was then molded within these ideas embracing the "us" against "them" mentality which undoubtedly served its purpose of survival under the Turkish oppression. Within the newly formed Greek society (post Turkish oppression) the highest societal value was that of "leventia" – which can be translated as gallantry. It stems from the significance of protecting the family's honor at any cost which ended up reinforcing the "us" against "them" but this time within the own Greek citizens fueling an underlying competition (Karaiskou, 2015). At the same time, the tight control exercised by the society to obey the unwritten moral laws seemed the only way to assure social stability. The Church endorsed this behavior labeling it an extension of its current decree which required rigorous conformity with the family and societal rules (Gellner, 1992). The "heroic" ranking established in the past – plainly described as economic success and social status – remained unshaken (Karaiskou, 2015).

The urbanization besides the societal class division, also brought two major yet opposing views. The first was an outward-focused and Europe-oriented view which was associated with advancement through rectification, innovation and a rational approach to daily life organization. The second was a more inward-focused and highly conservative view deeply rooted in the past traditions that the Greek Church and society had passed on to the Greek families (Karaiskou, 2015). Furthermore, there was a developing aversion towards any authority in the name of democracy which in combination with the 19th century Romantic libertarian doctrines promoted a weak sense of duty and responsibility with the underlying thoughts that "obligation" restrained freedom (Kohn, 1950). As the independence and sense of freedom started to take the form of a reassurance for safety, there was a noticeable decrease in political involvement. It was around 1976 that the Greek family started to accentuate its distinction and the figurative power of the material possessions. The Greek society started to view entertainment, pleasure and relaxation as a birthright (Karaiskou, 2015). The search for the so called "good life" was prioritized and escalated with the upcoming consuming society. In 1982 there was a 40 percent minimum-salary increase which stimulated that behavior even more (Karaiskou, 2015). The individual progress in Greece was identified by the family connections to the higher levels of the societal hierarchy with distinct focus on the capitalization on one's network for assistance and safety. In the Western societies however,

the progress of an individual is associated to personal excellence and hard work. This can include even breaking family connections in the process (Gellner, 1992).

The commitment to past traditions and attitudes as well as the reliance on the state stood firm (despite the decrease in political involvement mentioned above). It was the notion that the state carried the exclusive responsibility for resolving its civilian's problems and meeting their every demand that obstructed the kick start that the country needed to change its development (Karaiskou, 2015). The Orthodox Church persisted on nourishing the conservative and traditional views with the society. Greece was discovered to be the most religious country among Western European countries with more than 70 percent of the adults viewing God as an essential aspect of their daily life (Karaiskou, 2015).

Greece has currently taken in a huge number of immigrants with as a result more than 10 percent of the students in the public schools being of foreign origin (Asendorpf & Motti-Stefanidi, 2017). Most of these migrant students, originate from Albania and former USSR countries being the biggest groups of immigrants in Greece (Aspiridis & Petrelli, 2011). A research concerning intercultural relationships among Greek adolescents and migrants pointed out that the behavior of the Greek adolescents was negatively biased towards their peers of foreign origin (Dimakos, Spinthourakis, & Katerina, 2011). Which doesn't come as a surprise taking into consideration the long struggle of Greece for independence and attempts throughout the hardships to preserve the religion and the culture. This type of behavior comes forth also in the subject of sports and PA. Where migrants wanting to take part in organized sports have to join sport clubs where the majority are Greeks (Bangsbo, Krustrup, Duda, et al. 2016).

5.3.2. Organizational sport culture in Greece

As explained in chapter 3.1, the Greek sport clubs are mostly based on generating elite athletes instead of promoting mass participation. In addition, Greece is among the countries that do not gather sport participation data which limites the information to studies carried out by individual researchers. The restricted issued data concerning the advancement of mass participation on PA signifies the absence of accurate policy creation by the government. In addition, it implies that there is no critical approach to the planning and promotion of PA and

sports. Moreover, it indicates the lack of a feedback system in order to assess the effects of the applied policies (Balaska & Kouthouris, 2014). It seems that everything in Greece is performed with the "last minute" attitude because of the inadequacy of general organization. As other southern European countries, Greece prospers on chaos which at the very least implies unsuccessful multi-tasking (Press, 2010). An example of that are the 2004 Olympic Games where the majority believed they would never be ready on time. Against all odds Greece delivered at the very "last minute". The opening ceremony is always a statement of the hosting country and much can be derived from the opening ceremony in Greece. The sense of pride was prominent and was infused within various aspects of the opening ceremony. The pride experienced by the modern Greeks however is not acquired from modern-day accomplishments, but exclusively from allocating the additional value of the glorious past. On top of that there is a dominant notion that seeking perfection will surely lead to disappointment (Press, 2010). As a concept, pride usually involves a sense of worth and satisfaction which are derived from the accomplishments of the individual. The negative meaning of it however, calls upon an inflated sense of self which then can be described as arrogance (Karaiskou, 2015).

An antithetical situation is perceived in Finland. The strong public and voluntary sector is closely related to the cultural norms and ideology of attentive and obedient citizens. Since Finland's independence, the government's concern for the health and wellbeing of the citizens rose and was achieved by the use of sport and PA (Vehmas & Lahti, 2015). As opposed to the aversion towards authority that the Greek society possesses (as mentioned in the previous chapter) the Finnish citizens have a strong faith in it which can be clarified by the Protestant work ethic. Throughout the history, hard work and perseverance, were indications of an individual's redemption after death. In today's society, religion doesn't possess the same prominent role as it had in the past but some remnants might still define the behavior of the Finnish citizens (Vehmas & Lahti, 2015). Finland is operating according to the Nordic welfare state model in which social endeavors were undertaken in order to narrow the socio-economic gap and to ensure equal wellbeing for all the citizens (Allardt, 1980). This model positioned women as equals within all spheres of society as opposed to a strict patriarchic model which is still dominant to some extent in Greece. According to the Greek patriarchic model, the woman completes her nature by becoming a caring mother and not just

bring children into the world (Press, 2010). Another quite distinct characteristic of this welfare model, is the fact that subsidies are directed straight to the sport organizations (Vehmas & Lahti, 2015) unlike in Greece where various governing bodies interfere before the subsidies reach the sport organizations.

6. DISCUSSION

The aim of this thesis was to initially examine the social environment of one of the least physically active countries in Europe and place it next one of the most physically active countries. Subsequently to discover eventual differences that provide fertile ground or limitations for adolescents to be physically active. Furthermore I attempted to dive deeper and provide an explanation as to why the Greek social environment is shaped the way it is and thus contributes to the results we encounter regarding PA. This study contributed to the existing literature by examining the social environment of Greece and Finland and the relation it has to PA. In addition, deeper insights are provided regarding the Greek culture influencing the current societal state of Greece.

6.1. Summary of the results

The results of the analysis suggest that the Greek economy, in its current state, provides a barrier for the Greek parents to assist their children in their sport endeavors. As a Finnish national study has illustrated, parental support in general (including financial support) has led to a substantial increase in sport participation (Kokko, et al., 2016). Thus, before assuming the unwillingness/ignorance of the parents to promote PA for various reasons, the capability of performing such actions must be taken into consideration. Which in the case of Greece, already serves as a barrier if an individual wishes to engage in organized sport activities.

In addition, the emotional support from the family that the Greek adolescents receive is quite strong which is in line with cultural findings. Due to the hardships in Greece being close to the family served as means of survival which had as a results reinforced family bonds. The support the adolescents receive does however decline with age. These findings, maintain the notion that Helsen et al. highlighted that parental support declines with age as it is slowly complemented and partially replaced by peer support which gradually increases (Helsen, Vollenbergh, & Meeus, 2000).

Surprisingly, a high percentage of the Greek parents didn't know where their children were during their free time, who they were with or where they spent their money. Taking into

consideration the close family relationships in Greece this does seem controversial in the beginning. The unstable state that Greece is in, including the financial state of the country could possibly occupy the attention of the parents as they try to figure out possible ways of ensuring the survival of the household. On the other hand this decrease of communication with the parents can simply be a part of the growing process of the individual and the increased peer influence as Santrock stated (Santrock, 2007). Furthermore, a link can be established between the decline in communication and the 'need for orientation and control' as Michael Borg-Laufs outlines in the psychological needs of the individual (Borg-Laufs, 2013). Future research can clarify this issue by attempting to acquire more information as to why the communication decreased. The answer could be then placed either under the societal context (the parents are too busy keeping the household standing due to the current situation) or under the individual context which is not that worrisome since, as mentioned above, it is considered a naturally occurring process.

Moreover, Finnish adolescents have more close friends than their Greek counterparts. Which could mean that the quality of the Finnish social environment is higher than the one in Greece. This piece of data was derived from the perspective of quality and not quantity emphasizing the close friends the respondents had and not plainly the amount. In addition, the time spent with friends was much higher in Finland than in Greece. Greece however noticed a gradual increase with age as Finland's percentages remained the same during the years. As noted in the previous chapters, the peer influence is crucial for a healthy development which, as shown from the results, is impaired in Greece and only gets the chance to develop during the late stages of adolescence. This is closely connected to the 'need for self-esteem' which is prominent especially during the adolescent years, as described by Michael Borg-Laufs (Borg-Laufs, 2013). Furthermore, Finland scored higher in classmate support than Greece which confirms the quality of the peer relationships in both countries. Smith and Brownell outlined the effect of peers in developing self-image which could be viewed as the next step after the 'need for self-esteem' (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003). The relationship with peers was according to McNeil undoubtedly correlated to an increase in PA (McNeill, Kreuter, & Subramanian, 2006).

The stable contact with peers that the Finnish adolescents are experiencing throughout their adolescence could be viewed as a pre-condition to establish a fundamentally strong relationship with their peers. The much limited contact between peers in Greece on the other hand, could operate as a barrier not providing fertile ground for these relationships to develop until the latest years of adolescence, limiting the ability to socialize only within the school context.

Bullying is almost inevitable with peer interaction taking place. Finnish children were slightly more bullied than Greek adolescents but in the course of the years examined (11 – 13 – 15) this shifted. Especially in the ages of 15 years old there was a decrease in Finnish adolescents reported being bullied and Greece achieved higher percentages. In reports about bullying others however, Greece's numbers were double and sometimes almost three times higher than in Finland. This indicates the apparently substantial difference of the social environment and specifically the difference in peer relations between the two countries. The fact that the "us" against "them" mentality still lingers within the Greek society in combination with the huge numbers of immigrants arriving daily is a combination that can lead to an increase in bullying and nationalism as well as xenophobia in the later stages of life. Such high bullying rates can disrupt the safe environment needed for the individual to develop herself and the relationships with peers. Placing these findings back to the psychological needs developed by Borg-Laufs (Borg-Laufs, 2013) it seems that various barriers exist that could disrupt the smooth development of an adolescent which will undoubtedly have an impact on the sport participation and PA levels. Future research could pursue deeper insights as to why there are such high levels of bullying in Greece in order to create an even clearer picture.

Although Finland outperformed Greece in almost every aspect examined, it seems that Finnish adolescents also feel slightly more pressured from schoolwork than Greek students. Taking into consideration the fact that Finland has the number one educational system in the world it is hard to try to place it next to the one in Greece and frankly this was not an aim of this research. School was considered as a point of interest because of its role as the place where the adolescents spend most of their day in, as well as where the interaction takes place between the peers. The amount of school work/pressure does however play a role in the

occupation of the free time and the eventual drop out from sport or PA. Which is definitely not the case for Finland being the most active country in Europe. It seems that the school pressure reported by Finnish adolescents doesn't affect the PA engagement which is clearly imbedded into the culture and way of life of the country.

Regarding the daily electronic media contact, Greek adolescents were more active than the Finnish. Which seems logic since the Finnish adolescents have more close friends and meet with them more often comparing to the Greek adolescents. Thus the electronic media contact seems as an alternative for the Greek respondents to keep in touch and develop that way the relationship with their peers. It does however come with certain health risks which cannot be ignored. Comprehensive use of EMC has been correlated with poorer perceptions of health, decreased quality of sleep (Punamäki, Wallenius, Nygard, Saarni, & Rimpelä, 2007) and participation in risk behaviours (Koivusilta, Lintonen, & Rimpelä, 2005). Besides the EMC, Greek adolescents were positioned within the top five countries watching the most television in Europe. In most cases watching television is a synonym for sedentary behavior which seems to be extremely high in Greece. As Hills et al. concluded (Hills, King, & Armstrong, 2007) sedentary behavior greatly affects the physical processes as well as the developing rate of obesity. Besides that, watching television stands opposed to the socialization that should be taking place according to the aging process and the psychological needs especially during that period. Future research can investigate the reasons for such high television watching percentages. The results can be categorized based on origin, either originating from the decision of the adolescent or the decision of the adult limiting the socialization of the child and thus indirectly supporting a sedentary behavior.

The oppression upon the Greeks that lasted for hundreds of years has undoubtedly been a catalyst for the formation of today's social environment as well as the behavior of the citizens. The dominant role of the Church within the society and the fights in the past for the preservation of religion and the Greek identity, have been deeply integrated in the behavior of the citizens taking the form of the "us" against "them" mentality. This type of mentality did have a purpose in the past and it was thanks to this type of ideology that the Greek culture and tradition managed to survive. In modern times however there is no application for it and it serves only as a barrier to cultural and societal progress. On top of that, "pride" for past

achievement and cultural heritage is the term that is most prominent within the mentality of the Greeks.

According to Craig Calhoun pride is an essential aspect of identity (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000) while Pierre Bourdieu recognizes pride as a trait of the Mediterenean countries (Bourdieu, 1994). The resistance to anything foreign or anything contradicting the existing beliefs, unavoidably fueled by the "us" against "them" mentality is limiting the progress of the society in Greece. Research has also pointed out that the major difference between Greece and Europe is the cultural resistance. It seems that besides the idea of Greeks that obligation limits freedom, the difference between "challenge" and "threat" has yet to be understood (Fischer, et al., 2012). Traces of that misunderstanding can be found in the xenophobia which dictates the behavior of the modern society. In addition, the immigrants function as a scapegoat for the fall of the Greek economy and the decrease of the quality of life. The sense of pride for the unquestionable past achievements and contributions to the world and sciences, has become a throne of arrogance and inertia to rest upon instead of it becoming fuel to preserve these highly valued qualities of the past and reproduce them into the modern era. It seems that modern Greeks have a distinct and controversial relationship with the glorious past. They are incapable of grasping the essence of it but they do however call upon it as an essential aspect of modern Greek reality (Karaiskou, 2015).

 To conclude, what we thus encounter is a country with a prominent nationalistic sense deeply integrated from the past years which served as means of survival during times of hardship. The same nationalistic attitude lingers nowadays aimlessly within the society, in a country being constantly flooded by refugees and immigrants, having acquired a different role than what it had in the past. Namely that of a barrier disrupting the social cohesion, limiting the assimilation and integration of immigrants and refugees and fuelling the already existent xenophobia. The continuous reference to past glories seems to rob modern Greece of the much needed motivation and determination to acknowledge its own distinct power. Invoking past glories for egotistic reasons and not as means of motivation leads to an unproductive present with little to no future goals the effect of which is detrimental. As Gillis very intelligently placed it, "Identities and memories are not things we think about, but things we think with" (Gillis, 1994).

The PA levels are unquestionably influenced by the social and cultural environment. It would seem natural that a country that cherishes and evokes its past as often as Greece, would maintain the PA levels being the birthplace of sport and the Olympic Games. But PA has a different role in Greece. It is not within the priorities of the citizens because it was not essential for the survival under the Turkish and later the German oppression. It was replaced by the need for shelter, food and safety for the family. The heroic model of the past was defined more by possessions and relationships to the higher levels of societal hierarchy than nurturing the body. Which is quite contradictory since in ancient Greece the highest priority was the evolution of the so called mind and body. In Finland on the other hand being physically active has been high on the priority list and deeply imbedded into the daily life. From volunteering and subsidizing, to reduced monthly contributions Finland has made sure to create an even more accessible PA environment. The lack of mass participation policies, structure and data collection regarding PA in Greece points once more to the priorities set by the Greek government and the Greek families. Placing it in the context of the hierarchy of needs developed by Maslow (Maslow, 1943), it seems that the Greeks are focused on reestablishing the first two levels of the pyramid which where jeopardized by the recent financial crisis rather than focusing on PA. This leads to what is probably a fundamental difference between Greece and Finland (or any other country ranking high on PA) which is the ideology and perception regarding sport and PA. It is the understanding of the functions of PA both as an end and as means to an end. Finland has realized the benefits of PA leading to wellbeing and uses it as means to reach a goal while the Greek ideology on the other hand views sport as an end by itself.

6.2. Practical implications

The unquestionable, influence of the social environment on PA and especially in the case of such a physically inactive country as Greece does raise the question of changing the existent situation. Due to the complexity and volatility of the social environment and the numerous factors influencing it (economy being of high importance in Greece), attempts can be focused on shifting the existent idea of sports and PA. Steps can be taken towards creating the same ideology as in the physically active countries emphasizing the role of sport as a resource on achieving a greater goal that of wellbeing and health for example. Such change can be

initiated by originally educating the public on not only the effects of sport and PA but also on the contribution of these effects and the broader result they can have on the daily lives of the public. A link must be established between the effects of PA and the impact they have on the current priorities of the public. That way sport and PA can be perceived once more as a priority since it would be positioned as an enhancement to the already existing priorities. Government bodies would have to structure the sport policies and feedback system in such a way that removes the barriers towards PA and places it again within the concerns of society and the citizens. Taking into consideration the current situation in Greece it is challenging to set the focus on PA especially with the current ideology towards it. But even within the limited capabilities and resources there are actions to be initiated towards the improvement of the PA levels.

6.3.   Limitations of the thesis

This study, as the majority of the studies did not come without any limitations. The ethical limitations however were not present in this work due to the nature of the research. As far as the limitations are concerned, first and foremost the time limit placed upon it by being a part of a thesis work. Furthermore, the data used for this study already existed and was utilized on a different manner in this work. Even though the data utilized did provide sufficient information and the quality of it was ensured by European standards, the nature of the questions asked differed between Greece and Finland (especially the HBSC studies). Other sources were thus utilized in order to acquire the information. This rendered a solely comparative study between the two quite challenging. In addition, issuing a statement regarding the Finnish social environment and culture would jeopardize the integrity since my experience in Finland is quite limited as opposed to the Greece. That is why the main focus of this study was the Greek social environment and culture while the data from Finland served primarily as a standard set by an exemplary country regarding PA. Moreover, a translation from Greek to English took place in order to fully utilize the Greek data. Future studies, could recreate a clearer landscape of the differences between the two countries by distributing the same questionnaire which in turn provides the possibility of fully comparing the two.

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