

Athens 1st Local Debate Minutes

Date: January 28, 2025

Time: 09:30 – 14:30

Location: Serafeio, Municipality of Athens

Attendees: 50

Panelists

- **Facilitator:** Konstantinos Tsoukalas - Plastics and Waste Officer @ WWF
- **Natural Heritage Expert:** Miltiadis Seferlis - Natural Heritage Specialist @ EKBY
- **Local Policy Expert:** Georgios Apostolopoulos - Deputy Mayor of Environment, Greenery & Urban Fauna

Local Artists

- Yiannis Kranidiotis - Artist
- Marilena Georgatzi - Set Designer and Visual Artist

International Artist

- Marco Barotti - Media Artist

Festival Experts

- Ilias Chatzichristodoulou - Founder and Director of Athens Digital Arts Festival
- Elli-Anna Peristeraki - Curator and Art Director of Athens Digital Arts Festival
- Michaela Kollia - Communication Manager
- Eleni Tzempelikou - Project Assistant and European Programs Manager of Athens Digital Arts Festival

Agenda:

9:30 – 10:30 | Arrival & Registration

- Participants checked-in and settled in.

10:30 – 12:00 | Local Debate *(1.5 hours / 90 minutes)*

- 45–55 citizens participated in the discussion.

12:00 – 12:30 | Intermission *(30 minutes)*

- Break for refreshments and networking.

12:30 – 14:30 | Workshop One: Pete Medusa Valley *(2 hours)*

- Interactive session with 10–15 citizens.

1. Opening of the Debate

Opening Remarks - Ilias Chatzichristodoulou

- The event began with an opening talk by Ilias Chatzichristodoulou, Founder and Director of ADAF.
- He introduced the 21-year-old Athens Digital Arts Festival (ADAF) and its unique art categories, including WebArt, AR, and more.
- He emphasized the importance of collaboration in achieving a shared goal.
- Concluding his talk, he briefly outlined the day's program, highlighting the debate and the workshop by artist Yiannis Kranidiotis.

CO-VISION introduction - Eleni Tzempelikou

- Eleni Tzempelikou, EU Projects Coordinator, shared key points on the CO-VISION program and its objectives.
- She highlighted the importance of cultural debates in raising awareness about natural heritage and ecological issues.
- She emphasized the program's goal of fostering discussions that connect culture and environmental consciousness.

Introduction to the main theme of CO-VISION Grece - Elli-Anna Peristeraki

- Elli-Anna Peristeraki, Program Director of CO-VISION, concluded the program introduction with a brief framework.
- She introduced the theme of plastic pollution at sea and its particular relevance to Athens.

- She shared the vision for the “Medusa Valley” artwork, which will be co-created by the artist and participants in the future.

Panel introduction and Discussion Framework - Konstantinos Tsoukalas

- The widespread use of plastic in daily life.
- The imbalance between plastic consumption and recycling rates.
- Explanation of the debate format and rules.

2. Key Presentations Presented

1st Speaker: The challenges of recycling management in Athens - George Apostolopoulos

- **Lack of Recycling Education:** Citizens of Athens are not well-informed about plastic recycling.
- **Municipal Goals:** Upgrade recycling facilities and regulations to improve sustainability.
- **Challenges & Progress:** The local administration has tackled various recycling challenges.
- **Importance of Public Dialogue:** Local debates help bridge the gap between citizens and the municipality.
- **Sustainable Plastic Production:** A key goal is to promote responsible plastic production and disposal.
- **Environmental Impact:** Different recycling practices have varying effects, including chemical usage and pollution.

2nd Speaker: The collaboration of science, local administration and art - Miltiadis Seferlis

- **Scientific & Artistic Perspective:** Miltiadis Seferlis explored the intersection of art and scientific research on water pollution.
- **Focus Areas:** His work covers pollution in seawater, rivers, and lakes.
- **Community Engagement:** He emphasized the importance of discussions involving all stakeholders, including citizens.
- **EKBY's Work:** He shared insights into the organization's efforts in water pollution research.

- **Plastics & Pollution:** Explained plastic terminology, sources in daily life, and how plastics accumulate on the water's surface and bottom.
- **Public Interaction:** Answered audience questions on reducing daily plastic use.

3rd Speaker: Science and Art for Sustainability - Yiannis Kranidiotis

- **Art & Sustainability:** Yiannis integrates technology with environmental sustainability in his work, including *The Plastic Sea*.
- **Science & Art Collaboration:** His workshop *The Tipping Point* collaborates with European scientists to transform data into art, making complex issues accessible to the public.
- **Community Engagement:** His *Medusas* project has evolved into a large-scale community initiative for greater impact.

4th Speaker: The observation of water shows as how we can be part of the problem and the solution all at once - Marilena Georgatzi

- Her work at the **Municipality of Piraeus Makers Space** focuses on circular economy, highlighting its impact on water sustainability.
- She explores **upcycling** to transform production and consumption processes.
- Through her research and residencies, she created "**Cracks**", an artwork based on materials used in energy production and later repurposed in the entertainment industry.
- She studies water systems, mapping **rivers and lakes**, capturing their daily changes, which inspired a layered series of artworks.

5th Speaker: A Poetic representation of nature - Marco Barrotti

- **Marco Barrotti's Work:** Merges natural landscapes, technology, and environmental data to create sculptures and soundscapes inspired by nature.
- **Core Question:** Can the combination of art and science help restore marine damage?
- **Art & Science Integration:** His recent works, co-produced with scientists, explore this idea.
- **Key Project:** Presented artworks using real environmental data, with a focus on his poetic representation of clams, which aligns with his central artistic inquiry.

6th Speaker: ADAF team

- **Impact of Art in Awareness:** The ADAF director shared a personal story about how artworks can deeply affect festival audiences.
 - **Panel Expectations:** Eleni and Mika outlined key goals, highlighting projects like *Chromosphere*.
 - **Co-Vision Program:** Focuses on natural and cultural heritage, using storytelling to raise awareness locally and internationally.
 - **Interactive Art Installations:** Serve as tools for achieving more sustainable outcomes.
 - **Art as a Bridge:** The artistic framework connects science and citizens, with artists acting as mediators between environmental/social issues, daily life, and future solutions.
 - **Digital Arts:** Recognized as an innovative practice for addressing sustainability and awareness.
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3. Audience Q&A and Interactive Discussion

Question 1: How can citizens effectively influence and change pollution issues, which mainly stem from industry?

- **Response from [Seferlis]:** Awareness is the first step, and only a collective approach can bring real results. Proper information helps lead to a more effective response.
- **Response from [Georgatzi]:** One proposal is to **consume less**. Individual responsibility goes beyond recycling—it also includes reducing purchases and reusing items.
- **Response from [Tsoukalas]:** Society is a vast network; as citizens, we can reduce our individual consumption. However, poor enforcement of legislation and industrial practices also contribute significantly to negative environmental impacts.
- **Response from [Kranidiotis]:** There is also a **class dimension** to consumption and ecological choices.
- **Response from [Medasset NGO Representative]:** The solution lies in **avoiding usage altogether**. Individual responsibility is part of the solution and has its own impact.

Question 2: How much does art contribute to science?

- **Response from [Barrotti]** The motivation comes from the idea and my passion, so I create about one artwork per year and fully immerse myself in it—both as an artist and in the scientific aspect. I approach it with courage, putting myself in different positions. I never fully understand everything from the scientific side, but what we create between data and technology is very complex, a fine line between art and science.
- **Response from [Seferlis]** Publishing scientific data is not impressive for the general public. We believe that art can massively and much easier to engage the audience.

Question 3: How valuable is it to involve a broader audience in an art-science project?

- **Response from [Barrotti]** The approach to art as poetry is simple—I draw inspiration from people, their heritage, and their personal connection to nature. I choose elements that feel familiar and create something beautiful, then weave the science into it. This allows the work to resonate with the audience, making the message both accessible and impactful.
- **Response from [Seferlis]** Publishing scientific data is not impressive for the general public. We believe that art can massively and much easier to engage the audience.

Question 4: [from Laskaridis Foundation representative] What's the most exciting feedback you've ever received?

- **Response from [Barrotti]** There is the element of emotion that whatever you are communicating is coming right back.
- **Response from [Georgatzi]** The stories of people that get inspired from the artwork is very interesting to me.
- **Response from [Kranidiotis]** It is very interesting to observe how people respond to my artworks on social media.

Question 5: How can a community stay engaged from a distance, and how can an installation transcend art to create a deeper impact?

- **Response from [Kranidiotis]** Engagement is very difficult because that means you have to lose control as an artist, and the audience needs to be creative.
- **Response from [Tsoukalas]** As WWF we have several community programs that engage students and families that feel engaged and have been enthusiastically participating for more than two years now.

- **Response from [Peristeraki]** Communication and the mediation of art helps people understand crucial topics through art and more familiar environments in the everyday life.
 - **Response from [Audience]** An art installation that called people to action, to throw their garbage into a park, creating a massive installation with large impact, engaging a larger audience.
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4. Conclusion

The debate brought together experts, artists, and specialists from the fields of ecology and digital arts to explore how communities could stay engaged remotely and how art installations could transcend mere aesthetics to create a deeper impact. Through interdisciplinary dialogue, the discussion contributed to CO-VISION's long-term mission of engaging local communities in Green Deal topics. Moreover, the event served as an incubator for innovative ideas that highlight environmental heritage, with the potential to reach wider audiences through international festivals and online platforms. The upcoming ADAF festival from 3rd to 7th of April 2025 will highlight the CO-VISION theme and embellish the Medusa Valley artwork.

5. Workshop One: Pete Medusa Valley

In this interactive workshop, participants created a prototype jellyfish from the artwork “Medusa Valley”. More specifically, they built a unique, touch-sensitive jellyfish using upcycled plastic bottles, Arduino technology, digital LEDs, sensors, and optical fibers. This jellyfish will be added to Medusa Valley, an immersive artwork highlighting the beauty of marine life and the urgent threat of plastic pollution in our oceans. Under the guidance of Yiannis Kranidiotis—a renowned new media artist and musician known for merging art and science—they learnt how to use Arduino, an open-source electronics platform, to bring jellyfish to life with light and movement. They worked with sensors and LEDs, in order to design a jellyfish that responds to human touch, adding a dynamic, interactive dimension to the installation.

This workshop also offered a meaningful space to discuss the impact of plastic waste on marine ecosystems, and how art can be a powerful medium to raise awareness and inspire positive environmental action. By the end, they had created an interactive jellyfish sculpture that will be integrated into Medusa Valley, where it will contribute to a powerful collective artwork that connects technology, ecology, and community. This installation will be an ever-evolving immersive and interactive installation, which will be exhibited after Athens Digital Arts Festival within the next step of CO-VISION program to the rest of the partnering festivals.

Minutes prepared by: ADAF