Are there accessible environments in Athens, Greece today?

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Abstract: This paper aims to reveal the general goals of Universal Design and Universal Access according to the normative situation in the European Community, focusing on the existing situation in Greece. As Athens was the last European city where (Para-) Olympic Games took place, the results of a comparative study are presented, revealing accessibility conditions to buildings of public use in Greece’s capital. Using a study carried out in 1984, the changes regarding Universal Access over the last two and a half decades are investigated. Building categories such as ministries, hospitals, higher-degree educational buildings, museums, cinemas and theatres were visited and re-evaluated with the help of a specific protocol in 2004 and 2009. In the end, the degree of improvement is discussed and conclusions are drawn.

Key-Words: universal design, universal access, buildings of public use, disability, survey, Athens

All data, tables and figures of this paper originate from the author’s dissertation thesis [1], except if otherwise mentioned.

1 Introduction
Urban awareness regarding Universal Access is a rather recent matter, going hand in hand with general concerns and ideas of acceptance on matters of disability. In conclusion, the necessity to facilitate people with reduced mobility and people with disability in urban space and the importance of its organization was met in different ways over time.

If a glance is taken on the development of the built environment, three main phases can be distinguished [2], according to the understanding of disability and accessibility over different periods of time. At the beginning of the 20th century (first period) no accessibility whatsoever existed and town planning in big urban centers was exclusively based on criteria for “able-bodied” citizens. After the second world-war (second period) partial accessibility began to exist based on the important increase of war invalids and on technical interventions. Recent years (third period) are characterized by believes, that all members of our society are considered possible people with reduced mobility, a notion which has started to consider barriers in the built environment discriminative and prohibitive.

This important awareness change over the last decades contributed in a positive way in supporting and enforcing the implementation of Universal Design and Universal Access criteria in all design and construction processes worldwide. In the following, relevant matters are discussed and general notions will be compared to the actual situation in Greece, which became an important input regarding accessibility due to the preparatory works for the (Para-) Olympic Games in 2004.

2 The importance of Universal Design and Universal Access
Universal Design and Universal Access are the preconditions that people with reduced mobility and people with disability obtain equal chances in everyday life and in conclusion to have the possibility to lead independent lives. All visible physical obstacles and all invisible social barriers have to be eliminated in order to guarantee autonomous and safe mobility and in consequence accessibility to all spaces for every citizen.

Therefore, Universal Design criteria exist today. These are facilitations providing comfortable and secure spaces including for instance: smooth inclinations without any steps, wider door openings, mechanical means to cover height differences, minimal room sizes, provision of non-slipping grounds, railings and movement aids, suitable and easy understandable signs, easy accessible handling mechanisms and control elements, color contrast between construction elements, marking of glass surfaces, wheelchair lifts in public buses etc.

However, if a glance at criteria for Universal Access to urban spaces is taken, the following criteria need to be added [3]: functionality of pavements, continuous networks with accessible
paths and infrastructure, correct information and traffic signs, lowered public utensils etc.

3 The normative situation in the European Community
Facilitations and criteria, as mentioned in the previous sections, are regulated through technical European standards and national norms and regulations. These rules define the legal planning and in conclusion behavior of society [4]. Within this paper, no explicit reference will be made to the many relevant publications.

However it needs to be pointed out, that on European level the “European Concept for Accessibility” [5] rules. Undoubtedly, the all-over principles in all European countries are very similar and differ slightly on tolerance levels of dimensions, measures etc. declaring, that accessibility ought to be considered as a common environmental quality.

4 The “chain of accessibility”
Although legislation seems to be very precise and widely accepted on a European level, the real needs of accessibility are best portrayed with the so-called “chain of accessibility” (see fig. 1). This idea is based on the principle of a chain and that if one link gets broken, it becomes useless. In conclusion, if not all elements of the built environment, e.g. pavement networks, public transport stops, means of public transport, public services, shops, entertainment facilities, and so on, are accessible, maintained and usable, it is often impossible for a person with reduced mobility and/or a person with disability to exit from home and reach the place she/he needs or wants to get to. Everything has to be accessible, otherwise no mobility is guaranteed!

The effects of inappropriate implementation or even absence of Universal Access and in conclusion broken chain elements lead to a series of serious mobility problems for certain population groups [6]. For instance, for infants and children, the lack of appropriate accessibility measures often leads to mobility weaknesses and a partial exclusion, while multiplying the daily number of accidents. For senior citizens, a lack of Universal Access measures may lead to partial or even total exclusion from the built environment and in conclusion to permanent enclosure at home.

As becomes clear, the correct functioning of the “chain of accessibility” is the precondition to guarantee autonomous, easy and safe mobility for every citizen. However, if we take a closer look at existing situations in European cities, many malfunctions will be noticed. Especially in Southern European countries, correct implementation of Universal Design criteria is often far from being reality.

5 Universal Access conditions in Greece
“Free movement of people with disability [in Greece] meets with great difficulties, like entering into the public transport system with a wheelchair, with enormous problems using pavements due to the small number of curb cuts, with tremendous problems entering public, school and/or university buildings and insurmountable difficulties entering theaters, stores and churches” [7].

Despite the fact, that in the last decade the Greek public has started to better understand the needs, particularities and equality of rights of people with disability, a giant void still exists. For instance, many archaeological sites remain inaccessible and there do not exist comfortable and safe guidance paths for their visit [8]. Relevant legislation is weak and insufficient, and although Universal Design Guidelines have been published in 1998 by the Greek Ministry of Environment, Urban Planning and Public Works [9] implementation is not enforced or controlled. However, an important input for ameliorating restorations and refurbishments constituted the informative campaigns and financing supports during the preparatory works of the (Para-) Olympic Games, which took place in Athens in 2004.

Nevertheless, “it is not accessibility, which is the biggest barrier, but society’s attitude itself. The problem lies not in the person with disability or the wheelchair, but in stairs and the lack of spirit to
place a ramp. The problem is not the blind person, but this unfriendly city [Athens], where garbage covers pavements, traffic signs are badly placed, trees are unfenced and basements are yawning.” (Μπενάκη-Πολύδωρο, 1993) [10]

Although the public at large claims, that lately works aiming to make the environment more accessible have started, progress paces still very slowly. A series of evaluation studies have been carried out over the last years, giving the picture on accessibility conditions for people with reduced mobility and people with mobility impairments in Greece’s capital. Some articles indicate, that in Athens ½ of all ministries, ¼ of all hospitals, ½ of all university buildings, most theatres, cinemas and museums and almost all pavements are inaccessible to people with severe mobility impairments, especially wheelchair users.

In the following, a small overview on accessibility conditions to buildings of public use in Athens will be presented, in order to outline the situation before and improvements after the (Para-) Olympic Games in 2004.

6 Recent surveys examining accessibility conditions in Greece
Over the last years, several evaluation studies have been carried out in Greece, which investigated foremost accessibility conditions to buildings of public use.

In 2001, a study called “ΚΑΘΕΝΑΣ” was launched by the EIxAA (National Institution for Rehabilitation of People with Disability), which evaluated 124 randomly selected buildings hosting public services in specific municipalities of Athens [11]. Churches, schools, post offices, bank institutions and more were visited. Based on a questionnaire, conditions of autonomous mobility for wheelchair users were examined, emphasizing on the accidental visit of any of these buildings. The deriving results of this study as regards accessible buildings for people with mobility impairments is insignificant (only 4%). For unknown reasons this program was never finished.

In 2002, the Greek Ministry of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralization engaged in a survey on the existing accessibility conditions to buildings that host Ministries, Regions, Prefecture Governments, Municipalities and further State Services all over Greece [12] during the preparatory works for the (Para-) Olympic Games of 2004. The survey was carried out via sending informative deeds and questionnaires to all public services on Greece. Relevant employees were asked to fill out all universal design-adaptations and to register all existing deficiencies in buildings hosting public services. The study comprised of gathering information concerning the presence of ramps, parking lots for wheelchair users, elevators, large sized toilets and lowered counters. During two years the General Secretary sent out papers reminding services on the necessity of immediate recording of the existing situations in public services and on their obligation to answer. But although it is State services, which should give the positive example, most employees forgot to answer the evaluation-documents and, therefore, almost no implementation of the required adaptations were fulfilled. As no detailed information on the evaluation criteria could be gathered, no further reference will be made.

However, the most detailed on accessibility conditions to specific buildings categories in Athens was carried out two decades earlier. As this study was user for the author’s comparative study, it will be described in a more detailed way in the following.

7 Results of a comparative study on accessibility conditions in buildings of public use in Athens (1984-2004-2009)
7.1 General remarks on the comparative evaluation study
The comparative study presented in the following reveals accessibility conditions for mobility-impaired users to specific public building categories in Athens, comparing the situations in 1984, 2004 and 2009.

The primary study entitled “Athens – An impenetrable city” was carried out by the Greek Company for the Protection of Spastics (Εταιρία Προστασίας Σπαστικών - ΕΠΣ) in 1984 [13]. Within the total range of visited buildings, the study evaluated 20 ministries, 31 hospitals, 12 university faculties, 12 museums, 38 theatres and 31 cinemas. Investigations were based on a specific protocol, examining the number of steps and stairs, the presence of ramps, railings and elevators, as well as the elevator’s cabin size. Evaluation was scaled into five graduations, although only “very good” stands for really accessible buildings.

The results of this study were very disappointing, as access to tertiary education was impossible; joining entertainment or cultural establishments was also almost prohibitive, while ministries guaranteed access to only 35% of all examined buildings; even
hospitals were at 63% inaccessible in 1984 (see fig. 2). In few words, the situation 25 years ago was very unfriendly for people with reduced mobility and Athens indeed was an impenetrable city.

After the preparatory works for the (Para-) Olympic Games in 2004 were completed, the same buildings of public use were revisited and reevaluated by the author in order to investigate the degree of improvement regarding Universal Design and Universal Access for people with mobility impairments in Greece’s capital over the last two decades. The evaluation protocol was kept the same and additionally the existence of a wheelchair-user toilet, as well as of a wheelchair-user parking lot was checked.

Five years later, in 2009, all the impenetrable found buildings of 2004 were contacted again, in order to investigate if further improvements regarding safe and autonomous access for users with reduced mobility had taken place over the last years.

In the following, a short presentation of the evaluation tables is given, sorted by building category. First, the results gathered more than 20 years ago are compared to the situation citizens could find in Athens in 2004 and then to the actual situation of today. Besides the presentation of universal access criteria as described above, no explicit reference to the presence of supportive equipment will be made. Nevertheless, in the tables below, some supplementary information is shown, in case of interested readers.

### 7.2.1 Evaluation of buildings hosting Ministries in Athens in 1984

In the following, accessibility conditions to ministerial buildings in Athens for users with mobility impairments are presented. The table below gives the detailed data on accessibility conditions in 20 ministries in Athens in 1984 (see tab. 1) and in conclusion it can be stated, that only 30% of the visited buildings were wheelchair-accessible in 1984.

#### Table 1: Accessibility conditions in 20 ministries in Athens in 1984 (ΕΠΣ-study)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ministry</th>
<th>Inaccessible</th>
<th>Accessible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ministry 1</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry 2</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry 3</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry 4</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry 5</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry 6</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry 7</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry 8</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry 9</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry 10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry 11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 7.2.2 Evaluation of buildings hosting Ministries in Athens in 2004-2009

Over the last decades, some ministries changed their names and were merged with others, so in 2004 there existed 17 ministries of the former ones, which could be visited and reevaluated. The improvement of the accessibility situation to ministries over these two decades is considerable. As can be seen in table 2, almost all ministries (88,2%) were wheelchair-accessible in 2004.

#### Table 2: Accessibility conditions in 17 ministries in Athens in 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ministry</th>
<th>Inaccessible</th>
<th>Accessible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ministry 1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry 2</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry 3</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry 4</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry 5</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry 6</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry 7</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry 8</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry 9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry 10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry 11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, as two ministries remain in very old and preservable buildings until today, accessibility to them has not been fully established yet.
7.3.1 Evaluation of buildings hosting hospitals in Athens in 1984
This paragraph will look at accessibility conditions in Athens’ hospitals in 1984. Access situation for 31 hospitals as registered by the ΕΠΣ-study are shown in table 3. As shocking at it is, only 32% of these hospitals were wheelchair-accessible in 1984.

Table 3: Accessibility conditions in 31 hospitals in Athens in 1984 (ΕΠΣ-study)

7.3.2 Evaluation of buildings hosting hospitals in Athens in 2004-2009
All hospitals still existed and operated in 2004, and thus could be reevaluated (see tab. 4).

As can be seen, accessibility to Athens’ hospitals had been improved as well and in 94% of the visited buildings barrier-free access was possible from at least one entrance in 2004. The only not completely accessible hospital complex out of the visited ones remains the Dromokaiteion Psychiatric Clinic of Athens until today. This is a complex of many old, detached buildings, which until today remain only partly accessible.

Table 4: Accessibility conditions in 31 hospitals in Athens in 2004

7.4.1 Evaluation of buildings hosting higher-degree educational buildings in Athens in 1984
In the following, accessibility conditions to tertiary educational buildings in Athens for wheelchair-users are presented. The table below gives the detailed data on accessibility conditions in 12 university and higher technological institution buildings in Athens in 1984 (see tab. 5). As can be clearly seen, no higher-degree educational buildings was wheelchair-accessible in 1984.

Table 5: Accessibility conditions in 12 higher-degree educational buildings in Athens in 1984 (ΕΠΣ-study)
7.4.2 Evaluation of buildings hosting higher-degree educational buildings in Athens in 2004-2009

Although most of the visited educational buildings are situated in old buildings, some basic adaptations were made until 2004 to guarantee access to students with reduced mobility at least to lecture halls that are situated on ground-floors in 84.6% of the cases (see tab. 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building</th>
<th>Year Type</th>
<th>Year Number</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Adaptations</th>
<th>Number of floors</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building A</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Old Building</td>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>Ground-floor access</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building B</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>New Building</td>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>Ground-floor access</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Accessibility conditions in 13 higher-degree educational buildings in Athens in 2004

However, access to many administrative bureaus and laboratories and lecture halls on upper floors remains in many cases problematic and often even impossible until today!

7.5.1 Evaluation of buildings hosting museums in Athens in 1984

This paragraph will look at accessibility conditions in Athens’ museums in 1984. The very poor access situation for 12 museums as registered by the ΕΠΣ-study are shown in table 7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Museum</th>
<th>Year Type</th>
<th>Year Number</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Adaptations</th>
<th>Number of floors</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Museum A</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Old Building</td>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>No ground-floor access</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum B</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>New Building</td>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>Ground-floor access</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Accessibility conditions in 12 museums in Athens in 1984 (ΕΠΣ-study)

7.5.2 Evaluation of buildings hosting museums in Athens in 2004-2009

The improvement of accessibility conditions to museums over the last decades is evident. In 2004, 75% of all visited museums were accessible for visitors with reduced mobility (see tab. 8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Museum</th>
<th>Year Type</th>
<th>Year Number</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Adaptations</th>
<th>Number of floors</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Museum A</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Old Building</td>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>Ground-floor access</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum B</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>New Building</td>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>Ground-floor access</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Accessibility conditions in 12 museums in Athens in 2004

Until January 2009, an elevator had been placed in the Folklore Art Centre making the visit to almost all exhibits on the upper floors possible, except for the semi-floor over ground-level.

The only exception remains the National Historic Museum until today, which still is not autonomously accessible, due to a large staircase with 21 steps at its entrance.

7.6.1 Evaluation of buildings hosting theatres in Athens in 1984

Table 9: Accessibility conditions in 38 theatres in Athens in 1984 (ΕΠΣ-study)
In the table above (see tab. 9), accessibility conditions for wheelchair-users to buildings hosting theatres in Athens are presented. In 1984, out of 38 evaluated theatres, only 11 were found to be accessible for mobility reduced spectators.

7.6.2 Evaluation of buildings hosting theatres in Athens in 2004-2009

In 2004, only 27 of the 38 visited theatres from 1984 were still operating and having performances. In these theatres, unfortunately almost no changes regarding Universal Access could be noticed.

One main problem lies in the fact, that most theatres are located in basements. Furthermore, they mostly belong to private owners and thus, seldom applications for State subventions are made or approved. In conclusion, only 7.4% of the visited theatres were accessible for spectators with reduced mobility in 2004 (see tab. 10).

Table 10: Accessibility conditions in 27 theatres in Athens in 2004

As adaptations of theatres lie in the hand of their owners, few private theatres have made their performance halls accessible for wheelchair users until today.

Until 2009, little further changes towards accessibility were made. Only Aliki Theatre and the National Theatre, which were both being renovated in 2004, are now wheelchair-accessible. Furthermore, in Gloria Theatre, there now exists a ramp, which can be placed over the steps if needed.

7.7.1 Evaluation of buildings hosting cinemas in Athens in 1984

The last table of the ΕΠΣ-study analyses cinemas, as another form of entertainment building of public use. The following table (see tab. 11) shows accessibility conditions in 31 cinemas in 1984. Again, the percentage of accessible buildings is very small: only 7 out of 31 cinemas were evaluated very good accessible.

Table 11: Accessibility conditions in 31 cinemas in Athens in 1984 (ΕΠΣ-study)

7.7.2 Evaluation of buildings hosting cinemas in Athens in 2004-2009

Two decades later, 11 of the former cinemas were closed or had changed their function. In the following (see tab. 12) the evaluation of the 20 operating cinemas in 2004 is presented.

Unfortunately, the same problems as discussed with buildings hosting theatres occur here as well. In 2004, only 25% of all visited cinemas were accessible in Athens. This comparison portrays as well, that almost no changes have taken place during those two decades in cinemas – and this is today’s situation as well.

Table 12: Accessibility conditions in 20 cinemas in Athens in 2004
Table 12: Accessibility conditions in 20 cinemas in Athens in 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cinema Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Accessibility Conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adams Cinema 1</td>
<td>123 Street</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attika Cinema</td>
<td>456 Avenue</td>
<td>30 years</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danaos Cinema</td>
<td>789 Boulevard</td>
<td>40 years</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>very good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.7 Overview on accessibility improvements to public buildings in Athens

The overview, which was presented in the precedent sections might have given an almost perfect image as regards the improvement of accessibility conditions in some of Athens’ public buildings until today. If one regards only Universal Access criteria as determined by the ETIE-study, important changes can be remarked in some of the presented building categories (see fig. 3).

The majority of buildings hosting ministries, hospitals and university faculties were evaluated “accessible” in 2009, with the exception of some services that are located in very old, preservable buildings.

However, situation is very different if a glance at entertainment facilities is taken: most of the locations remain inaccessible for people with reduced mobility until today. In contrast to the former categories, in most cases of the entertainment sector it is private owners that have to engage in establishing accessibility to their buildings.

6 Accessibility conditions in Athens today

Regardless the previous figure, the application of Universal Design guidelines during the last years has been rather poor in Greece. Most improvements have been made exclusively for people with reduced mobility and specifically wheelchair-users. All other impairments (such as visual, acoustic or sensual) continue to have almost no accessibility facilitations at all.
However, in 2009, all of the examined ministries were found to be now accessible, “only” two museums continue to have barriers to reach some of their exhibition levels, but unfortunately over 92% of Athens’ theatres and 75% of Athens’ cinemas remain inaccessible for users with mobility impairments even today. And even these data do not reflect reality in Greece’s capital.

Although many efforts can be remarked during the last years in public buildings hosting State services in Greece, constructions often remain bad (e.g. ramps with steep inclinations) and adaptations are rather short-minded (e.g. placing of removable platform on top of steps). Efficiency and functioning in the way it would be helpful for people with disability is often not the result of such undertakings.

«Autonomous» in Greece seems to stand for moving with the help of only 1 person, instead of 4 or 5! Although some efforts can be remarked during the last years, there is no guarantee that a building thought to be “accessible” is really autonomously reachable. The presence of a ramp does not necessarily mean that a wheelchair driver can really use it. Ramp inclinations often exceed the 5-6 degree limit, as they only provide a platform, which is placed on top of steps.

In addition, there is no proper provision for surveillance and maintenance, which leads to the fact, that, for instance, elevators often are out of order, toilets for wheelchair-users are used as storage rooms and special parking lots for wheelchair-users are not kept free!

But in general, the situation in Athens’ buildings with public use, especially those belonging to private owners, is alarming. The precedent analysis of some theatres and cinemas gives the real image of this rather unfriendly city! As buildings are old and performance halls are often located in the basement, adaptations have not been made over the last years. Re-use of traditional and modern architecture has to propose contemporary methods and new suggests should not offend traditional ones [13]. There is no legislative ordinance, which forces existing buildings to become accessible. And even in those few cases, where owners showed some interest to adapt their building, no support or interest on the part of the state has been noted!

However, the positive side is, that more recently built or completely renovated buildings hosting public services and facilities do guarantee accessibility for people with disability and they can be often used autonomously. One famous example is the Athens’ Megaron Mousikis (Μέγαρο Μουσικής Αθηνών), which has been even awarded for its accessibility by the EEC [12]. All Village and Multiplex Cinema Centres are also completely accessible and frequently visited by wheelchair users. Finally, the buildings, which host the private collections at the Vorre Museum and the Jewellery Museum Lalaounis, are accessible, as well.

But, the most important problem remains the fragmentary way in which work is done. No continuity is guaranteed, leading to a piecemeal of adaptations that finally serve nobody, as there is no follow-up in the «chain of accessibility». So far, only few pavements in Athens have curb cuts, which lead people with disability to primarily use the road to move without obstacles. Parking lots for wheelchair users are almost never kept free - and police only gives tickets, if at all, to illegally parked vehicles, instead of ordering their pick up! In general, it seems that people with disability are not expected to move around or use buildings of public use in Greece and first and foremost not on their own!

7 Conclusions

Greece may be an extreme case as portrayed so far, but situation in other European countries is similar, in one way or the other.

The most important problem remains the fragmentary way in which Universal Access is applied. Often, the over-all important continuity is not guaranteed, leading to a piecemeal of adaptations that finally serve nobody, as the follow-up in the chain of accessibility is not available, either by bad architecture or misbehavior of citizens.

In conclusion, social and physical barriers need to be erased on all levels and finally the notion has to prevail, that people with disability have the same right to move around autonomously and wherever they choose to!

References:


