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Accessible Tourism in Athens, a new potential:
Master Thesis

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract στα ελληνικά

Ο Προσβάσιμος τουρισμός ως έννοια εμφανίστηκε για πρώτη φορά στα τέλη της δεκαετίας του 80' σε ένα διεθνές κίνημα που ονομάστηκε "Τουρισμός για Όλους (TAD Project, 2019). Σήμερα, η σημασία του- που πηγάζει από τις Διακηρύξεις για τα Ανθρώπινα Δικαιώματα- έχει αποσαφηνιστεί, καθιστώντας μία αγνοημένη ως τώρα τουριστική αγορά σε μία ταχύτατα αυξανόμενη ευκαιρία, λαμβάνοντας υπόψιν μεταξύ άλλων την παγκόσμια δημογραφική αλλαγή. Η Αθήνα χρησιμοποιήθηκε εδώ ως μελέτη περίπτωσης, όπου προδιαγραφές και προτάσεις έχουν τη δυνατότητα να υπογραμμίσουν τις αδυναμίες προσβασιμότητας στην Αθηναϊκή πρωτεύουσα αλλά και τα πολλά υποσχόμενα πλεονεκτήματα από τον καθολικό σχεδιασμό. Αυτή η ερευνητική προσπάθεια αξιοποίησε δευτερογενή βιβλιογραφικά στοιχεία με τη μέθοδο της ανάλυσης περιεχομένου, συγκρίνοντας τις υπάρχουσες προδιαγραφές, ώστε να ερευνηθεί η υφιστάμενη προσβασιμότητα του τουριστικού προορισμού. Η βιβλιογραφική ανασκόπηση υπέδειξε σε γενικά πλαίσια μία ισχυρή σύσταση υπέρ των προσαρμογών που οφείλουν οι προορισμοί να επιδιώξουν, διασαφηνίζοντας ότι η προσβασιμότητα είναι μία βιώσιμη και αναπόφευκτη προσέγγιση στον τουριστικό τομέα. Τέλος, η βιβλιογραφία υπέδειξε επίσης ένα συμπαγές αλλά πολύ γενικό πλαίσιο προδιαγραφών προσβασιμότητας, ώστε να αξιολογήσουμε εύστοχα το υπάρχον αθηναϊκό πλαίσιο και να υποβάλλουμε προτάσεις ως προς του τι ακριβώς πρέπει να επιδιώξει ο προορισμός.

Keywords: Προσβάσιμος Τουρισμός, πιθανό target group, πρότυπα προσβασιμότητας, Αθήνα- μελέτη περίπτωσης προσβασιμότητας

Abstract

Accessible tourism as a concept appeared for the first time in the late 1980s in an international movement by the name of "Tourism for All" (TAD Project, 2019). Till today, its notion -that originates from Human Rights Declarations- has been clarified, transforming an ignored tourism market into a fast-growing opportunity, taking into consideration among else the global demographic change. Athens was used as a case study, where specifications and recommendations could underline its accessible weaknesses and its potential benefits from designing universal strategies.

This research effort used secondary data, that will be presented in a content analysis mode, comparing existing requirements to indicate the current situation in Athens as a tourism destination. Literature review's results showed generally a strong consensus in favor of accessible implementations that destinations should reach for, clarifying that accessibility is a sustainable and non-avoidable approach in the tourism sector. Indicating the importance of designing for All, literature revealed also a concrete but general framework of accessible standards, in order to evaluate properly an existing athenian accessible framework and propose on what the destination should aim for.

Keywords: Accessible tourism, potential target group, accessibility standards, athenian case study

List of Tables

Introduction

According to recently published data, 10% of the population in Europe has a form of disability, a fact that corresponds nearly to the number of 50 million people. This percentage is estimated to continue to increase as an unavoidable result of the demographic change trends, related to a significant percentage of the elderly over 65 (ENAT, 2007). This fact is a reality that makes accessibility a social ideal "necessary for 40% and convenient for all."

This master thesis will attempt first of all to highlight accessibility as a social concept for designing inclusively for tourism, in order to help perceive people with disabilities also as a potential market for the city of Athens. The whole essay is structured into three main chapters substructured into subcategories. Firstly, in the first chapter, a review of the concept of accessible tourism is attempted, in order to understand its main principles and its beneficiaries. A literature review will allow us, also, to discuss the access needs of potential tourists with disabilities and what constitutes a motivation for them when they travel. This concise chapter intends to shed light on the main physical and also social barriers that may discourage disabled people and hindered persons from enjoying a tourist experience.

Secondly, aiming at the identification of relevant strategies, this thesis will describe the notion of a universal tourism design that emerges as a result of the views of experts in the sector, as a top priority in an inclusive way of acting in tourism. Following the global principles of ethics in tourism, the second subchapter will examine the justified reason for the tourism industry to actively address the increasing needs of people with disabilities around the world, who usually find it challenging to travel. Highlighting the necessity to Design Tourist experiences for All, in an attempt to draft the main guidelines, this second chapter will number good practices of interventions towards accessibility, as applied in several regions of the European Union.

The final chapter will approach the initial hypothesis by studying the case of Athens as a potential tourism destination. It was deemed useful, for these purposes, to present at the beginning a certain amount of information about the European and Greek legal framework related to the requirements of accessibility already in place. Following this initial presentation, it will be attempted to identify the main features of the city of Athens as a tourist destination, emphasizing its traditional character.

The current reality of the Greek capital city will be described also in this chapter, by reviewing the weaknesses in the evaluation of the destination's level of awareness and availability of accessible tourist services. Last but not least, this thesis will propose universal recommendations, taking into consideration good practices of accessibility interventions. The recommendations will be benchmarked against the six dimensions of accessibility that are identified in the literature review, as regarded from a legislative, a human, a biotic, an abiotic, and a relational approach.

Methodology

To pursue the aim of this thesis, which is defined as a primary step to explore several aspects of accessibility tourism as a concept and the related requirements, an attempt to confirm its multilateral benefits and potential was introduced, based on facts and findings from experts and policy documents from around the globe .

An attempt is made to describe this potential using the case of a low-scale accessible tourist destination like Athens, exploring its current accessibility status, and comparing the findings with the universally proposed recommendations and proposals.

The thesis was realized through the use of secondary data, where literature review contributed to the provision of mainly qualitative data, used to form the basis for the mapping of concepts, requirements and other features. Especially concerning the findings on the destination's legal and public policies framework, my internship at the Ministry of Infrastructures and Transport was pretty edifying in order to explore Greece's recent strategy towards accessible tourism.

In order to locate and retrieve the existing data, EU's guidelines were the starting point of this research, primarily focusing on the existing literature that provides a framework for the concept of accessibility in the tourism sector, which emerges as an important human activity. Numerous global journals were reviewed, also with the aim to profile the fast-rising tourism market of disabled and hindered tourists, their needs, their tourist behaviors and the restrictions they face, despite their strong motives to travel. EU and international standards of accessibility were also explored, in order to provide a concrete background for the mapping of the existing requirements and specifications.

Exploring existing requirements in Athens was quite one-dimensional, as policies and strategies are mainly dictated from the state laws and public policies, while Greece in its role as an EU member-country is also committed to implement all legal binding directives and regulations for the EU. Furthermore, standards are recently announced-with the latest greek legal direction to be announced earlier this month- as covid pandemic seriously slowed down ambitious strategic acts. Finally, to critically present the current accessible situation throughout the region, in comparison with the general standards, was even harder, as Greek and European journals and manuals confirm detailed implementations only for the historic-center of Athens. Only a limited number of publications were discovered describing disabled tourists experiences in Athens, a fact that presents an opportunity for future research on destination's accessibility, in an under-researched topic.

Lastly, in order to propose additional interventions, the thesis reached to exploit good practices from EU region and competitive destinations. Attempting a methodological approach of the final content throughout the collected data, the main findings were summarized in a SWOT analysis of the destination's accessibility.

1. Accessible Tourism

1.1 Understanding Accessible tourism

According to European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT, 2010), the concept of accessibility in tourism is defined as a form that "includes processes of cooperation between tourism professionals, which allow people with access needs including mobility, vision, hearing and cognitive disorders, to operate with independence, equality, and dignity through the provision of globally designed products, services, and environments, in terms of tourism." Indeed, perceived as a wider multidimensional idea, accessibility not only envisions enhancing a fair tourist experience for disabled people but it also includes every social group and individual that would benefit from the lifting restrictions, such as the elderly or families with younger children, etc. Furthermore, ECTSAA's (2016) definition of accessible tourism is "about the process of making all tourism offers suitable and easy to use". Actually, it seems that seniors are at the lead of tourists that increasingly demand higher-level quality of accessible tourist destinations and services, a social group that quite often confronts social and biological restrictions (UNWTO, 2016).

In the globe of social inclusion

It is apparent that accessibility originates from the values of social inclusion, in order to advocate against inequality and to ensure social participation in every aspect of activity. Following specifically the symbolic but essential Charter of Human Rights as they are described today (United Nations, 2020), disability in the globe of sustainability tends to be a part of human diversity (Skarstad, 2018), claiming that disability refers mostly to a social construction and that people with disabilities (PwD) are independent human beings with various preferences, motives, skills and needs.

Describing inclusivity in Tourism, accessibility of tourist installations and services could guarantee the right of all people to enjoy leisure (Navarro-García et al., 2015), a feature that is found in the literature review as the concept of "Tourism for All". Indicatively, "Tourism for All" has been chosen as a common message with a friendlier sign to identify a tourist culture that supports social justice and inclusivity but underlines, at the same time, that accessible adaptations in Tourism benefit every

individual. "Tourism for All" can be further defined as Transformative tourism, providing a unique opportunity to engage marginalized groups as clients and employees (Biddulph & Scheyvens, 2018). In addition, as an aspirational ideal, accessible tourism could open a new business potential, a whole new target group/clientele that can enjoy from the outset the benefits of a pleasant tourist experience.

According to Small & Darcy (2010), not only those with access needs can benefit from a universal touristic design, but all users, as a universally designed environment considers on a human-based level, creating a safer and more inclusive reality for all. In fact, accessibility is a requirement that concerns everyone, but we usually become aware of the need when we face restrictions (ENAT, 2007). Realizing the priority of inclusivity, this adaption can be successful if accessibility "is perceived as a complex system of structures and services that need to be available" (Setola et al., 2018).

1.2 Accessible Tourism for whom?

When we consider the number of people that are included in the wide social group of disabled people with chronic or temporary disability, as well as the increase of the elderly population and their family, friends, and caretakers that accompany them, we can better understand the wide range and also the scale in which accessible tourism addresses. Only in Greece, seniors reached till 2011 the number of 2 million people and disabled people summed up to the number of 776 thousand (Kasimati & Ioakeimidis, 2019). ENAT is estimating that the future accessible tourist market has the potential to address the needs of 130 million people all over the world, producing an income of 68 billion euros.

Souca (2010) observes that specifically tourists with disabilities become pretty loyal visitors if they can cover their tourist needs in a more satisfying way. They often take longer holidays than an average tourist if they are able to cover their access needs and spend generally more than a typical traveler. Usually, they prefer to travel along with friends, families, or/and caretakers, eagerly recommending a pleasant destination, with only a small percentage of hindered persons traveling alone with a rather low budget.

1.3 Disable Tourists' Motives and Needs

Aiming to present some of the basic motives that make disabled people travel, a general literature consensus is revealed. Firstly, as tourism is referred to as an important human activity nowadays, people with disabilities or/and with access needs express every intention to travel equally, although they are facing important restrictions (Stankova et al., 2021). They present, also, tourist expectations based on their leisure and social needs, their budget, and their information and accommodation needs, factors that don't differentiate from typical travelers but require various and fundamental changes sometimes.

Reviewers of AT (accessible tourism) are making clear, from an economic point of view, that the supply of tourism services and experiences for All does not meet the demand by people with access needs who wish to travel. Furthermore, enjoyment and special interests are logically confirmed as a top priority that motivates PwD to travel (Mamoon, 2013), with special mention of interest in culture and heritage.

Darcy (1997), in a research article exploring intentions to travel, noted that at least 74% of PwD participants are willing to travel if their whole tourist experience improves. Even more, various impairments do not eliminate or restrict stronger intentions to participate and engage in more outdoor and leisure activities, considering that social discriminations often limits their social life (Chih-Yung, 2010). Actually, PwD (people with disability) feel excluded while expressing tourist desires and expectations that resemble typical tourist behavior and intention (Ieng Loi, 2015).

Devile & Moura (2021) add that people with access needs can be pretty enthusiastic and loyal travelers, if their experience is positive, seeking the opportunity to enrich their social experiences. Also, Chih-Yung (2010), mentions -through a psychosocial observation- that physically disabled people appear usually shyer in research, with lower self-esteem, but at the same time they are eager to recommend a positive tourist experience or participate in social events like festivals which can contribute to their personal growth (Kamyabi & Alipour, 2022).

Lastly, quantitative data show that Tourists with disabilities are more anxious about traveling with overnights, as pursuing suitable accommodation, proper infrastructures or easily comprehensive information can often be a challenge (Dwyer & Darcy, 2011). An unapproachable liability can also be

the general attitude towards diversity or disability, likely one of the most discouraging factors for a person with access needs.

Tourism is more often described through a literature review as an important social activity in our life because everyone seeks the opportunity to satisfy their wish for leisure, exploration, exciting intellectual and physical activities, and for a chance to take care of their mental health. PwD and seniors seem to be quite thorough with the details, prioritizing their biological and psychological needs, due to the restrictions they are facing. So, in order to facilitate a tourist with access needs, stakeholders should prioritize their implementations as well as their services, achieving their strategy step by step (Popiel, 2016).

1.4 Barriers for Disabled Tourists

Eichhorn & Buhalis (2011) are categorizing the plethora of tangible and intangible barriers that restrain the tourist experience for disabled and hindered persons as factors affecting <u>physical access</u> and <u>access to information</u>, as well as <u>attitudinal factors</u>. With the classification of physical barriers in access, researchers refer to an unfriendly environment without accessible tourist infrastructures in transportation, accommodation facilities and attractions, a severe limitation especially for mobility disabilities and impairments,

Additionally, non-accessible information can discourage a potential tourist to plan a trip, especially in a digital era where tourism websites rule and define the primary tourist preparation (Vila et al., 2020). Finally, attitudinal barriers, (Daruwalla & Darcy, 2005) do not only express offensive and prejudicial treatment of a wide social group of tourists but also express the unverbalized stereotypes and behaviors (Popiel, 2016) that stigmatize PwD. Linguistic and oppressive approaches, for example, can alter quite often the tourism experience (Gillovic et al., 2018)

Popiel (2016) proposes, also, a classification of barriers to intrinsic, environmental, and interactive ones, a classification where interior and exterior factors in an individual's life are forming a system of difficulties. Like in the first categories, we can distinguish also tangible characteristics like infrastructures and ecological barriers, as well as intangible ones like accessible information, fair

communication, or empathic behaviors. Particularly within the pre-travel phase, intangible possibilities like suitable access to information can determine whether an individual will fulfill the potential to become an active tourist (Eichhorn et al., 2008)

Nevertheless, reviewers stress that PwD and hindered people represent a heterogeneous social group in tourism research (Kamyabi & Alipour, 2022), with various, different needs and different necessary adaptations. For example, according to Kaganek & Ambroży (2017), younger tourists that wish to feel and act independently, tend to demand suitable equipment to do so. At the same time, seniors would emphasize more on social requirements, like satisfactory service. It is evident that this variety of needs and desires that generally refers to Tourism, generates some prohibiting and some limiting factors that affect each tourist with access needs at a different level (Mckercher & Darcy, 2018). In other words, a prohibiting factor can be inhibitory and restrictive when a specific need is totally excluded, while a limiting factor affects mostly the quality and the type of tourist activities that a traveler with access needs can be engaged with.

2. Designing inclusively/Designing for All

2.1 Global Code of Ethics

Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (GCET) that was acknowledged by UNWTO in 2001 is a "comprehensive set of principles whose purpose is to guide every stakeholder in tourism development". This Global Code does not constitute a legal binding document, but initiates a list of general considerations on ethics in tourism. It is structured in 10 principles, covering the economic, social, cultural, and environmental components of tourism, that are intended to underline the opportunity to use this human activity as a loyal and inclusive ally to improve the lives of all people without exceptions (Camilleri, 2015).

2.2 The potential market of accessible tourism

European Commission (2015), confirms that the European travel market is losing more than 142 billion euros every year, due to the absence of appropriate infrastructure, tourist products and services. Meanwhile, there is an indifference -or at least lack of awareness- in the tourist sector to cultivate an aware and accurate code of behavior toward tourists with disability.

Nevertheless, research indicates that accessible tourism, even though the current monitoring of active PwD and hindered persons in the tourism activity is not satisfactory, could be one of the fastest-growing tourism market segments that could benefit everyone. Navarro-García et al (2015) especially mention the importance of the external image of tourism stakeholders like hoteliers, where a long-term positive perception of their business as accessible could yield a stable increase in income, as well as a positive social impact.

In the EU, accessible tourism demand is estimated to have "contributed 786 billion Euros in terms of total output and 356 billion Euros in terms of gross value added or 394 billion Euros in terms of GDP within the EU" (University of Surrey, 2014). These percentages, generally speaking, correspond to 3% of the total GDP of EU27.

Referring to the implied demographic change that will contribute unavoidably to a higher demand for accessible tourism in the future, the same study from the University of Surrey (2014) underlines a significant growth of potential tourists with access needs if the tourism sector interacts with these fundamental social needs. Through her research, Eichhorn (2014) estimates that even under the present reality, tourism may bring a return on investment within the first year from the point where stakeholders start covering efficiently every access need. Not only many disabled or/and senior tourists are eager to spend for their comfort, but accessibility can harmonically be compatible with every important detail of the customers' information need chain (Eichhorn & Buhalis, 2011). Besides, accessibility is well-recognized as a quite profitable value for tourist companies and stakeholders, as we can securely confirm the increased numbers of disabled people, due to the prolonging of our life expectancy (Rubio-Escuderos et al., 2021).

Dwyer & Darcy (2011) are pointing out that only the method of measuring efficiently the Tourism GVA can effectively indicate the contribution of any tourism market to the tourism sector, as accessibility provides encouraging realities that can affect a product's value. At the same time, tourism which includes culturally and constitutionally every access need can be creative enough to favor disadvantaged groups with disabilities, by making it possible, for example, to employ them in friendlier environments (Genç & Genç, 2017). Giving the chance to the tourism market to address demands, not only enhances social inclusion and responsibility, but Disabled people around the world could participate actively, enriching new business opportunities (Popiel, 2016).

Rebstock (2017) in three research scenarios of different levels of access improvements in the EU, exposes an increase of economic benefits in the region of 18% to nearly 40%, while people with access needs tend through the study to travel around the EU in a markedly higher scale. We could mark, additionally, an estimated increase in creating new job opportunities, generated by Tourism for All. The World Tourism Organization (and Fundación ACS, 2015) clarify that it is already an increasing market, with a high level of demand. Accessible tourism can innovatively boost the destination brand and image, offering new marketing and social concepts and ideas to differentiate tourist products and services or find solutions for non-sustainable problems like seasonality and mass tourism in over-saturated destinations. Finally, adopting a universal design strategy can enlarge

the target markets in a more sustainable way, forming accessibility into a competitive concept for a destination or a tourist experience (Michopoulou et al., 2015).

2.3 Universal Design/Designing for All

Designing for All, in theory, proposes universal access for everyone to numerous and various services and products (Deffner, 2015), with the basic purpose of minimizing the exclusive assistive differentiations needed before orienting a tourist experience. As a "Universal design is the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible" (Papamichail, 2015), there is the condition that every aspect of the production chain linked to the tourism experience must be comprehensive (UNWTO, 2016) and approach every potential implicant in a pleasant and understanding manner. With the aim to simplify and enrich our personal life into traveling, a design addressing All ambitions to eliminate every physical and social limitation along the way (UNWTO, 2016).

Designing an inclusive and universal tourist system in order to take into account from the outset every access need can be a perplexing but necessary priority. It is also a chain-based system (Deffner, 2015), where legislative, economic and social networks must work and correlate properly without dysfunctions, implementing principles and innovative ideas at the same time. Embracing an approach that benefits everyone, reassuring everyone's ability to enjoy a tourist experience, we are reinforcing the necessity for action to produce and offer an accessible environment that can be comfortable (Rebstock, 2017), without exclusions. In other words, reviewers claim that we need mainstream and inclusive tourist products, that consider a wide range of different participants, with various and understandable access needs (Papamichail, 2015).

Reviewing the notion of a universal design, the process of Design for All in Tourism is bound to express seven inclusive principles (UNWTO, 2016), the equitable use of a product or experience, its flexibility in use, and the idea of simplicity. Additionally, every piece of information must be perceivable, a tourist environment must present a tolerance of error, due to safety reasons, as well as a tourist "product" requires low physical effort and be calculated correctly concerning its Size and Space for Approach and Use (Papamichail, 2015).

Deepening promptly into these principles (UNWTO, 2016), managing the equitable use, a design should be useful and appealing to diverse people with various needs, without characterizing appropriate or not users. The same design should be flexible in use, in order to adapt to various and sometimes contradictory needs and abilities. To be simpler to use could include different levels of knowledge and processing of new given information, avoiding fancy and unnecessary complexity. It is also vital to avoid non perceptible information, as the design transfers essential details and must be communicated in various ways of understanding and communication.

Design must be reassuring through its function, limiting risks and hazards for the user's physical and mental health and enjoyment. Also, users should be comfortable engaging with the universal design without having to exceed their physical strength. Last but not least, in order to use a product, tourism destinations should be approachable, taking into consideration every appropriate size and space needed by people with access needs to use with dignity through potential equipment or assistance.

Polyzos (2020) is initiating also different levels of accessibility through this universal management, referring to physical access, to perceived and appropriating access, as accessibility does not for sure refer only to infrastructure, but has to do with feasible experiences, services, and social activities in various environments, providing the opportunity for someone to participate independently (Deffner, 2015).

Polat (2016), finally, notes the four stages for stakeholders to implement a universal tourist strategy as awareness phase to understand the deficiency and as starting phase to initiate a design. In the developing phase of accessible tourism, mechanisms of evaluation must optimize the execution, in order to consolidate every good and inclusive practice.

2.4 Holistic framework of accessibility's requirements

Kovac (2020) into "Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act" proposes a classification in 5 standards:

The Information and Communications Standards

In order for organizations and the public sector to provide accessible formats, they should design from the outset websites and services, or offer alternate formats compatible with the official design. As for an inclusive information, firstly, there are ways of presenting printed, written or visual material so that people with print disabilities can access it. Moreover, alterations can address to people with disabilities with sensory disabilities or/and communication needs.

The Employment Standards

It can be useful to engage PwD early to the destination development, in order to integrate their experiences and recommendations during the process (Zsarnoczky, 2017). Accessible information can give, also, to all employees the appropriate tools to achieve their goals, do their jobs well and offer their diverse talents to workplace activities and culture.

The Transportation Standards

As transportation can be crucial to enjoy a tourist experience, general requirements describe first of all technical standards that need to be fulfilled. These technical requirements adapt universal design that concerns physical accessibility in every piece of built infrastructure, but also include accessible information and communication formats.

The Design of Public Spaces Standards

Independent exploration throughout the destination, including enjoyment in public spaces also requires appropriate signage for all, providing various modes of operations. Analyzing the challenging unhindered and free pedestrian and special vehicle circulation, we should refer promptly to important standards (Yılmaz, 2018).

Pedestrian Roads:

- Accessible roads do not include any elevation difference, stair, footstep or escalator.
- For the visually impaired people guided roads have to be applied on the pedestrian roads.
- The elevation difference between the pedestrian way and the vehicle way must be a maximum of 15 centimeters.
- For the visually impaired people on the pedestrian ways, the guiding roads at least 50 centimeters away from the vehicle road have to be placed.
- The guiding roads have to be placed on a pure and acceptable route and have to be away from the manhole and drainage canals.
- For the usage of all disabled people, the material of guiding roads have to be on the same level with the ground pavement.

Ramps:

- The slope of all of the ramps have to be 5 % for the independent usage of wheelchair users.
- The clean width of the ramps has to be a minimum 91.5 centimeters. At the starting and finishing parts of the ramps there must be an empty space left minimum 152.5cm x 152.5 cm. for the movement of the wheelchair user.
- The distance that the wheelchair user can go straight is 9 meters. In the ramps that are longer than 9 meters, platforms have to be placed at a minimum in 152 .5 centimeters long.

Stairs:

- The width of the stair has to be a minimum 91.5 centimeters which is the minimum dimension for the passage of wheelchair users.
- The common stair and platform widths in housing units have to be minimum 120 centimeters, in public buildings the dimensions have to be minimum 150 centimeters.
- For the comfortable usage of everyone after 8 – 10 footstep a platform has to be placed in staircases. At the starting, finishing and platforms sensible stimulating surfaces minimum 60 centimeters in width have to be applied.
- In order to ease the visibility and the prevention of slippery, the color of the step tips has to be different from the main color of the stair and has to be marked with a perceptible color.

- The stair step width has to be minimum 28 centimeters, the height of the step has to be maximum 16 centimeters for the disabled people; for the other situations it can be maximum 18 centimeters.

Balustrades:

- Balustrades, parapets and holders have to be placed in places where people in need of them like passageways, stairs and ramps.
- Balustrades have to be placed 30 centimeters away from the starting and ending points of the stairs and ramps and have to continue all along the stairs. In ramps, instead of balustrades, protective borders at least 5 centimeters high can be used.

Entrances and Exits:

- For the passage ways, ramps, stairs, entrance doors, information and warning boards required dimensions have to be used. In front of the entrances space for the movement of wheelchair users has to be provided.
- If there is carpet on the ground floor, the material has to be fixed on the ground securely. The hair or the texture of the materials thickness must not be more than 13 mm.

Vehicle Approach:

- In mass transportation or private car use, all of the users' approach to the vehicle, to get on and out of the car, needs an adequate space which is very important. For the disabled people the reserved space for them to see the vehicle, approach, to get on and out of the car has to be cleared from all of the obstacles.
- In built environments, different kinds of applications have to be considered for the physical, visual and aural impaired individuals. For example, for a wheelchair user an efficient area has to be provided; for a visually impaired individual stimulating surfaces on the ground and aural stimuli systems are needed; for the audial impaired people visual stimulating systems can be applied.

- In between the pedestrian way and road, ramps should be constructed for the crossing. At the transition areas and at the other used ramps on the roads have to have a maximum 5 % slope.

Vehicle Parking Areas:

- Vehicle parking areas have to be placed closer to the entrance and open to an accessible route.
- In the transition points from parking areas to pedestrian roads, there must not be any level difference preventing the crossing.

Stops:

- Stops have to be protective from the weather conditions depending on the existing region. Inside the stops there must be seating places, holding bars have to be fixed in needed sections and an empty space must be left for the parking of a wheelchair.
- At the stops, audible and written (the writings may be embossed) information and warnings related to the mass transportation service has to be found.
- When mass transportation vehicles approach the stop, a direct transfer has to be provided without any level difference.

The Customer Service Standards

Customer service could potentially include every aspect of products and services in the tourism sector. Indicatively, this thesis will present primarily requirements that can moderate accommodations into accessible environments, referring to every space within.

Crucially, a European standard for digital accessibility with the coded number of EN 301 549 (ETSI Standards, 2021) was able to summarize also requirements for information and communications technology to be accessible for people with disabilities. In reality, ICT products and services can be literally any device, software, or equipment that helps people adapt their environment as:

- Computers and operating systems

- Websites

- ATMs, ticketing and check-in machines

- Smartphones

- TV equipment related to digital television services

- Telephony services and related equipment

- Access to audio-visual media services such as television broadcast and related consumer equipment

- Banking services

- e-books

- e-commerce

Lastly, friendly and aware personnel's attitudes are considered a non-negotiable prerequisite. As such, proper training is a highly underlined requirement.

Table 1. Standards Review

Information and Communications Standards	Employment Standards	Transportation Standards	Design of Public Spaces Standards	Customer Service Standards
Information Braille Large print Accessible digital files, such as: Html Microsoft Word Audio	Information should include Documents or announcements available to every worker	Information and Communication formats Audible and visual announcements Pre-boarding announcements On-board announcements Verbal announcements	Circulation Pedestrian Roads Ramps Stairs Balustrades, parapets and holders	Accommodations Accessible entrance Elevators to all floors Access to reception, pool or bar areas Clear signage Visual alarms Complete access through the entire building

Text transcripts of visual or audio information		Visual signage		Accessible WC
<u>Communication supports</u> Sign language interpretation Writing, email, or texting Captions Audio description Assistive listening systems Augmentative or alternative communication devices, including: Letter, word, or picture boards Devices that convert text to speech Reading aloud Rephrasing in clear language	<u>Tools in dispose of employees, such as:</u> Presentations or videos Handouts or discussions at meetings Manuals or guidelines	<u>Technical Standards</u> Lifting devices Steps Grab bars and handrails Floor surfaces Lighting Signage Stop-requests and emergency response controls	<u>Transportations</u> Vehicle Approach Vehicle Parking Areas Transition points Stops	<u>Requirements for ICT products and services</u> Usage without vision -at least one non-visual mode of operation Usage with limited vision -features that aid their limited vision Usage without perception of color -operation that does not require user's perception of color Usage without hearing - at least one non-hearing mode of operation Usage with limited hearing -enhanced audio features Usage with no or limited vocal capability - at least one mode of operation that does not require vocal output Usage with limited manipulation or strength

				- features that enable users to operate without requiring manipulation, simultaneous action or hand strength Usage with limited reach -all the elements required for operation will need to be within reach of all users Minimize photosensitive seizure triggers - at least one mode of operation that minimizes the potential for triggering photosensitive seizures. Usage with limited cognition, language or learning - features and/or presentation that makes it simpler and easier to understand, operate and use.
	Types of Accessible Formats Braille Large Print Screen Readers Verbal Description Communication Supports			Attitudes of staff Aware and proper training

	<u>Types of Communication Supports</u> Sign Language Speechreading Captions and Text Transcripts Assistive Listening Devices Telephones Communication Devices			

2.5 Good practices/ Review

Serrat (2017) defines good practices as implemented proposals, tried and shown to work positively somehow. It was chosen in this essay to present some indicatively good accessible actions or strategic design first of all to see actualized fragments of universal designing. Counting benefits from taking into consideration examples from good practices within the concept of Tourism for All, we have the opportunity to replace misconceptions and inefficient actions, by improving services. We can use these examples also to pattern or methodologically write down our first steps towards higher performances in the tourist sector. On purpose, every good practice comes from regions in the EU's territory.

<u>Research and its missing pieces</u>

Accessible tourism tends to be a quite recent popular field study, as monitoring or providing statistics specifically about Tourists with disabilities is practiced or reviewed with uncertainty. In a research project from 2000-2009, co-funded by the EU Commission and the Turkish Government, MEDRA attempted to generate illuminating data about the participation of Disabled people in tourist

activities in two cities, Drama in North Greece and Mersin in Turkey. Findings from this project indicated the mapping of needs of tourists with disabilities, explored relative legislations, researched good practices, proposed policy improvements to enhance accessibility in Mersin and Drama, and structured suggestions to reform inaccessible infrastructures. Importantly, the project underlined the necessity to train and motivate every stakeholder (Naniopoulos, 2016).

Environmental adaptations

National parks, Hiking for all, and Mountain events

Following a full and detailed Italian framework for accessibility in public areas, several Italian national parks have adopted guidelines to be able to offer services to visitors (Cappelletti et al., 2019). Hoping to form accessible areas and paths connecting the main protected area, nearly 10 to 24 national parks in Italy have followed implementations to create accessible experiences within their areas. We should refer primarily to walkways and an underwater path that can service people with motor impairments, offering the opportunity to walk by nature, be able to enjoy the parks' idyllic environment. We could distinguish, also, special education workshops and programs like flowering growth, available and specialized for PwD with sensory and intellectual disabilities. Additionally, there are adaptations concerning aspects of differentiating ways of information, like texts in braille and road paths that connect the park environment with the valuable for the Mediterranean destination beach environment.

With the inspiring concept of "Hiking for all", Spanish Mallorca in order to ensure autonomous but safe transportation throughout natural pathways, funded electrical accessible vehicles (UNWTO, 2021). Stakeholders within the destination also attended specialized training programs in order to address sustainability to Tourists and Visitors with disabilities. We can also mention that the destination achieved in a pro-covid era to fully engage more than 200 visitors with disabilities to their hiking guided tours.

Culture and Museum access

According to the law regulations, in Poland newly erected buildings and public spaces must be accessible to persons with hearing, visual, and motor impairments. Although 70% of the attraction in the country are still inaccessible, the article presents applied adaptations that enhance accessibility in historic districts of Cracow and Warsaw, including numerous 'best practice' recommendations (Ostrowska-Tryzno & Pawlikowska-Piechotka, 2016). Importantly, a significant minority of museums obtained accessible or demi-accessible entrances, as well as accessible exhibitions and educative programs for children and visitors with motor and intellectual disabilities.

A consistently accessible destination

Arona in Spain can be defined as a well-known accessible destination from its tourist beginning (Arona, 2015), as the inclusive perception was part of the initial tourist policy. It also seems to follow a consistent and ongoing tourist plan. Referring to the stakeholders, the Tourism Board of the Region takes responsibility to promote training projects towards accessibility, and cultivating social awareness. Indeed, increasing demand for accessible services encourages itself to further improve facilities and infrastructures. Arona also took into consideration success stories like Scotland or Valencia, developing critically their example.

The importance of regional regulations

Paris, and its central district Paris Île-de-France, literally the most popular tourist destination, offers a variety of exquisite tourist attractions (European Commission, 2015). In this case study, we can notice a concrete example of regulations that find general approval by stakeholders. Firstly, legislation in Paris awarded businesses with a handicap label, in an attempt to inspire awareness and reinforce the implicants that improve and apply accessibility implementations. Regional Board also declared its intentions clearly with the purpose to support every stakeholder that adopted an inclusive approach.

Design for locals

Stockholm, as a rare but interesting example, does not identify itself as an accessible tourism destination. More surprisingly, the city promoted regulations to widen its accessibility under the service of its locals. Although it lacks till today a marketing-oriented plan to advertise its valuable assets, Stockholm (European Commission, 2015) seemed unaware till a while ago about the importance of informative access for tourists with disabilities, emphasizing eliminating physical obstacles and improving everyday accessible infrastructure in shops, accommodations, and restaurants.

Universal urban design

London is considered a profound case study of inclusivity in its tourist strategy. Its vision became feasible with legislation among other policies, being able to increase its accessibility scale impressively over the last decade (European Commission, 2015). In the field of its successful marketing, the UK insisted on creating a single promotional organization for London in order to communicate its goals. Nevertheless, through legislation mentioned before, London managed to change the entire chain supply of tourism, successfully establishing a positive "joined thinking" for a quite large region, establishing accessibility as a mainstream idea.

Slovenia on the other hand offers a fragmented case (European Commission, 2015). We can't talk according to the review of this case study about a persistent or universal tourist plan. We should mention although excellent functioning public transportation could be included easily in a wider strategy. Austria as well, with an example from Schönbrunn, presents as well satisfying access to its center, also providing tourists with a variety of technological systems as allies to fulfilling informative access (European Commission, 2015).

Lastly, Frankfurt's Tourist and Congress Board in Germany is dedicated to eliminating accessibility barriers for people with disabilities. They aimed according to the assessment of this case study to create loyal visitors among people with disabilities, aiming at the same to its positive image and credibility to ensure a comfortable tourist experience (European Commission, 2015).

Table 2. Good Practices Review

Good practice towards accessible cities	Destination	Interventions/Adaptations/Design
Research and its missing pieces	Cities in Turkey and Greece	Project MEDRA
Environmental adaptations	Italy Mallorca, Spain	Italian National Parks-interventions "Hiking for All"
Culture and Museum access	Cracow and Warsaw, Poland	Accessible or demi-accessible entrances, Accessible exhibitions Educational programs for children and visitors with motor and intellectual disabilities.
A consistently accessible destination	Arona, Spain	Tourism Board of the Region Training projects Improving services
The importance of regional regulations	Paris, Île de France	Regional Board Disability Business labeling
Design for locals	Stockholm, Sweden	Improving everyday labeling infrastructures
Universal urban design	London, UK	Universal Legislation
	Slovenia	Excellent public transport system
	Schönbrunn, Austria	Technology
	Frankfurt, Germany	Positive and accessible destination's image

3.The case of Athens

3.1 EU and Greek legal framework

General EU legal framework

Exploring the EU's legal framework, as a field with essential policies, strategies, and guidelines for the tourism industry in Greece, we can distinctly clear regulations about accessibility. Primarily, paving the way through the global findings and agreements, the Council of Europe favors passionately every aspect of inclusive economic and social activity towards a disadvantaged social group. In Tourism, regulations promote, among other things, transformative implementations in infrastructures and transportation.

Additionally, the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was founded in 2007 mainly to safeguard and reassure the correct and just expression of all human rights and freedoms of Disabled People (World Tourism Organization and Fundación ACS, 2015). With the fundamental principle of non negotiable social equality, Article 30 clearly declares the unrestricted participation for every individual in culture, leisure, and physical activity, a convention that is legally protected in every state party like Greece.

Critically, the EU's legislation framework provides, in an illuminating way, the state parties mostly with guidelines and technical standards. Like in the field of human rights, nations play a vital role to support any social group at disadvantage and designing political and social strategies, while EUs has legally no competence on the subject of tourism (ENAT, 2007). Surely, the internal market within the European Union that allows a free movement of movements and products surely can impose and promote requirements and conditions towards accessibility, but obligations differentiate often from state party to state party, with the national laws to be responsible for accurate implementations (Bekiaris at al., 2018).

*The European Accessibility ACT (2015-2018)

European Accessibility ACT underlined common accessibility requirements covering products and services across the EU, legally for the first time. It constitutes a proposal for a law that would make many products and services in the European Union (EU) more accessible for persons with disabilities. Importantly, the proposed Accessibility Act takes the form of a Directive, which is legally binding.

In a minimum description of requirements on accessibility, in reality achieved to include only a limited range of products, such as computers, smartphones, TVs, ATMs, payment terminals, e-books, e-readers, websites and mobile applications of private companies and ticket machines. It also initiated the accessible version of 112-emergency number and telephony services. Critically, it excluded a binding document for transport, microenterprises that provide services, household appliances or any obligation on accessible buildings and infrastructure throughout the state-parties in the EU.

*European Disability Strategy 2010-2020

This strategy is structured in eight areas for joint action between the EU and the Member States. i.e., accessibility, participation, equality, employment, education and training, social protection, health, and external action (TAD Project, 2019). It specifically aims at breaking down the barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from participating in society on an equal basis.

General Greek legal framework

Legally speaking, in Greece, rights of people with disabilities are constitutionally guaranteed, reinforced by both centralized and regional provisions. According to Greek law (Law 4067/2012, paragraph 2) accessibility is clearly a top social priority in theory, fighting against discriminations and promoting the importance of physical, ecological, and virtual infrastructures in public and private areas, in an inclusive strategic plan (Michopoulou, 2015).

Specifically for the accommodation and hospitality sector, Law 2831/2000 (General Building Regulation) progressively makes it mandatory to install special conditions for buildings and services

to respect and enhance disability, while recent laws define specific hotels' regulations where accessibility is counted in the star evaluation system. Finally, according to Ministerial Decision 216 Article 5 (2015), the minimum number of rooms for people with disabilities in hotels is set at 5% of the total capacity of the facility. The application of this rate is obligatory until the number five total rooms for disabled persons (Dimou & Velissariou, 2016).

The Greek National Tourist Organization's Strategic Marketing and Promotion Plan 2014-2015-2016 progressively took an interest in senior tourism and proposed product development and suitable City Breaks (European Commission, 2015). Moreover, the Athens Development and Destination Management Agency also expressed its interest, declaring its purpose to occupy requirements and conditions to enhance accessible tourism strategies. A challenge would be to integrate these guidelines into a fair supply chain to improve inclusive services in Athens. Finally, a national tourism framework strategy for 2020 proposed by SETE, by Hellenic Association of Tourism Enterprises, and by Athens Hoteliers' Association included marketing policies and strategies that take into consideration people with access needs and seniors as potential and respected markets.

*National Strategic Action Plan for People with Disabilities/Commitments (Ministry of State, 2020).

- Develop new tourist products and services to promote accessible tourism in Greece.
- Engage more tourist destinations to the European Network for Accessible Tourism.
- Enhance tourist businesses and destinations' certification as "Accessible".
- Mapping the number of accessible accommodations and businesses.
- Mapping tourists with disabilities.
- Enrich legal framework about special Interest Tourism, adding provisions about Accessible Tourism
- Digital mapping accessible destinations, in collaboration with Regional Government, updating and improving accessibility of GNTO's (Greek National Tourism Organization) website.
- Number of Acts about Tourism Education.
- Legal provisions about pets' and stray animal's rights.

- Create Volunteers' Network about Accessible Tourism, increase its numbers.

3.2 Athens as a destination

The tourism industry in Greece in terms of value tends to be the most promising sector (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2014). Its capital Athens reached 41st place in 2019 among the most popular destinations in the world, implying the importance of tourism as well in the wider region of Attica and its historic center (worlddata.info). In the context of tourism destination products, traditionally and nearly stereotypically (Karachalis, 2015) Athens offers a unique heritage experience, based on its emblematic archaeological sites and museums like the Acropolis, combined with the double concept of "sun and beach holidays".

Research studies remind us that even in a post-covid tourism era city of Athens managed to maintain its competitiveness thanks to its multifaceted experiences like culture, an all-day available variety of food options, natural paths in the wider region, seaside tourism, and a plethora of different accommodations (INSETE INTELLIGENCE, 2022). Summer seasonality generally in Greece remains also a tourism reality, even though smooth winter may seem appealing throughout the energy crisis in Europe. Finally, the city as an urban destination receives in some studies positive affirmation concerning its general indicators of tourist satisfaction, such as interesting, friendly, exciting, distinct, and joyful, but there is not much about its responsible or considerate social features (Vitouladiti et al., 2018).

In 2021, the Regional Board of Attica, following the state law 4875/2021 and in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, established for the first time a Regional DMMO. At this point, the governor referred to the role of the new "Metropolitan Attica SA" as a mediator between the public and private tourism sectors throughout the regional economic development (SETE, 2022).

3.3 Current accessible reality and interventions

There is a significant lack of studies that can estimate precisely the level of accessibility in Athens (Kasimati & Ioakeimidis, 2019), as only the historical center of the city can be described with a detailed plan of adaptations (European Commission, 2015). Through every general information that we can find in greek journals, we can talk about the absence of a holistic design and a legal framework that only recently is trying to take interest in accessibility throughout the region.

Despite its economic safety and guaranteed financial success from steadfast products, the tourism industry and tourist experience in Athens were not evaluated positively in the scale of accessibility, especially throughout the previous decade. According to Ikkos (2006), accessible tourism in Greece appears quite problematic. Especially in the matter of attractions, public transport, and accessibility, the situation is far away from inclusive requirements.

Kasimati & Ioakeimidis (2019) confirm that accessible tourist demand remains limited in Greece in the absence of appropriate infrastructure and easy access to public transport, except from the existing subway stops. The lack of easy accessibility in public transportation is the most discouraging factor in making a trip for a disabled person with motor impairments. Cultural hubs and points of interest are accessible usually to some extent and hotels offer easy access to private services, but do not take into consideration easy access to communal facilities, limiting opportunities to socially move independently. Restricting a large number of visitors from the outset of their intention to travel may also be a problematic fact, as Greece and Athens lack valid and accessible information that can be found easily on the internet or physically at special meeting points. Moreover, the greek tourism industry should assimilate the necessity to connect experiences, by giving the possibility to a disabled tourist or a hindered senior to explore facilities and extra tourist services nearby the area that may offer individual accessible features.

Understanding the weaknesses, Vogel (2006) explains that the tourist industry may be unaware of accessible tourism for three main reasons. A significant amount of people, still in the perception of forced normalization, do not feel comfortable around people with disabilities, as social stigma remains alive. Secondly, there is a misconception that accessible tourism can attract a limited market, and lastly, many stakeholders are unaware but hesitant to act and work in a "disrespectful" way around PwD. Researching the priority to improve physical, virtual, and communicative infrastructures that can enhance accessibility, we should consider an urban destination not only as

a system of roads and transports but also a living area where a tourist can sleep and rest comfortably, can explore to find local shops and restaurants, can enjoy or discover its personality through culture and interesting sites (Kasimati & Ioakeimidis, 2019).

The Athenian historic center's case

Despite the previous conditions, contrasting to a smooth and mobility-friendly city environment for PwD and the elderly, Athens historical center presented innovative implementations that were fulfilled 18 years ago, during one of the most optimistic and prosperous eras for Modern Greece, when Athens would welcome the Olympics and Paralympics Games. In terms of accessibility, hosting the Olympic and Paralympic Institution would be a catalytic event that enabled the Greek state and the mayor to bend any reactions (Michopoulou, 2015). We can easily see today the legacy of these implementations in the accessible pedestrian environment that rounds the hill of Acropolis, an environment framed by an advanced public transport network. Greece obtained for the first time a highly functioning and universally designed subway, with art and cultural exhibits at the stations, accompanied by new buses and an electric superficial tramline which connected the center with the Athenian coastline (European Commission, 2015). Archaeologists initiated for the pedestrian street to have a cobblestone aesthetic, giving a traditional character, without thought offering a smoother part in the walkway. The walkway also contains a continuous tactile route for blind people.

Another ambitious idea was the radical cultural and geographical "Unification of the Archaeological Sites", in a city center that suffered from heavy traffic and transformed into a tourist meeting point of heritage. In terms of accessibility, an exterior lift to access the Athens Acropolis -an emblematic archaeological site for Greece- as an innovative installation initiated every serious talk in Greece around accessibility in archaeological monuments and outdoor environments. The idea of the lift's installation was executed as a reversible intervention, with respect to the archaeological environment.

More than ten years after the Olympic and Paralympic Games, the Greek National Tourism Organization has created projects, under the validation of state law 4030/2011 that obliged hotel accommodations to ensure accessible conditions (Michopoulou, 2015). Their premises are granted

with a special signal sign, as an evidential application of the law. Additionally, till today, under an annual "Tourism for All" program/subsidy, the greek state provides for every individual with a disability over 67% and their protective members eight days of vacation, without restrictions in terms of income-related criteria.

3.4 Findings

Table 3. Destination's Accessibility Review

General Standards	Classification	Athenian framework	Stakeholder
*The Design of Public Spaces Standards	**Physical planning and accessibility**	OGG Law5045/B/2021 a. Access to surrounding area -accessible directionals with minimum acceptable width of 0,90m and preferable width of 1,30m till the door entrance of the building. -special parking spots for vehicles of people with disabilities to a percentage of 5% of the overall number of parking spots -Accessible directional signing from the main building entrance till the accessible entrance, if they are not the same b. Access to the entrance -accessible entrance -accessible direction from the door entrance to the elevator with minimum acceptable width of 0,90m with wheelchair maneuver space -accessible reception area, if it is required from the technical study	Greek government OGG Law5045/B/2021

		-accessible informative signage (wall relief or in braille, relief maquette, relief maps etc) c. Horizontal Circulation -accessible directions in the building from and to all the spaces/entrances/elevators/hoists with minimum width of 0,90m with prediction of wheelchair maneuver spaces at the same time -door entrances with minimum acceptable width of 0,90m -color contradictions between floor-wall, wall-door of accessible directions -anti-slip stable floor, non-reflective, that can facilitate whleelchair user's and hindered person's circulation -appropriate lighting -accessible signage d. Vertical Circulation -accessible elevator προσβάσιμος ανελκυστήρας, -accessible stairs of suitable requirements -appropriate lighting e. Accessible Services -accessible hygiene facilities in a 5% of the overall number of the commune facilities -accessible signage	

		-accessible emergency directions and accessible waiting spaces	
		a. Accessible sidewalks/pedestrian streets/roads of light circulation/squares	
		-prediction of pedestrian and blind zones	
		-creation of flat, smooth, continual and stable surfaces	
		-plantation out of the pedestrian zone	
		-urban equipment's installation out of the pedestrian zone	
		-no installation of railings, pillars and general barriers vertically to pedestrian circulation	
		-prediction of accessible signage	
		b. Accessible pedestrian passages	
		-prediction for appropriate ramps	
		c. Accessible urban Green areas/Parcs	
		-prediction for free pedestrian circulation zone	
		-prediction for blind zone or guidance systems for visually disabled people	
		-prediction for accessible public hygiene facilities	
		-prediction for access to every built infrastructure	
		-prediction for accessible signage	

		d. Accessible Spaces -prediction for appropriate linkage with ramp between parking space with the existing sidewalk -prediction for signage of available special parking spots OGG Law6213/B/22 -emphasizing to specify every public space that need to be accessible -initiating the usage of mechanic, technological and "smart"adaptations -interventions that don't limit free pedestrian circulation -disclaimers for technical standards National Strategic Act for People with Disabilities' Rights/Commitments 1.Conditions for improving accessibility and physical access to urban area 2. Ensure universal access to every built infrastructure of transport sector 3. Promote free urban circulation 4. Intensify monitoring and awareness acts to ensure free circulation for all 5. Ensure access to ships and air transports	OGG Law6213/B/22 National Strategic Act for People with Disabilities' Rights

*The Employment Standards	**Equal Treatment & Training**	Law 4443/2016 prohibits every discrimination due to religious or other beliefs, disability or impairment, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, providing protection: ● to general terms of employment and hiring ● to conditions of employment ● to earnings and redundancies ● to promotion ● to trade union activity ● to education and professional training National strategic Action Plan for People with Disabilities 1.Integrate the concept of disability and accessibility to typical Tourism Training and Education 2. Integrate special Unit to Tourism Studies Regulations of Advanced (Higher) Schools of Tourism Education, of Institutes of Vocational Training and programs of continuing education on Tourism. InclusiveGreece Team Accessible Tourism Consulting International Certification Employees' Training on Accessible Tourism	Greek legal framework Law 4443/2016 National strategic Action Plan for People with Disabilities https://www.inclusivegreece.com/

*The Customer Service Standards *The Transportation Standards	**Travel**	Accessible subway/trams and taxis Difficult horizontal and free circulation throughout the city Accessible but unknown website of public transportation's information	Public Transport
*The Customer Service Standards	**Information/ Organizations dedicated to tourism for disabled people**	Necessary accessibility information for European destinations Recommendable heritage routes for people with motor disabilities Heritage and Routes for motor and visual impairments	Disabled Access in Athens (sagetraveling.com) Wheelchair Accessible Athens | The Official Athens Guide (thisisathens.org) https://accessibleroutes.thisisathens.org/en/

Table 4. Destination's SWOT analysis

Following the findings, we could finally initiate a destination's evaluation throughout an accessible roadmap, using a SWOT analysis model:

Strengths	Weaknesses
● A modern and overall accessible subway that continues to expand ● New legislation and policies towards disability protection ● A carefully designed historic center ● Accessible heritage routes near the city's center	● Hilly environment ● Inaccessible communal facilities ● Inaccessible or unknown ICT technology ● Heavy traffic ● Overcrowded public transport ● Limited legislative framework that concerns mainly motor disability
Opportunities	**Threats**
● Expand the tourist interest throughout Attica ● Update locals' quality of life ● Enhance seasonality through accessible tourism	● Further burden environmentally an overcongested city center ● Promote the city, without having resolved the problem of today's fragmental accessibility

● Enhance sustainability through accessible policies and strategies	● Consider disabled tourism as another isolated category of special interest tourism, instead of promoting integration

3.4 Design, inclusive proposals

Tite-Cunalata et al. (2021), in order to describe a sustainable management of an accessible destination, proposes six essential dimensions, a human, a legislative, a technological, a biotic, an abiotic, and a relational approach. In the case of Athens, we could try and propose implementations through the prism of these indicated dimensions. Before developing each aspect, it is essential to comment on Athens' geography and expansion, keeping in mind that every accessible intervention is confined around the city's historical center, which has already become an overcrowded tourist hub. Wider Attica region has at its disposal differentiated assets like mountainous paths, exquisite heritage sites from various historical periods, and museums of special interest around the city, except the well-recognized classical ones. From the aspect of sustainability, an accessible wider area should pursue finding new solutions to address seasonality and tourism meeting points throughout a region of nearly 5 million habitants.

<u>Legislative</u>

Greece's legal framework is characterized by strict-based centralized management, especially when we consider accessible public transportation that can service every tourist's needs. Every regional or private initiative must generally be approved by the state's government and responsible ministries in order for it to be horizontally or successfully implemented. While the expansion of the contemporary, high-functioning and fully accessible subway attempts to expand significantly but slowly, in order to decongest overpopulated areas, corners in the city that could develop a tourist interest are serviced only with buses of mediocre requirements of accessibility. Even without the dire entrance into buses, digital information and applications about arrivals are not easy to find through international sights. Universally approaching the traffic issue in the City, as well as its environmental consequences, Athens should move into the phase of awareness, providing motives and high-quality public transport to limit this vast abuse of private vehicles.

Regarding the significant attitudinal barriers already mentioned, and which tourists with disabilities and access needs are currently facing, we could seek more viable solutions through the proper education of employees throughout the tourism industry. For example, in Greece and in its capital, where most universities or professional schools related to tourism are based, analytical programs of studies should include universal design principle, according to the aspects or perspectives of professional approach. The Greek Ministry of Education generally also inspects analytical programs from private studies in tourism and services-related sectors.

Human

With a human approach, reviewers include indicators that respond to human behaviors and attitudes around disability and normalization. Considering potential inclusive proposals, the literature underlined the importance of adopting a positive language and attitude for every client and visitor in the tourism industry. From all the stakeholders, at the core of this social change are its own people, people who work in private tourist businesses, hoteliers, people at museums and heritage sites, and everyone that serves, accommodates, or communicates with tourists. From an interesting case study from Paris, private stakeholders or foundations can raise social awareness by making positive use of motives like a sign-label of accessibility as a marketing asset for their business. Additionally, DMOs that are responsible to communicate an accessible image of the destination, could enhance and promote collaboration to create and offer an integrated network of accessible and appealing tourist products, services, and experiences. London, for example, as a vast urban area, preferred to use only one private organization to communicate properly and correctly its universal strategic design. Frankfurt on the other took into consideration its intention to provide experiences to engage loyal tourists with access needs.

Technological

Engaging younger and senior tourists with disabilities, an interesting tourist market if we consider the young ages of international tourists that enrich tourism in Athens, require a number of

technological improvements to make the experience more fulfilling. Technological achievements with an indicative example of the lift in Acropolis have proven even in Athens that innovative ideas and redesigning heritage interventions without dangerous aesthetic intrusions can change our cultural perspective about common participation. Younger visitors with access needs, also, prefer using equipment that enhances their independence and self-esteem, eliminating their barriers. Interventions in more heritage sites could nevertheless prevent accidents in hazardous corners, or fully accessible entrances and facilities in various thematic museums could create more special interest tourism meeting points. Finally, an important venue and popular area in Athens "of sun and beach holiday" for tourists and locals is the unhindered access to the beach of the north coastline mostly for people with motor impairments, as well as the accessible toilet facilities. Till today, accessible beaches in Attica are 8 of the 12 more popular and suitable for swimming.

Biotic

Attica is mostly a hilly region, rounded by mountains with exquisite byzantine churches, natural trails, and adventure sports opportunities. Following the example of the Spanish "Hiking for All", adventure sports & outdoor activities associations and companies could be trained properly to offer with the proper equipment and attitude tourist opportunist to a wide target group that has often fewer chances to visit outdoor areas due to safety or social reasons. Outdoor experiences could also benefit local people with access needs and children with developmental disorders and disabilities, as nature provides a psychologically therapeutic environment.

Interventions in Italian national parks also showed the way to recognize and promote hidden but important public green areas, valuable for its locals. Starting with the National Garden approximately to the historical center, there are plenty of open areas to design implementations like path walks for motor and vision impairments, as well as inclusive guided tours and educational programs with mixed groups.

Abiotic

Meaning intangible but important destination's indicators and characteristics, an example of an abiotic asset of Athens could be its climate conditions. Expressing the ambition to expand seasonality, smoother winters in Greece and its capital compared to other countries of tourist origin could open new opportunities for accessible and inclusive tourism in urban areas. Not having to face the challenging hot temperatures of summer in Greek cities, disabled and senior tourists among others could discover new tourist products in wider areas of Attica, being able to better use the less crowded public transportation. Even though Athenian beaches are for someone quite pleasant to swim or just visit even before or after the summer months.

Relational

The last dimension is easy to be perceived as the unchained interaction between the other aspects of a destination's tourism management. It is evident that inspirational legislative work can only be applied if stakeholders find their utile place in it, or if a regional initiative could lead to a concrete new state law around the tourism industry's requirement. Respectively, abiotic factors affect the tourist experience. Technological achievements and proposals can completely enrich every misconception we have as a society about disability and potential. It is essential, finally, in order to find "the roadmap to success" to pursue the process to design inclusively to complete each phase from awareness to routinization methodically and step by step (Eichhorn, 2014).

Conclusions

Proposing the initial suggestion that accessible tourism can be a social requirement, and a beneficial economic concept in the tourism industry, this master thesis canvassed the potential of an inclusive tourist strategy. Its universal nature attempted, also, to be summarized through the examination of the case of a standard to low level of service destination in terms of accessibility, like Athens, where paradoxically its regional and centralized legal framework prioritizes social necessity.

Approaching the first chapter, it was evident that equal human rights of people regardless their disability are non-negotiable. Specifically, the European Network of Accessible Tourism clearly declares its inclusive manifestation towards the tourism industry, encouraging every state party to act efficiently in this direction. In trying to understand the concept of accessibility in tourism, different definitions were given, as the review provides us with multiple details of an inclusive design. It was, also, explained that accessibility pertains to any individual, age and condition, such as seniors, children, or pregnant women who need proper requirements - and not only to disabled tourists. Then, it was presented that "Tourism for All" as a positive but general social message originates from the contemporary notion of inclusivity in every human activity like tourism, implying transformative changes and adaptations. Inclusive tourism could be enough creative not only to obtain more disabled or elder clients but to create whole new job opportunities for the socially disadvantaged, like PwD. Throughout every reference, it is clear that accessible and more inclusive tourism can benefit every stakeholder during the process.

Describing the basic market target of accessible tourism, we recognize that nearly half of people with access needs are tourists over 65 years old and people with chronic or temporary impairments and disabilities. Even though they are considered often as a profitable market, this general social group includes approximately 2 million people only in Greece, a hint showing that society can not ignore its rights and its potential. Describing a rather heterogeneous group, reviewers state that they are demanding but loyal tourists, who seldom travel alone, eagerly recommending their tourist preferences. They also tend to stay more days in a destination they approve of, spending usually more than average.

Researching different motives and needs to travel, PwD express clearly, in a decisive percentage of the range of 74%, their positive but hesitant intention to visit and explore a destination, still facing a high risk of not succeeding to do so, due to physical and informational barriers. They wish often to engage in more outdoor and leisure activities, seeking a fulfilling experience that includes various social interactions. Interestingly, they wish to contribute to their personal growth, being aware they have fewer chances of social experience. Lastly, as they prioritize their needs and tourist demands, designing an inclusive strategy should consider being applied step by step.

Understanding, through the findings, the barriers that prevent a potentially hindered tourist from engaging into actual tourism activity, they are classified primarily into 3 categories, namely barriers of physical restriction, attitudinal limitations, and barriers to comprehensive information and communication. Additionally, other reviewers mention that restrictions can be prohibitive or semi-restricive, usually depending on the impairment and the disability at quest. They confirm also that this social group of interest includes various people with different tourist needs and expectations.

Summarizing chapter two, we show some main principles of the concept to a universal approach to design for All in tourism. Generally, important but not legally binding documents of the Global Code of Ethics acknowledge that every person should have equal access to tourism, offering fundamental guidelines, to begin with. Additionally, suggesting that PwD and seniors can be an important market in the framework of the accessible worldview, the European Commission estimated already with numbers the unexploitable potential profit. Statistics about disabled and hindered tourists are not satisfactory as they rested for many decades as a no-target group for the tourism industry, but the EU was able to inform us about their realistic financial contributions. Demographic change and the prolonging of our estimated life seem to play a vital part in a highly increased demand in this social group, while they tend to spend more for their comfort. Their active presence suggests also that accessibility can be measured as an important added value, contributing to the sustainable increase of a destination's competitiveness.

Progressively, a universal strategic design towards accessible tourism proposes a holistic and chain-based system of values. Reviewers also claim that products should be inclusive and mainstream in a positive way and not differentiated, including various understandings. The most important aspect of this chapter should be its good practices that indicated examples of positive implementations and

adaptations throughout Europe. Indicatively, we specially mentioned accessible national parks and natural areas, a universal urban design like London's, adaptations that first favored locals, as well as a highly functioning transport system and legislative regional initiatives.

Before concluding with a proposed universal design for Athens, this thesis mentioned tourism legislations that apply in the EU and Greece and can enhance accessibility. While EUs legal framework is authorized to offer guidelines and regulations on which member-states must rely and constitute. Greece on the other hand presents a centralized legal reality, where tourism initiatives need to be further applied. The Greek framework protects and declares PwD's right in social life, describing through special laws and regulations about requirements in accommodations and infrastructure, taking into consideration mainly tourists with motor disabilities as they have difficulty exploring greek destinations without assistance.

Moreover, Athens as a destination till nowadays is a classical culture tourist-oriented city, promoting mainly its well-recognized and quite accessible historic center. While wider Athens is unpleasantly inaccessible due to limited appropriate infrastructure, limited access to the public, and limited trained workforce, we were able to see through the iconic, for the Athenian capital, example of the historic center. With the catalytic effect of the Olympic and Paralympic Games of 2004, the government achieved to fulfill an older idea of potential gentrification. An important point of interest is the unification of the ancient monuments around the Acropolis, creating an accessible pedestrian street. The heritage site of Acropolis was also granted with the innovative solution of an exterior lift to provide access to the PwD, for the first time.

Concluding, this thesis proposed optimizations under the spectrum of the necessity for a universal design for Athens' city accessibility. Approaching these proposals, classified in six dimensions, we were able to explore constitutional interventions, raising the priority to expand the public transport system and progressively expand a tourist interest that currently stay limited to the city's center into a wider region. Additionally, we could use good practices from european destinations to be introduced from the outset with the hidden natural environment of the city. Finally, the chain-based system that requires a universal destination design like this can be confirmed by special and vital interactions between the dimensions, where legislation must meet with stakeholders' motives and

initiatives, or any technological implementation can radically change our perceptions of disabled people's abilities.

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