



**Mapping and Performance Check of the Supply of  
Accessible Tourism Services  
(220/PP/ENT/PPA/12/6491)**

*Case Study 10*

**The Historical Centre of Athens as an Accessible Destination,  
Greece**

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**European Commission**

**Enterprise and Industry Directorate General (DG  
ENTR)**

“Mapping and Performance Check of the Supply of Accessible Tourism  
Services” (220/PP/ENT/PPA/12/6491)

**Case** **Study:**  
**The Historical Centre of Athens as an Accessible  
Destination**

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## Executive Summary

Athens is a world-renowned destination for tourists and attracts visitors from all over the world. The historical monuments of Athens and its museums are the most visited sites in Greece. 1.5 million people visited the Acropolis World Heritage site in 2012 and over 5 million people visited the New Acropolis Museum in the first 3 years after its opening in 2009.

The city's historical centre was developed and renovated in preparation for the Olympic and Paralympic Games, according to the Greek Accessibility Guidelines and urban planning legislation. The International Paralympic Committee's expectations for an accessible city were also a motivating factor for creating an accessible environment for all. Today, the legacy of the 2004 Games can be seen in the accessible pedestrian environment and public transport network of the city centre.

This case study shows how the city of Athens achieved significant improvements in the accessibility of urban spaces, heritage sites and public transport for people with disabilities, within an overall plan which has re-defined the historical centre, its monuments, historical sites and streets. The planning process took into account the requirements of different disabled groups, strongly focusing on mobility and visually-impaired persons for movement in the public spaces. The so-called "*Unification of the Archaeological Sites*" by a pedestrian route was an innovative plan, creating a new, attractive accessible environment in a city centre that suffered greatly from motor traffic. This is a model of good practice that other Greek cities are now following. The new Metro system is regarded as one of the most accessible in Europe, combining high technical standards with art and cultural exhibits at the stations. Together with the accessible trams and buses, this has contributed strongly to the success of the overall project.

One of the outstanding achievements of the project, in terms of accessibility, was the installation of a lift for wheelchair users to access the Athens Acropolis – a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the symbol of Greek civilisation. This intervention has broken the boundaries of what was considered possible in adapting heritage sites, resulting in world-wide recognition that people with disabilities have right to visit and enjoy cultural heritage sites on equal terms with others. The lift solution was carefully planned and executed as a "reversible" intervention with minimal intrusion. In the beginning, only wheelchair users were allowed to use the lift but the policy has been widened to allow pushchairs and people with walking difficulties to use it, making the Acropolis truly "Accessible for All".

For Athens itself, the city's heritage area has gained even more popularity than before as it gives better access to everyone. It has become the focal

point for citizens, with new tourist offers and it is a particular attraction for disabled visitors, seniors and families.

Improved access has brought other benefits, with the establishment of small enterprises and new activities, including bicycle rentals and guided walking tours. The renovated area also supports many local tavernas, cafeterias, hotels, museums and an open air cinema.

The case study also draws attention to weaknesses in the strategy of marketing Athens, as the city centre is not promoted as an 'accessible destination'. Although Athens' historical centre can be considered accessible to a high degree, there has been no significant follow-up in terms *marketing access* as a quality product for visitors.

Athens could be promoted as an *accessible heritage city* towards people with disabilities and the accessible tourism market, giving benefit to all tourists and providing a stimulus for higher tourism growth. Opportunities for targeting the accessible tourism market have been overlooked during the past nine years since the Olympic Games and Athens has not harvested all the rewards it might have done.

At the end of the year 2013, some changes are under way in marketing and product development. The tourism sector is making plans to diversify and improve its offers to international visitors. The issues of *access for people with disabilities* and marketing towards these customers, as well as *Senior Tourism* are now included within the new Greek Tourism 2020 framework strategy proposed by SETE, the Hellenic Association of Tourism Enterprises, as well as in the programmes of the Athens Hoteliers' Association. The Greek National Tourist Organisation's Strategic Marketing and Promotion Plan 2014-2015-2016, includes targets for *Senior Tourism* product development and *City Breaks*. Similarly, the Athens Development and Destination Management Agency is also aware of the benefits of focusing on the accessible tourism market and is planning to pay more attention to this, according to recent communications. If these plans can be realised the accessible tourism supply chain in Athens has the potential to deliver greatly improved services to visitors in the coming months and years.

## 1.0 Introduction

Tourism in Greece is a major industry and the key source of foreign income. Based largely on sun and sea and world heritage monuments, including the Acropolis and the Agora – the birthplace of democracy, tourism development is now focusing on diversifying the range of offers and higher quality in order to strengthen the economy. In the modern era, tourists have come to Athens both for its historical significance but also as a stopover en route to the islands of the Aegean and beyond.

This case study describes how Athens, after being awarded the Olympic and Paralympic Games 2004, embarked on a transformation of the historical centre of the city, incorporating *accessibility for all* as a key element in the building, infrastructure and public transport system. This wide-scale initiative has contributed to a renewed image of the city, attracting more tourists and providing opportunities for new businesses to be established in spite of the recent years' financial crisis.

The following sections will describe and explain the steps taken to tackle the long-standing problems of traffic congestion and urban decay, with access improvements to the physical infrastructure, including an extensive pedestrian route joining the historical sites and introducing access provisions to the UNESCO heritage monument of the Acropolis. The pedestrian area also includes the new Acropolis Museum, opened in 2009, set within a 'walkable' downtown area that is a magnet for tourism, strongly supported by the accessible public transport system with the new Metro and renovated electric railway at its heart. This constitutes a proven "best practice" example of urban development, which is now being used as a model for other Greek cities.

The case study also draws attention to weaknesses in the promotion of the destination as an *accessible heritage city*. The dimension of accessibility has not been perceived or fully understood by tourism marketers as a quality factor to benefit all tourists and a stimulus for higher tourism growth. Accessibility was perceived more as an 'obligation' than a market opportunity and, as a result, over the past nine years Athens has not harvested the rewards it might have done. Public sector websites in general - apart from the public transport system - do not provide detailed access information for visitors. It is left to private websites to fill this information gap. Moreover, hardly any new projects have appeared since 2004 to improve access in the city centre even further.

Now, in 2014, we see the first signs of awareness of the value of the market that requires good access. Strategies and plans are being put in place by public and private sector actors to win, for example, the *Senior* and *City Break*

markets with renewed focus on the safety, comfort and accessibility of Athens historical centre.

## 2.0 Overview and background information

This section addresses the general context of the case study, presenting the economic characteristics of tourism in Greece and focusing on the historical centre of Athens as an accessible tourist destination. The issue of access for disabled people is examined as a key factor in the offer, throughout the whole supply chain.

It can be said that Greece's "heavy industry" is tourism. In 2012, the contribution of tourism to Greek GDP amounted to 10.4 billion Euro or 16.4% of total GDP, while the number of jobs in tourism amounted to 688,800 - corresponding to 18.3% of the workforce. These and other basic tourism figures are shown in Figure 1, below, published by SETE, the Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises.

**Figure 1: Greek tourism data, 2012.**

<b>Greek Tourism - Basic Figures, 2012</b>	
Contribution to GDP	16,4% [WTTC]
Contribution to Employment	18,3% of total employment [WTTC]
Total Employment	688.800 [WTTC]
International Tourism Receipts	10,4 bn. € (including cruise receipts) [BoG]
International Tourist Arrivals	16,9 mi. (including cruise passenger arrivals)
Average per capita tourism expenditure	616 € (including cruise data)
Market Share	1,5% World, 2,9% Europe
Seasonality	56% of international tourist arrivals are recorded in July - August - September
Concentration of Supply	66% of hotel beds are concentrated in 4 areas of Greece [HCH]
Hotel Capacity	9.670 hotels / 771.271 beds [HCH]
Top 5 markets	Germany (2.108.787), U.K. (1.920.794), FYROM (1.300.000), France (977.376), Russia (874.787) [H.ST. & BoG]
Top 5 airports (in international tourist arrivals)	Athens (2.651.062), Heraklion (2.067.475), Rhodes (1.593.298), Thessaloniki (901.573), Corfu (824.000) [HELL.STAT.]

Source: SETE, Hellenic State Authority, UNWTO, WEF

As shown in the above table, compared to the rest of the world and despite 6 years of recession, Greek tourism continues to achieve a satisfactory level of performance. According to data published by the World Tourism Organisation (WTO), in 2012 Greece was in 17th position as regards the number of international tourist arrivals and 23rd as regards international tourism receipts. Moreover, according to the World Economic Forum (WEF), in 2013 Greece was in 32nd position out of 140 countries included in the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index. In 2013, the total number of tourist arrivals from

abroad topped 17 million for the first time ever. These statistics point to the fact that Greek tourism is one of the sectors of the national economy that is competitive at a global level.

Average tourism expenditure per capita was €616 in 2012. Over half the international tourists visit Greece in the 3 summer months, June, July and August. Greece attracts tourists with its Mediterranean climate, beaches and many islands, and also with its important historical monuments and museums, spread throughout the whole country, revealing its ancient history and subsequent epochs. Many of the most important historical monuments and archaeological sites are found in the capital, Athens, the birthplace of democracy.

### **Legal Framework for accessibility of the built environment**

The Greek Constitution guarantees equal rights for all citizens. This includes equal rights of people with disabilities before the law (article 4), to participate fully in society (article 21) and in employment and the right to work (article 22). Constitution of Greece, 85/A/18-4-2001.

Since June 1985 an *Office for Studies for People with Special Needs* was established in the Ministry of Environment, Planning and Public Works, with the purpose of eliminating barriers and improving the awareness of technicians and all the actors responsible for this issue. This office provided important input to the General Building Regulations and also published the first Greek “Guidelines on Designing for All” (1998).<sup>1</sup>

Enforcement of access guidelines before 2000 was relatively weak across all sectors. During the intensive planning and development period which preceded the Games, the accessibility requirements were enforced through government circulars and amendments to the laws regarding municipal urban renovation works and public buildings. The building code and the General Building Regulation were also amended (2000, 2004, 2012) in relation to accessibility.

The legislation governing hotels, which refers to the accessibility guidelines, was updated in 2002 followed by a campaign to encourage hoteliers, especially those in Athens, to improve the accessibility of their premises.

The Accessibility Guidelines, supplemented by additional specifications criteria, e.g. detailed description for creating and constructing tactile paving routes, were used as the tool for implementing accessibility during the preparation of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, in the urban environment, sports venues and other facilities. Indeed, the Accessibility Guidelines were and continue to be used as a *de facto* standard, since they are referenced in all legislation regarding the built environment.

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<sup>1</sup> Guidelines on Designing for All. <http://www.minenv.gr/1/16/162/16203/g1620300.html>



## Athens 2004 Olympic and Paralympic Games

In 1997, the City of Athens won the right to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games of 2004. This was a turning point for the country and especially for the host city, resulting in great developments in infrastructure and urban planning. The preparations for this world-class event have contributed to significant improvements in the quality of the tourism offer, including new motorways, roads, railways, the new international airport, public transport, hotel accommodation and the renewal of the city centre. Although accessibility provisions for persons with disabilities had already been introduced in policies, planning and design works, these requirements were not widely introduced or respected. Due to the Games, access became a key requirement for all projects, including the 'unification' of the archaeological sites and the provision of wheelchair access, for the first time, to the symbol of Greek civilization, the Acropolis. The responsibility for implementing the unification plan was given to a new private body incorporated in 1997, "*Unification of the Archaeological Sites of Athens S.A. - EAXA*", owned entirely by the Greek Ministry of Culture, and the Ministry of the Environment, Planning and Public Works.

## Unification of Athens Archaeological Sites

In 1985 the law 1515/85 gave legal status to a *Structural Plan and Programme for the Environmental Protection of the Greater Athens Area*. Athens' archaeological sites make up the principal elements of the city's cultural heritage, reflecting its historical continuity since ancient times. The archaeological sites of Athens were regarded as "a museum open to the world" and for decades, their unification had been a dream for architects and urban planners. Therefore, the *Unification of Athens Archaeological Sites* was included in the City of Athens General Urban Plan addressing:

- The promotion of the historical character of Athens and the upgrading of its central area.
- The improvement of the quality of life for all its residents and the protection of the natural environment.

Among the specific targets of the plan were:

- The upgrading and decongestion of Athens' and Piraeus' central areas with emphasis on the conservation of their historical character and on the promotion of their urban image
- Planning of strategic urban renewal interventions.

The term "unification" implies the creation of a network of major cultural landmarks such as the principal monuments and archaeological sites of the city, interconnected with a sequence of open spaces, common green, service facilities and areas designated for cultural activities and recreation. The "Grand Promenade" joins the archaeological sites such as those of Acropolis, Filopappos and Kerameikos which constitute some of the most significant green or non-built-up areas in Athens.

**Figure 2: Map of Historical Centre of Athens**



(Source: EAXA AE, 2008)

The map, above shows the main pedestrian route, the "Grand Promenade", connecting the major archaeological sites (D. Areopagitou street, is marked with yellow and Apostolou Pavlou street with orange colour).

The project was a multi-sectoral venture involving two Ministries (the Ministry for the Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works and the Ministry of Culture), the Municipality of Athens and other authorities at different administrative levels. The principal objectives of the plan were:

- The organization and upgrading of the archaeological sites.
- The creation of a high quality pedestrian network, which connects the archaeological zones and recreates, in part, ancient pedestrian movements.
- The creation of green areas and open spaces in conjunction with new planting in the pedestrian network.

- The rehabilitation and conservation of monuments and renovation and upgrading of buildings (refurbishment of facades, building maintenance, removal of advertisements etc).
- The reshaping of some of Athens' most historical squares.
- Design and implementation of *a traffic and parking management scheme that caters for visitors and residents* and resolves through-traffic pressures including a fixed-rail tramway, which will service the main pedestrian corridors.
- Design and implementation of a land-use plan affecting neighbouring areas that will protect residential areas, while safeguarding at the same time normal conditions of function for the existing commercial uses and the light industry and artisans establishments.

**Figure 1: The photographs above show two of the main roads around the Acropolis, before and after the “Unification” project.**

**Dionissiou Areopagitou Street – Before**



**- After**



**Apostolou Pavlou Street – Before**



**- After**



The Unification of Archaeological Sites company commissioned a number of planning and feasibility studies in order to develop the unification works, including *a scheme for the management of tourism, taking into account*

*accessibility* and other functional requirements and the need to safeguard and protect the monuments from intensive use.

Dora (Theodora) Galani, architect, urban planner and CEO - President of the Unification body has noted, recently:

*“The unification project started and was mostly funded with the European Union Third Support Framework financing programme..The Olympic Games funding and the 2004 deadlines moved the plan forward and contributed with additional funding. The project followed the Accessibility Guidelines “Designing for All”, of the Ministry of Environment, Planning and Public Work which are included in Greek planning legislation. One of the issues was the selection of surface material for the pedestrian walkway and the construction of a continuous blind (tactile) route”.*

The state archaeologists had a specific role in the project. They proposed to replace asphalted roadways with cobblestones to evoke a traditional character. A smooth stone path was not included in the walkway, which would have given more comfort to wheelchair users and people with pushchairs and those with walking difficulties. Nevertheless, many of these citizens and visitors enjoy moving freely throughout the new pedestrian route.

A continuous tactile route for guiding blind persons was included in the paving. During its construction there was a close consultation with the Panhellenic Union of the Blind. Mrs. Verikokaki, who is blind and a trainer of blind people in mobility and orientation, tested the route with blind people on many occasions and found it to be satisfactory. Mrs. Verikokaki has presented this work at conferences including one in South Africa, to considerable acclaim. It may be noted that this is not the “standard” tactile paving, as specified in the Greek Accessibility Guidelines. Instead, it was agreed with the archaeologists that the blind route should not have a colour contrast but that it should be made of marble and with only three wide raised, flattened lines (instead of the standard pattern which has six narrow ridged ones).

The unification site manager, Mr. Zervas, is quoted as saying that the contribution of the blind testers in repeated testing of the route was a very useful experience and gave a good result. When the project was delivered, shortly before the Games, the shop and cafeteria owners were informed not to place tables, chairs and goods for sale on the tactile route. Today some owners do not follow these instructions to take care to avoid covering the route.

**Figure 2: (Left) The "Grand Promenade" at D. Areopagitou Street showing the cobbled paving and (Right) Following the tactile route designed for the 4 kilometre Grand Promenade.**





The “Grand Promenade” has become the most popular area for walking and meeting for the Athenians and visitors. Dora Galani stated: *“The proof of the success of the area is that the citizens like to go there and it is obvious that where they go, then visitors will do the same. Now, where the ancient Greeks used to walk, we can again walk and hear birds sing”*

“Today, visitors to the “park” can enjoy a walk among some of the world's most ancient treasures in a peaceful way. The “park” extends from Dionysiou Areopagitou Street, Apostolos Pavlou, Adrianou, Ermou and Vassilisis Olga streets and covers an area of approximately 4 km in length and 15,000 acres. Highlights of the sites along the way are: the Acropolis, The Irodion Theatre, The Ancient and Roman Agora, Hadrian's Arch, the Ancient Temple of Olympian Zeus, The Theatre of Dionysos and Philopappou Hill. Furthermore, other monuments have been integrated, including the Byzantine and Post-Byzantine period, areas of green including the National Garden, Zappeion, and the traditional neighbourhoods of the historical Centre of Athens namely, Plaka, Anafiotika, Thisio, Psirri, Metaxourgeio, Makriyanni and Koukaki. In addition, the New Acropolis Museum, the 3<sup>rd</sup> most popular museum in the world lies on Dionyssiou Aeropagitou pedestrian street”. Source: [www.breathtakingathens.com](http://www.breathtakingathens.com) (2014).

### **Disabled Access to the Acropolis - World Heritage Site**

The Acropolis is the best known symbol of ancient Greek civilisation, and a UNESCO world heritage site.



Its oldest monuments including the Parthenon, date back 2500 years. It is 160 metres high, yet it had remained inaccessible to people with various types of disabilities

until the organization of the Paralympics Games in 2004.

For decades the only access to the top was by a steep and twisting footpath with many steps cut in the rock, and without handrails. Access was difficult and even dangerous in wet, slippery conditions. Until this century the issue of access was hardly even discussed, being considered too outrageous, given the status of the monument. However, the Greek State made a promise to make the Acropolis accessible for all, when, in 1997, it submitted its bid to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Access for people with disabilities to the Acropolis of Athens was described in answer to a Parliamentary question by the *Ministry of Culture in 2011*, as follows:

*"Adopting the philosophy of "design for all" and implementation of access and services for people with disabilities are elements that characterize the cultural and educational level of a country.... In August 2004, shortly before the opening of the Olympic Games in Athens, one of the most important monuments of world cultural and architectural heritage, the Acropolis of Athens, became accessible to people with disabilities. For a long time there had been an exploration of all possible solutions and many objections had been expressed about the possible deterioration of the monument. Finally, a solution was reached by constructing an elevator on (open type - without well) as the least disturbing and reversible at any time. The lift was installed on the north slope of the Acropolis to a new section of the wall (made in the decade of 1930)."*

**Figure 3: Ascent to the Acropolis by lift and wheelchair user viewing the Erechtheion**



*“A specially designed elevator, which was placed on the north slope of the Hill, covers a distance of 70 m. from the foot to the top of the site. To further facilitate their access to the elevator, a special separate entrance north of the main entrance to the site, has been constructed, where a van can transport them to a conveyor platform, which can then transfer both wheelchair and person to the elevator.*

*The rocky surface of the site on top of the hill rendered it essential for a specially defined path to be constructed which can ensure a smooth tour (photo). W.C. facilities for people with disabilities are available both on the west slope of the hill, as well as on the east side of the site, that is on top of the hill. On a daily basis the site is visited by 10 people with disabilities on average while during the Paralympics Games 2004, all the above mentioned facilities were used by a total of 3.000 people with disabilities, both athletes and their escorts, a fact which extracted favorable comments.” - Vassiliki Georgaka. Archaeologist - Curator of the Acropolis Archaeological Site Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism (retired)*

Nowadays the lift is also available to transport parents with pushchairs and people with walking difficulties - not only for wheelchair users, which had been the case previously.

### **Other points of interest along the route**

**Irodion Theatre.** The pedestrian route also gives access to the Odeon of Herodes Atticus, known as the Irodion Theatre. This stone amphitheatre, built in 161 A.D., is located on the southwest slope of the Acropolis and has a capacity of 5,000 people. It was restored in the 1950s and since then it has been the main venue of the Athens Festival, which runs from May to October each year, featuring a variety of Greek as well as International performances.

Before the pedestrian route was created, the police had to stop traffic on the surrounding streets before the evening performances. Today people enjoy a pleasant walk to the theatre. Wooden ramps and a platform area have been added at one side of the terraced rows of seating, making the ancient theatre accessible for wheelchair users. A special platform is placed over the existing seating in the first row above the floor for 8 wheelchair users and accompanying persons. An additional 13 seats are reserved for people with other disabilities. Toilets for disabled guests are available.

## New Acropolis Museum

**Figure 4: New Acropolis Museum showing open excavations below the entrance level.**



The New Acropolis Museum is located below the Acropolis, on the Grand Promenade. It is 200 meters from the Acropoli metro station. It is a landmark for Athens and it is the 3rd most popular in the world. Designed by the Swiss architect, Bernard Tschumi it opened in 2009.

The new museum is an exceptional example of a design which respects the historical legacy of the city. The museum houses surviving antiquities of the Acropolis, that were previously exhibited in several museums. Accessibility has been considered, focusing mostly on the requirements of wheelchair users. Wheelchairs are also available free of charge at the Museum entrance for those with walking difficulties. There are also parking spaces for visitors with disabilities. The museum is popular not only for tourists but as a meeting place for the Athenians, who enjoy concerts, events and the restaurant/cafeteria.

The President of the Acropolis Museum Board, Dimitrios Pantermalis has noted in an interview with [Tourismtoday.gr](http://Tourismtoday.gr) in March 2013, that more than 5 million visitors have visited the museum between 2009 and 2013. 25% of these have visited 3 times or more, showing that Athenians are enthusiastic guests. The economic crisis and the blow to tourism was not enough to reduce the interest of foreign tourists coming to visit the Acropolis Museum.



For him, the Acropolis Museum is undoubtedly a means of promoting Greek tourism.

To the extent permitted and in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism the museum organizes events to boost Greek tourism. Ticket prices are maintained at low levels compared with other museums abroad. *“We do this consciously to make it a world Museum, more affordable and comfortable to visit. We want to become part of the life of the Greeks and of any other visitors”.*

### Transport

The historical centre of Athens is well served by public transport, with a new Metro system connected with renovated electric railway, bus and trolley bus services, new tram lines and the. The transport system, which is designed to be accessible to wheelchair users and other persons with disabilities, connects directly with the Grand Promenade at many points.

**Figure 5: Athens Metro station and carriage**



The *Athens Urban Transport Organisation* - OASA is the largest mass transit system of Greece. From July 2011, the Athens Mass Transit System consists of: a bus network, an electric trolleybus network, Athens Tram system, the Piraeus-Kifissia urban railway (ISAP), formerly owned and operated by Athens-Piraeus Electric Railways, the Athens Metro system, consisting of *Metro Line 2* and *Metro Line 3*, (connecting the city centre with Athens Airport) and a suburban rail system, Proastiakos.

The extent to which accessibility requirements for disabled passengers has been integrated in the transport planning, contributes to a very high level of access throughout the centre of Athens, when compared with other European historical cities. The new Metro system, combined with the renovated electric railway, is regarded as one of the most accessible in Europe, combining high technical standards and full accessibility with art and cultural exhibits at the stations.

Dora Galani states, *“The unification of the archaeological sites would never have been such a success without the contribution of the Metro and other means of public transport system”*.

A well-known disability travel website also confirms the value of the Metro to disabled tourists.

*.....disabled tourists will find that the metro system is perhaps the most accessible in all of Europe, with nearly all stations having elevators down to the platforms. We gave Athens a 2 star rating for proximity of sights to each other and a 4 star rating for accessible transportation.*  
<http://www.sagetraveling.com/Athens-Disabled-Access>

*.....Athens has the most accessible subway system in Europe and every station has elevators.* <http://www.sagetraveling.com/Athens-Accessible-Holiday>

During the 2004 summer Olympic Games, the transportation system of Athens served 300,000 to 350,000 spectators and employees to the Olympic Venues travelling per day between to the Olympic Venues, tourist sites and other destinations and providing coordinated services to the rest of the city.

It is important to mention that OASA provides accessibility information in its main website and other relevant websites as well as a Guideline to Passenger Rights and advice to people with disabilities about how to use the public transport system.<sup>2</sup> Public transport staff receive continuous training to cater for these passengers with respect, taking into account any modifications concerning assistance of disabled passengers and the law. OASA provides door-to-door service from Monday to Friday, between 08.00 o'clock to 22.00 hours with three specially designed vans which take up to 7 people and three wheel chairs. This service is provided to paraplegics and tetraplegics and the service is upon request (call number 210 42 70 748).

### 3.0 The integration of the supply chain

With the accessibility legislation, extensive infrastructure works, urban public transport system and hotel renovations that were implemented in preparation for the Olympic and Paralympic Games, the historical centre of Athens has a strong basis for being an accessible destination. However, the tourism supply

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.oasa.gr>

chain does not live up to its full potential with respect to information and marketing of the accessible tourism offer, in particular to visitors from abroad, as presented in this section.

For disabled visitors to Greece – and to Athens - there is *no official Access Guide* – that is, a tourist Guide Book or official website covering accessible tourist attractions, accommodation, transport and things to do. Several websites created by public bodies, private citizens and even foreign tourists, taken together, provide a variety of access information on themes such as hotels and other accommodation, public transport, museums, archaeological sites and other venues. However, there is no single, authoritative public website which brings together all the information on accessibility for disabled tourists to Greece or to Athens.

The Greek National Tourist Organisation (GNTO) does not provide information on disabled access for tourists on its website, <http://visitgreece.gr> nor does it display links to sites which contain such information. This creates an information barrier for prospective tourists who need to know in advance what Greece can offer in terms of access. Disabled tourists are not visible in the images shown on the site and there is no evidence of awareness about the need to promote Greece and Athens to disabled visitors. GNTO makes checks of plans for hotels, rented rooms etc. in connection with assessment for the star rating.

Maria Maraka-Romanou, Deputy General Director of Development, GNTO, notes that the City of Athens, including the historical centre, is seen as a subject for the promotion of Greece in the official campaign of the GNTO. Athens, together with the city of Thessaloniki, are the two main destinations for promoting “City Break” tourism.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Box 1: From the GNTO website**

From the GNTO website: <http://www.visitgreece.gr/en/citybreak>

*City tourism – City Break according to the international term – is an emerging trend, mainly amongst experienced travellers. It is directed at those people who do not simply wish for a ‘superficial’ stereotyped relationship with popular urban destinations, but who seek deeper knowledge of culture, the actual lifestyle, pace and true character of a city. Greek cities combine all the elements needed to attract the demanding visitor. Each Greek city has its own special colour and its entirely own urban character. Even cities with only a short distance between them have completely different features and qualities.*

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<sup>3</sup> Personal communication, January 2014.

The following pages present some of the websites that offer information about *accessible services for people with disabilities* in the **City of Athens**, beginning with the public sector website, **Breathtaking Athens**: [www.breathtakingathens.com](http://www.breathtakingathens.com)

Breathtaking Athens website is an official public website managed by the Athens Development and Destination Marketing Agency. Some accessibility information can be found on the site but it is relatively difficult to find, being three steps “down” from the Home Page. By searching through two levels of ‘menu-tabs’, the user may reach the access information at the third level:> **Experience > Athens for You > People with disabilities**

The category of ‘People with disabilities’ is included alongside other sub-sections entitled: Athens on a budget, Couples, Gay & Lesbians, Family and Kids, Teens & Youngsters, Nature Lovers, Seniors, Singles, Students and Greece Easter. The section ‘People with Disabilities’ contains sub-sections with various types and amounts of information:

- *Accommodation* has a short text but no links and no phone numbers,
- *Transport* has comprehensive and detailed information including phone numbers and opening hours,
- *Communication Services* has detailed information about use of public telephones and telephone services,
- *Tour Agencies* lists only one specialised agency, and
- *Information* lists three Athens-based NGOs which can provide some information for people with disabilities.

At this site, the historical Centre of Athens features as the 1<sup>st</sup> itinerary in the [City of Athens Official Visitors’ Guide](#) (a downloadable PDF document).

It can be concluded that the disabled foreign traveller is not well served by “Official” Greece or Athens with regard to information about the availability of accessible services in the city. This lack of a distinct policy for marketing ‘Accessible Athens’ undoubtedly results in a weaker performance, as potential visitors are not led to the offers and services that are actually waiting for them. Fortunately for the visitor, accessible services are presented on private and NGO websites and in Guides, as the following paragraphs illustrate.

### **Disability NOW NGO and non-profit association**

Since 1997, through its own dedicated portal at [www.disabled.gr](http://www.disabled.gr) the organisation has established an informational gateway: it gathers, enters,

classifies, publishes and distributes information on a daily basis which relates to, benefits and concerns people with disabilities, and people with special educational and consumer needs; it offers a complete directory of information and an intelligent instrument of research and survival for every person with disabilities. Articles on travel and tourism in Greece are included, in Greek and English.

## ESAmEA

The National Confederation of Disabled People (ESAmEA) ([www.esaea.gr](http://www.esaea.gr)) and other disability organisations. Disability NGOs also participate in local, regional, national and EU projects on accessibility.

**Greek Access Guide: “Odigos”.** <http://www.esamea.gr/odigos/>  
A visitor guide, “*Guide of Accessible Entertainment Activities in Greece*”, 2009 (*only available in Greek*), was made within the framework of the project “Accessible Itineraries of Social Inclusion of People with Special Needs under the EU Social Funds and the Ministry of Health under the programme “Health and Care Measure 3.2 Gradual Re-inclusion of People with Special needs in the social/economic life and integration in Independent Living”. The guide is free and can also be consulted in an online version. It lists and describes access conditions throughout Greece to hotels, cafes and bars, restaurants, attractions, museums, etc.

The Guide includes sections which refer to Athens and, in particular, to the areas within and around the historical centre. The pedestrian route around the Acropolis via Dionysiou Areopagitou is a recommended route, “...*easily accessible but requires a helper (for wheelchair users) as it goes uphill from Thissio and an independent wheelchair user would get tired*”.

## EuropeforAll.com

Accessibility information for Hotels in the city of Athens can be found at the website [www.europeforall.com](http://www.europeforall.com) This site, developed in the EU-funded OSSATE project, lists 19 hotels, of which 15 hotels present “self-assessed” access information and 4 hotels have been audited by trained access auditors. The Greek Ministry of Tourism was a member of the OSSATE partnership until 2007 but the information on Europeforall.com is no longer updated. The hotels listed in Europeforall.com opted in to a voluntary scheme, therefore the list does not include all hotels with accessible rooms. In addition, since 2007, new hotels have opened and older hotels have been renovated, including a number of hotels with accessible rooms.

Volunteer guides and “Greeters” can be found in Athens. Some of these local amateur tourist guides have experience of guiding people with disabilities. “**This is My Athens**” ([www.thisismyathens.org](http://www.thisismyathens.org)) has been established as a

visitor “greeter” programme, where visitors can book a local volunteer greeter free of charge to give an insider’s view of the city. The sign-up form includes the question: “*Is there a medical condition or disability that we must be aware of?*” Visitors are required to answer “No” or if “Yes, please explain”. In this simple way visitors with disabilities can be identified and their needs can be accommodated.

Another recently started “Local Volunteer Guide” initiative in the Greek capital is [www.Dopios.com](http://www.Dopios.com).

Also [www.toursbylocals.com/Athens-Tours](http://www.toursbylocals.com/Athens-Tours) provides guiding services for visitors on an individual basis.

The Greek *Association of Licensed Tourist Guides* lists 1000 guides for the whole of Greece, covering 28 foreign languages. <http://tourist-guides.gr/en.aspx> None of the tourists guides has received special training in guiding tourists with disabilities.<sup>4</sup>

Commercial accessible travel services are provided by very few small, specialist enterprises serving Athens and the surrounding regions. One of these is *Himalaya Travel*, which offers minibus tours, longer excursions and hire of assistive equipment, as well as recommendations for hotels, restaurants and cafes with accessible WCs and other facilities.

**The well-known traveller ratings website “Trip Advisor”** has declared Athens to be one of the “Travellers’ Choice destinations of 2013”

*“Once known for smog, traffic and tacky architecture, Athens is a city reformed thanks to fortunes brought by the 2004 Summer Olympics. Spotless parks and streets, an ultra-modern metro, new motorways, an accessible airport and all signs in perfect English make the city easily negotiable. Meriting more than a stopover en route to the islands, sophisticated Athens sites include many pillars of Western history, from the Acropolis to the Temple of Olympian Zeus, as well as treasures in the National Archaeological Museum”.*

[http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Tourism-g189400-Athens\\_Attica-Vacations.html](http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Tourism-g189400-Athens_Attica-Vacations.html)

**Essentially, the above quote confirms the core theme of this Case Study, that Athens has been transformed into a modern and welcoming destination for tourists, especially in its historical centre.**

The *Hotel Association of Athens - Attica & Saronic Gulf* has recently launched a pilot programme relating to accessible hotels to inform all hoteliers about the

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<sup>4</sup> Personal communication: Tourist Guide, Efi Kalamboukidou, Association of Licensed Tourist Guides.



importance of accessibility and the ways in which hotels can become "holistically " accessible to people with permanent or temporary disabilities.<sup>5</sup>

The Hotels Association of Athens notes that the crisis impacted negatively on hotels in Athens - Attica and the Saronic Gulf, occupancy rates dropping from 2008 to the first quarter of 2013 in some cases up to 40 %. Also, many hotels in this period either closed or changed their operating regime from 12 months to seasonal opening. The prices have dropped significantly. Since April 2013 and until today we recorded stabilization and growth trends of traffic / demand and very encouraging signs for 2014 . Also, new units have been added by the dynamic Athenian hoteliers or have re-opened. These are considered "good signs" and we hope that in future there will be better results for hotels in Attica”.

Referring to the areas of Athens that are more popular with tourists, the Hotel Association of Athens observes that each region has various reasons why it is selected by visitors. The same applies to each hotel. It has to do with the type of journey the visitor makes(e.g. a business trip/conference, holiday travel & recreation; City break; etc. And of course it depends on the degree of penetration of each hotel unit in international markets. Of course there are always areas that are attracting high interest, such as the historical and commercial centre of the city, the " Athenian Riviera " (coastline to Cape Sounion), Syngrou Avenue (between the centre and coastline), ...etc. “The historical and commercial centre of the city is popular for reasons of easy access to local attractions , historical and archaeological sites, streets with shops and traditional picturesque neighbourhoods for shopping and entertainment, located on roads where public services.”

Possible reasons which influence demand for hotels in the historical centre were rated by the *Hotel Association of Athens - Attica & Saronic Gulf*, especially for this Case Study. The ratings are shown in the table below:

a. The Acropolis	Not important	Important <b><u>important</u></b>	<b><u>Very</u></b>
b. The Grand Promenade long walk and pedestrian streets Aeropagitou - - Apostle Paul	Not important	<b><u>Important</u></b> important	Very
c. The new Acropolis museum	Not important	Important <b><u>important</u></b>	<b><u>Very</u></b>

<sup>5</sup> Personal Communication with Mrs. Falirea, Managing Director, Hotel Association of Athens - Attica & Saronic Gulf.

d. Easy access by metro (and its connection to the airport)	Not important	Important <u>important</u>	<u>Very</u>
e. The historical center is combined with fun ( Monastiraki , Gazi , Thissio etc. ) and gathers together many monuments and archaeological sites	Not important	Important <u>important</u>	<u>Very</u>
f. The area of the historical center is considered safe	Not important	Important <u>important</u>	<u>Very</u>
g. Accessibility for people with disabilities to the historical centre with the unification of archaeological sites , accessible public transport etc.	Not important	<u>Important</u> important	Very
h. The advertising and promotion of the historical centre.	Not important	<u>Important</u> important	Very

With regard to marketing of Athens, Mrs. Falirea, director of the *Athens Hotels' Association*, declares: “ *We are not entirely happy with the way Athens and Attica is displayed internationally. That is why we ourselves organise promotional activities ( e.g. fam trips / press trips) and try to gather information and promote information about the city. The hotels of our members and their tenants, are promoted to the foreign or Athenian audiences and nationwide through our website ([www.all-athens-hotels.com](http://www.all-athens-hotels.com)) and social media, through journalists' articles, participation in exhibitions, publications , etc. . Certainly there are efforts by bodies such Athens Municipality and GNTO but unfortunately, in our view, these are insufficient. Athens' reputation has suffered very unfairly and in many ways over the years of crisis and there is a for need dynamic effort to change for the better. We believe that the Association's actions have contributed to a move in the right direction and have cultivated in more positive climate for the city”.*

In general, the issue of accessibility is of major concern to the Athens Hotels Association. Mrs. Falirea notes: “*We contact and cooperate with sites representing disabled persons directly or indirectly and also those sites referring to hospitals (medical tourism), with agencies or institutions for the elderly and children and we are aware that people may have temporary or permanent disability. The elderly and other vulnerable groups constitute at least 20 % of people who travel for various reasons , they are also a class of people who "capture" or "symbolise" our culture , our knowledge and the quality - or not – of our infrastructure . There are hoteliers who have the knowledge and understanding around all these issues and strive for the best, but there are also hoteliers who need more information. Our goal is to raise*



*awareness and inform all the hoteliers - members of our Association and participation / collaboration for an Athens accessible to all”.*

Conventions, conferences, events and meetings play an important role in Athens tourism. Several major hotels in the city centre provide accessible services including accommodation and accessible conference facilities. The promotion of these hotels and other accessible venues could be improved through public and private websites, making Athens more visible and attractive as an accessible conventions destination.

Plans are under way to improve tourist information services by the Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises, SETE, which presented a new report: Tourism Strategic Plan: Implementation Road Map, in October 2013. Among the actions and initiatives proposed were improvements for the City Break tourism offer in Athens, including:

- easily readable maps
- routes, access, accessibility
- tourist information points
- shopping sales.

It is anticipated that, if implemented as planned, these actions would make a positive contribution to the visitors' experience of Athens.

### **Public Transport**

The Athens Public Transport Organisation, OASA writes: *“The accessibility of disabled people in big cities still remains as a serious problem since it has not yet been solved. This problem affects the quality of life of these people since they cannot have equal chances as the other people. We consider all those people who have a permanent or temporary handicap. In this category we consider also elderly people, pregnant women etc. According to the statistics all these people sum up to 42,5% of the whole population. For this reason, OASA and the affiliated companies which are running the buses, trolleys, metro lines and tram line are offering a good level of service to sizable people so that they can have to a good and autonomous service”.*

Facilities for disabled people, according to OASA include:

- 270 precast concrete platforms at bus and trolley stops so that the accessibility to and from buses is easy and convenient
- All buses and trolleys are provided with kneeling system
- Trolleys are provided with bus stop info display
- Metro lines 1,2 & 3 are fully accessible

- Tram line is fully accessible

### **Shops and small businesses**

During the Games, the ATHENS 2004 Committee in cooperation with the Chambers of Commerce of Athens and the Olympic cities (Thessaloniki, Heraklion, Magnesia and Achaia) produced the “*ERMIS Accessible Choice*” Access Guide, publicising those shops and cafés which conformed with simple access criteria and were found to be “disability–friendly”. Unfortunately this project was discontinued after the Games and has not been revived or replaced since. Currently there is no publicly supported programme for making shops, cafés restaurants in Athens more accessible for people with disabilities.

In contrast to the period during the Olympic and Paralympic Games when accessibility was highly publicised, there are now some places where shopkeepers and others extend their displays and coffee tables across tactile routes. This is not a common practice but it indicates that the city is not closely monitoring accessibility conditions on the ground. It may also be symptomatic of a generally poor awareness concerning the needs of disabled visitors in the city.

## 4.0 Provisions for cross-impairments

The tourism supply chain which embraces the historical centre of Athens has been examined with regard to the offers and services addressing tourists with various disabilities and other access requirements.

The requirements of **mobility impaired visitors** (people using wheelchairs, mobility scooters, those with walking difficulties) are satisfied very well in the renovated pedestrian streets and outdoor spaces, also including the Acropolis and other monuments and archaeological sites, all public museums, including the New Acropolis Museum, the Irodion Ancient Theatre and the (private) Lalaounis Jewellery Museum.

Public services such as post offices have been made accessible for wheelchair users and blind citizens.

Pedestrian routes to and from the Metro stations, as well as all the stations and platforms are accessible for wheelchair users, and are equally accommodating for parents with pushchairs. Trams, buses and trolley buses serving Athens city centre are all wheelchair accessible. Many bus stops have a raised platform which juts out from the pavement into the road, so the passengers including wheelchair users can board the bus.

Athens' taxis are **not** wheelchair accessible and there are only few specialised hire vehicles in service (less than 20) which can carry wheelchair users seated in their wheelchair. The city's public wheelchair accessible service vehicles, which are normally used for the transport of Athenian citizens, may be hired by visiting tourists but this service is restricted to daytime and weekdays and it is not widely advertised. Therefore, visitors who use a wheelchair must use the public transport system or rely on private accessible taxi firms which charge higher rates than the regular taxi service. Information about accessible taxis and vans – and how to book them – can be found at the websites of OASA and *Breathtaking Athens*, as described above.

In 2013 plans were announced for a fleet of wheelchair accessible 'White taxis' to be introduced in Athens and other major cities. These vehicles are expected to fill a crucial gap in accessible transport provision for citizens and visitors with disabilities.

Visitors who require a mobility scooter or electric wheelchair during their stay in Athens can hire these locally at specialised shops in the city centre but information about these services is not included on mainstream tourism websites. Some suppliers will deliver equipment to hotels.

According to the Greek legislation, new hotels are required to have a percentage of accessible rooms, according to the type and size of hotel. For example: for hotels with more than 20 rooms: 10% for the 3, 4 and 5 star hotels, and 5% for the 2 and 1 star hotels.

**Blind and visually impaired persons** find that the tactile paving which has been laid throughout the 4 km. 'historical' pedestrian route, is a useful and effective aid for orientation and way-finding. This is confirmed by the *Panhellenic Association of the Blind* which was involved in the implementation of the path. In just a few places this route may be blocked by shop signs and coffee tables but mostly it is clear and easy to follow. However, directional signage and tourist information at points of interest is generally lacking in the city centre and there are no tactile maps or digital information points along the routes. In the Metro and electric railway carriages stops are announced verbally.

As yet there is no Athens access guide for blind and visually impaired persons. Information in Braille is not available, either in restaurants or hotels and the city does not provide audio guides at any of the public museums.

It is reported that some visitors with guide dogs have been refused entrance with their dog at the New Acropolis museum. They tell that they have been asked to leave the dog outside and allow themselves to be placed in a wheelchair to be wheeled through the museum. There are no tactile displays or replicas of statues at the Acropolis Museum and exhibits may not be touched.

### **Deaf and hearing impaired visitors**

In the Metro and electric railway carriages, stops are announced on a screen. The stations also have electronic signs for passengers displaying the destination and waiting time until the next train arrives.

Visitors with sensory impairments are catered for by a new private company, *Access Greece*, based in Athens. Its mission is to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities into the cultural and tourism sector. The company offers *"multi-sensory tourism packages and activities for people with disabilities, their family and friends, an opportunity to experience Greece with all senses"*.

### **Learning difficulties**

There is no available information on Athens websites relating to touristic offers for visitors with learning difficulties.

## 5.0 Impact

Athens is a world-renowned destination for tourists and attracts visitors from all over the world. The historical monuments of Athens and its museums are the most visited sites in Greece. 1.5 million people visited the Acropolis World Heritage site in 2012 and over 5 millions visited the New Acropolis Museum in the first 3 years after its opening in 2009.

Improved access in the central heritage areas has brought many benefits to Athens. It has helped to increase tourism flows, allowing small enterprises to become established offering new activities and allowing people to enjoy the city in new ways.

It should be emphasised that the actual financial status of businesses in the central heritage area of Athens could not be identified from available statistics, as there are no published statistics at the destination level. (See also, *Section 6. Business Case*).

**Figure 6: Artisans' Stalls and Fun Bikes on the Grand Promenade**



Artisans' stalls and 'Fun-bikes' for 2 or more cyclists and passengers have appeared along the "Grand Promenade and the many cafes, tavernas and the famous open air cinema at Thissio are well frequented by citizens on a day out and by tourists.

The success of the Unification of Archaeological Sites project in Athens is stimulating similar new projects in other Greek cities. One specific example is Greece's third largest city, Patras, which is now following the path of Athens. According to a recently published article by the daily newspaper "Kathimerini", the example of Athens, with regard to the integration of archaeological sites and creating paths for

visitors to follow inspires Patras. Therefore, the city is now focusing on a study to create two routes, one near the new archaeological museum and the other in the historic centre. The objective is that the projects should be sufficiently prepared to apply for funding in the next EU framework, 2014 - 2020 ago In November 2013 the Green Fund approved the proposal for funding the study, submitted by the Municipality of Patras and the Unification of the Archaeological Sites of Athens SA and ( EAXA ). The city's mayor, Yiannis Dimaras stated: "Seeking ways to increase the numbers of visitors to the city, we decided with the help of EAXA to promote a program of consolidation of archaeological sites and to create tourist routes".

In general, Improving accessibility of the built environment and the overall planning procedures, legal requirements and strategy for any future interventions and public works are an important legacy for the further development of city. Today, public buildings, streets and pavements, museums and other public infrastructure all over the city and other municipalities, are built or upgraded to the required levels of accessibility. There are, however, many areas of Athens where access has not yet reached the standard that is seen in the historical centre, as municipal works have been slowed or stopped in the last 6 years due to lack of public funds.

In addition, the involvement of a large number of technicians, public authorities' personnel, hotel and other tourism businesses managers and personnel, resulted in a better awareness, knowledge and understanding of accessibility .

## 6.0 Business approach – building a business case for accessibility

This section gives a broad indication of the impact of the accessible tourism market in Athens, using only partial available data sources. Like most countries, Greece does not gather or publish statistics about numbers of *visitors with disabilities*, either at national regional or local level. We therefore know very little about the numbers of tourists with access requirements, their economic value to the country's economy and their activities and spending patterns, for example in Athens.

The number of tourist visits to Greece over the last decade has shown a steady increase from 14.2 million international visitors in 2004, to over 17 million in 2013. "*Invest in Greece*" foresees that in a few years this number will reach 20 million, almost twice the country's population.

A large number of these tourists visit Athens, either as their final destination or

on their way to or from the islands or other parts of Greece. Latest figures (for 2012) show there were 2.6 million passenger arrivals at Athens airport. Figures for 2011 showed that Athens airport arrivals reached a total of 3,123,631 passengers, of whom 3,259 were *Passengers with Reduced Mobility (PRMs) not requiring wheelchairs* and 41,012 required wheelchair assistance. This equates to 1.41% of all passengers being people with reduced mobility. These statistics do not indicate whether PRMs stay in Athens or transfer to other flights. However, they do give an indication of the size of the overall inbound market of PRMs to Athens airport.

As mentioned in the previous section, the historical monuments of Athens and its museums are the most visited sites in Greece. 1.5 million people visited the Acropolis World Heritage site in 2012. On average about 10 people with disabilities per day visit the monument, taking the lift to the top.

Over 5 million people visited the New Acropolis Museum in the first 3 years after its opening in 2009. The museum does not keep records of the actual number of disabled visitors, as it does not issue tickets to these visitors.

From two surveys carried out by the *National Confederation of Greek Commerce*<sup>6</sup> and the *Athens News Agency and Macedonian News Agency (ANA-MPA)*<sup>7</sup> both in 2013), the following statistics give an indication of the tourist spending and demographics related to businesses in the historical centre of Athens:

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<sup>6</sup> National Confederation of Greek Commerce: Consumer Standards. *Tourists in Commercial Agora of Athens and Piraeus* , August-October 2013

<sup>7</sup> Athens News Agency / Macedonian Press Agency, 2013.

## **Box 2: The route Syntagma – Ermou - Monastiraki**

### **“The route Syntagma - Ermou - Monastiraki - Acropolis wins tourists”**

*The tourists’ daily spending averages 30.1 Euros in catering establishments and 29.8 Euros in commercial enterprises. The area where spending is particularly dense appears to be from and/or to the Acropolis and Syntagma Square , in regard to the points visited by tourists in Athens. The route Syntagma – Ermou Street - Monastiraki - Acropolis has the largest crowd movements among routes taken by tourists choosing Athens as the place of residence. The most important area for spending seems to be within the commercial centre of Athens. The surrounding area of Gazi - which is a key area adjoining the so-called "big archaeological walk of Athens" (Grand Promenade) is a magnet for a very large number of tourists , as well as the areas around the Zappion of Panathinaiko Stadium and Temple of Olympian Zeus. (National Confederation of Greek Commerce)*

*The ANA – MPA survey has shown the total daily expenditure of tourists without transport costs and accommodation stood at 64.1 euros. The total daily expenditure includes expenditure in restaurants, coffee bars, markets, travel tickets , admission to cultural venues. The results for the overall daily personal expenditure of visitors arriving on cruise ships shows these tourists belong to a higher income bracket, compared with general tourists. (It is assumed that the visitors who remain outside the cruise ship on average only 6.5 hours). In this context, the cruise visitor, during his stay in Athens, spends a total of 67.2 euros , of which 15.5 Euros is spent on food and 44.3 Euro on other items.*

### **Demographic data of the research on cruise passengers**

*Regarding cruise visitors and their demographic characteristics, there are some differences compared with the bulk of tourists in Athens. There is a marginal predominance of women, while there are significant differences in age, as cruise guests belong to the older age group compared with ordinary tourists .The largest age group of cruise visitors is aged "45-54" while nine out of ten said they belong to the higher education level . The survey showed that the majority of cruise visitors have annual incomes between 30,000 to 70,000 Euros.*

### **Demographic data of the survey of tourists**

*As for the gender of tourists (not just cruise) there was also a weak predominance of women over men. The majority of tourists (nine in ten) said that they belong to a higher educational level. The educational level of respondents by country of permanent residence does not show statistically significant differences. Regarding the annual income of tourists as a whole,*



*there was a relatively equitable distribution of tourists in “economy class” income below 15,000 to over 70,000 Euros , with a relatively higher concentration of low income groups .*

New businesses that have sprung up in relation to the heritage routes include “Fun bikes”, bicycle rentals, guided cycling tours and walking tours. These are well advertised through social media and travel websites such as Trip Advisor. Some of these offers, for example the fun bikes, are accessible for people with reduced mobility (as passengers) and visitor reviews have also commended the cycling tours as being very enjoyable for young persons with a learning disability. ([www.tripadvisor.com](http://www.tripadvisor.com))

Other notable offers that can impact the spending patterns of tourists include *volunteer guiding* by “Athens Greeters” at [www.thisismyathens.org](http://www.thisismyathens.org) and “Dopios” local guides [www.dopios.com](http://www.dopios.com) These activities have not yet been analysed in studies or surveys, although it is noted that in the sign-up form, Athens Greeters make a point of asking if there are any disabilities of medical conditions that the greeters should know about.

New Greek SME start-ups in tourism are now developing, with new entrepreneurs moving into the tourism sector with fresh ideas and new perspectives. Some of these were presented at the second *Travel Massive Athens*<sup>8</sup> event that took place recently in Athens. *Travel Massive* is a global initiative that connects people in the travel industry locally. The event in Athens attracted travel bloggers, journalists and representatives from the Athens Development and Destination Management Agency (ADDMA), hotels, travel agencies and airline companies from all over the Greek capital. During the event, young and ambitious entrepreneurs shared their project’s story and their views about the travel industry in Greece of 2014.

## 7.0 Conclusion

This case study has shown how Athens, a European metropolis and long-standing tourist destination has re-developed its historical centre, preserving its cultural heritage and making it more accessible for all visitors, including people with disabilities, seniors and families.

It must be said that, for the nine years that have passed since the Olympic and Paralympic Games, disabled tourists from abroad have not been

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<sup>8</sup> <http://news.gtp.gr/2014/01/31/new-greek-startups-in-tourism-presented-at-2nd-travel-massive-event/>

particularly targeted. They have not been perceived as a market for heritage or city tourism. Yet, with the ageing population, the proportion of tourists needing good access is inevitably growing, especially in Greece's major feeder markets of Germany, the UK and France, as well as North America. Today

Athens city centre is characterised by a calm and peaceful environment created by the four-kilometre pedestrian walkway joining the Acropolis and other ancient sites and monuments. This is a tangible, positive legacy of the 2004 Olympic and Paralympic Games, which is well complemented by the excellent, accessible Metro and public transport system. Although it has an accessible offer, it does not promote it.




## 8.0 Recommendations

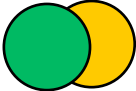
- As a destination, the city's heritage sites should maintain and develop the already accessible environment to strengthen competitiveness and add further value to the tourism sector.
- The "Grand promenade", its archaeological sites, green spaces, cafés, restaurants shops and markets are widely recognised as attractive places for citizens and tourists to walk, explore, relax and dine but the city does not actively promote itself as an *accessible destination*. The city should make its accessible offers part of its marketing and promotional strategy.
- There are very few businesses which target the international accessible tourism market. SMEs should be made aware and encouraged to improve their accessibility and market their access as a quality factor. New programmes should focus not only on the tangible assets but also on human resources – improving awareness of accessibility among tourism managers, small business owners and staff through dedicated training programmes.
- A significant push is needed to enhance the amount and quality of *online accessibility information and services* from all the relevant public authorities showing that the city is a welcoming and well-equipped capital, which is both safe and convenient for these tourists.
- With the excellent pre-conditions for accessible tourism left by the Olympic legacy, and its promising new development programmes, Athens is well positioned to renew its image as an accessible world-class destination for tourists of all ages and abilities. With a greater degree of independence from centralised planning, the municipality of Athens may be in a better position to design and implement plans for developing the city's tourism offer.

- At the end of 2013 this apparent lack of awareness about the potential of accessible tourism shows signs of changing. New programmes are proposed or being prepared by the Ministry of Tourism, the tourism entrepreneurs association and Athens destination managers. Shops, hotels, food and drink establishments and the public domain all require renewed attention to raise accessibility standards to even higher levels, in the effort to create City Breaks, Senior and Family Tourism as well as conventions and events that are accessible for all visitors. If these plans can be realised the accessible tourism supply chain in Athens has the potential to deliver greatly improved services to visitors in the coming months and years.
- Athens and Greece, as all European destinations, should gather statistics on the numbers, activities and spending habits of visitors with access requirements. This can lead to better targeted programmes for the future development of the accessible destination and tourism products.

## Annex I: Criteria and justification for best practices

**Table 2: Criteria and justification for best practice**

Criteria	Justification	On track/off track
<b>Relevance</b>	Athens' historical centre was developed and renovated to be accessible for the Olympic and Paralympic Games, according to the Greek Accessibility Guidelines and legislation and also influenced by the expectations of the International Paralympic Committee. The Games' legacy can be seen in the accessible pedestrian environment and public transport network. Great attention has been paid to the needs of people with mobility impairments and blind/visually impaired in the design of the pedestrian walkway, joining the historical sites and monuments. The new Metro system is regarded as one of the most accessible in Europe and combines high technical standards with art and cultural exhibits at the stations. Trams and buses are also accessible for wheelchair users.	
<b>Transferability</b>	The accessible public transport system is a key factor in enabling citizens and tourists to access and enjoy the historical centre. Stations are well placed to serve major points of interest, such as museums, and encourage shorter and longer walks for people of all ages, abilities and fitness levels. This is an important lesson for other heritage cities – that the pedestrian environment fulfils its purpose when it is easily accessed by public transport networks. Heritage routes also contribute to business development and new economic opportunities, as visitors are open to enjoying various activities in the area, relax, eat, drink and shop in a pleasant and calm environment.	
<b>Efficiency &amp; Effectiveness</b>	The historical centre of Athens has very good physical accessibility and it is served by accessible public transport, meeting the needs of disabled visitors. However, for many years	

	<p>the good level of access (compared with other European heritage cities) has not been understood as a valued selling point by the tourist authorities. This appears to be changing now, with new action plans for ‘City Break’ tourism, walking tours and senior tourism being promoted by public and private organisations.</p>	
<p><b>Sustainability</b></p>	<p>The organisation responsible for joining the archaeological sites has continued beyond 2004, developing projects and cooperation agreements with other Greek cities to transfer the know-how and create similar pedestrian routes within renovation works.</p> <p>For Athens itself, the city’s heritage area continues to benefit from giving better access to everyone and has become the focal point for tourist offers and especially for disabled visitors.</p> <p>In contrast to the period during the Olympic and Paralympic Games when accessibility was highly publicised, there are now some places where shopkeepers and others extend their displays and coffee tables across tactile routes. This is not a common practice but it indicates that the city is not closely monitoring the accessibility and perhaps there is a reduced consciousness of the value of access. During the Games, the ATHENS 2004 Committee in cooperation with the Chambers of Commerce of Athens and the Olympic cities (Thessaloniki, Heraklion, Magnesia and Achaia) produced the “ERMIS Accessible Choice” Access Guide, publicising those shops and cafés which conformed with simple access criteria and were found to be “disability–friendly”. Unfortunately this project was discontinued after the Games and has not been revived or replaced since.</p> <p>The accessibility of the city centre is not promoted on the national tourist website and,</p>	

	<p>until now, it is not marketed actively by the city marketing agency or mainstream tourism businesses.</p>	
<p><b>Innovation</b></p>	<p>Joining the archaeological sites by a pedestrian route was an innovative plan which has created a new accessible environment in a city centre that suffered greatly from motor traffic.</p> <p>In terms of accessibility to World Heritage sites, establishing lift access to the Acropolis has broken the boundaries of what was considered possible, resulting in a wide appreciation of accessibility to a world class heritage site. The solution was planned and executed as a “reversible” intervention which does not intrude excessively. In the beginning only wheelchair users were allowed to use the lift but the policy has been widened to allow pushchairs and people with walking difficulties, making the Acropolis truly “Accessible for All”.</p> <p>When new tunnels were dug for the Athens Metro the archaeologists revealed many buildings, structures and artefacts that had been covered for thousands of years. These are now exhibited in the Metro stations, accessible to all passengers passing on their way and adding a sense of living history to the modern metropolis.</p>	