



PYLON ONE

HANDBOOK



# INCLUSIVE PATHS YOUTH-LED ACCESSIBLE EXPLORATION IN THESSALONIKI

## The INSPYRE Guide: Inclusive Journeys in the City

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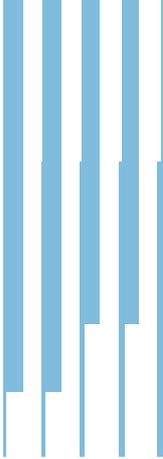
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# Introduction



Welcome to INSPYRE: Inclusive Paths Youth-Led Accessible Exploration in Thessaloniki. This Handbook represents more than a simple collection of routes and recommendations; it is the outcome of a shared vision and collective effort.

Conceived and developed with the creativity and energy of young people, enriched by the voices of community members, and supported by dedicated partners, INSPYRE seeks to reimagine Thessaloniki as a city where every individual regardless of age, background, or ability can participate fully in its cultural life and urban experience.

Thessaloniki is a city of layers, where ancient monuments stand alongside modern neighborhoods, where bustling markets open to tranquil green spaces, and where the seafront offers one of the most recognizable promenades in Europe. Yet, like many cities, it also presents barriers physical, social, and attitudinal that limit the ability of some to engage with its richness. INSPYRE was created to address these barriers and to open new pathways. By offering accessible walks, highlighting inclusive facilities, and providing practical guidance, this project seeks to transform exploration into an experience that is both equitable and enriching.

This Handbook is designed for all. For residents, it offers an opportunity to rediscover Thessaloniki from new perspectives, exploring its heritage and neighborhoods with fresh eyes. For visitors, it provides a reliable and welcoming guide to experiencing the city in ways that are inclusive and meaningful. For people with disabilities and their caregivers, it offers reassurance and practical tools to enjoy Thessaloniki with safety, confidence, and independence. Each page reflects the idea that accessibility is not a specialized feature but a universal right that benefits everyone.



At its core, INSPYRE is not only about creating routes but about fostering a culture of solidarity. It is about youth stepping into leadership, using their energy and empathy to shape their city. It is about local businesses and cultural institutions recognizing their role in inclusion and welcoming all visitors with dignity. It is about residents and visitors alike sharing responsibility for the city's public spaces and cultivating a sense of respect and hospitality. Together, these actions form a movement where accessibility becomes the fabric of urban life rather than an exception.

Through this Handbook, we invite you to walk with us. Wander through the historic streets that reveal Thessaloniki's layered past, along the seafront that has long been a space of gathering and renewal, into museums where culture is made tangible, through markets alive with sounds and colors, and into green spaces that offer rest and reflection. Each route has been carefully chosen and tested to minimize barriers, to highlight accessible facilities, and to create experiences that welcome every participant.

But more than a guide, this Handbook is a promise: that Thessaloniki can and will continue to grow as a city of inclusion. Every path described here is both a physical route and a symbol of possibility. With each step, you join a movement that demonstrates how accessibility strengthens community, how solidarity builds resilience, and how walking together transforms the way we see our city and ourselves.

Welcome to INSPYRE. Welcome to Thessaloniki without barriers. Welcome to a journey where every path leads to belonging.

## **Our Mission and Vision**

At the heart of INSPYRE lies a simple yet profound belief: that cultural heritage, public spaces, and the joy of discovery belong to everyone, regardless of ability, circumstance, or background. A city is more than its buildings and monuments; it is the shared experience of walking its streets, gathering in its squares, admiring its art, and enjoying its rhythms of daily life. When barriers exclude some from these experiences, the city itself is diminished. INSPYRE exists to change this reality.

Our mission is clear: to design, promote, and celebrate accessible walking paths across Thessaloniki, routes that open the city to all and demonstrate how exploration can be inclusive without losing authenticity or richness. Each path has been carefully mapped, combining physical accessibility with cultural depth and natural beauty. Supported by digital tools, the project ensures that information is always at hand, empowering people to explore with confidence. At the same time, INSPYRE emphasizes community engagement, involving youth, caregivers, residents, businesses, and institutions in shaping routes and resources. In this way, accessibility is not presented as an external solution imposed upon the city but as a shared endeavor built by the community itself.

Yet our vision extends beyond the creation of routes. We aspire to foster a Thessaloniki where accessibility is not seen as a favor or an exception but as the norm, seamlessly integrated into every aspect of urban life. We envision a city where people with disabilities are not treated as passive recipients of assistance but as active citizens, welcomed and valued as contributors to the cultural, social, and economic vitality of the community. INSPYRE strives to cultivate an urban culture where inclusion is celebrated, where every citizen recognizes their role in upholding accessibility, and where solidarity forms the foundation of civic pride.

A distinctive feature of this vision is the role of young people. INSPYRE recognizes youth not only as the leaders of tomorrow but as the innovators and advocates of today. Through volunteering, mapping, guiding, and digital innovation, young people are at the forefront of shaping Thessaloniki's inclusive future. Their creativity and empathy allow them to challenge old patterns and to imagine new possibilities for their city. Our vision is of a generation that carries accessibility not as an obligation but as a natural expression of fairness, respect, and responsibility.



Thessaloniki offers the perfect canvas for this transformation. A city layered with history and alive with cultural energy, it is at once ancient and modern, local and cosmopolitan. Its Byzantine monuments, Ottoman relics, Jewish heritage, and vibrant contemporary life testify to a tradition of diversity and resilience. Yet its beauty can only be fully honored if it is accessible to all. Through INSPYRE, we commit ourselves to ensuring that the city's treasures its architecture, its neighborhoods, its seafront, and its green spaces are open to everyone, so that no individual is excluded from their richness.

Our mission and vision are not limited to Thessaloniki alone. They speak to a broader principle: that inclusion strengthens communities, that accessibility enriches culture, and that solidarity builds sustainable futures. By walking the INSPYRE paths, by engaging with its tools, and by sharing in its values, participants help create a city that embodies these principles. Together, we aspire to show that accessibility is not only possible but essential, that it is not only a technical adjustment but a cultural transformation.

Through INSPYRE, Thessaloniki takes a step forward in becoming a city of empathy, a city of openness, and a city of inspiration.

Our mission is practical and immediate, providing accessible routes and resources. Our vision is expansive and enduring: to ensure that the beauty and diversity of Thessaloniki are not reserved for some but shared by all.

## How to Use this Handbook

This Handbook has been designed as both a practical guide and a source of inspiration. Within its pages, you will find detailed descriptions of five accessible walking paths, each crafted to highlight a different aspect of Thessaloniki's cultural, historical, and natural identity. For each path, we provide clear information on distance, duration, accessibility features, rest points, and highlights, ensuring that you can plan your journey with confidence.

Beyond practical details, you will also encounter stories, reflections, and insights gathered from the people who helped shape INSPYRE, youth volunteers, disability advocates, community partners, and local residents. These voices remind us that accessibility is not only about ramps and routes, but also about attitudes, awareness, and solidarity.

We encourage you to use this Handbook in whichever way suits you best:

- As a map and guide while exploring Thessaloniki step by step.
- As a learning tool to better understand the importance of inclusion and accessibility.
- As an inspiration to support or replicate similar initiatives in your own community.

Most importantly, we hope you carry this Handbook not just in your hands, but in your heart. Let it guide your steps, open your perspective, and remind you that a truly inclusive city is built when we walk together, without barriers and without limits.

# Accessibility in Thessaloniki

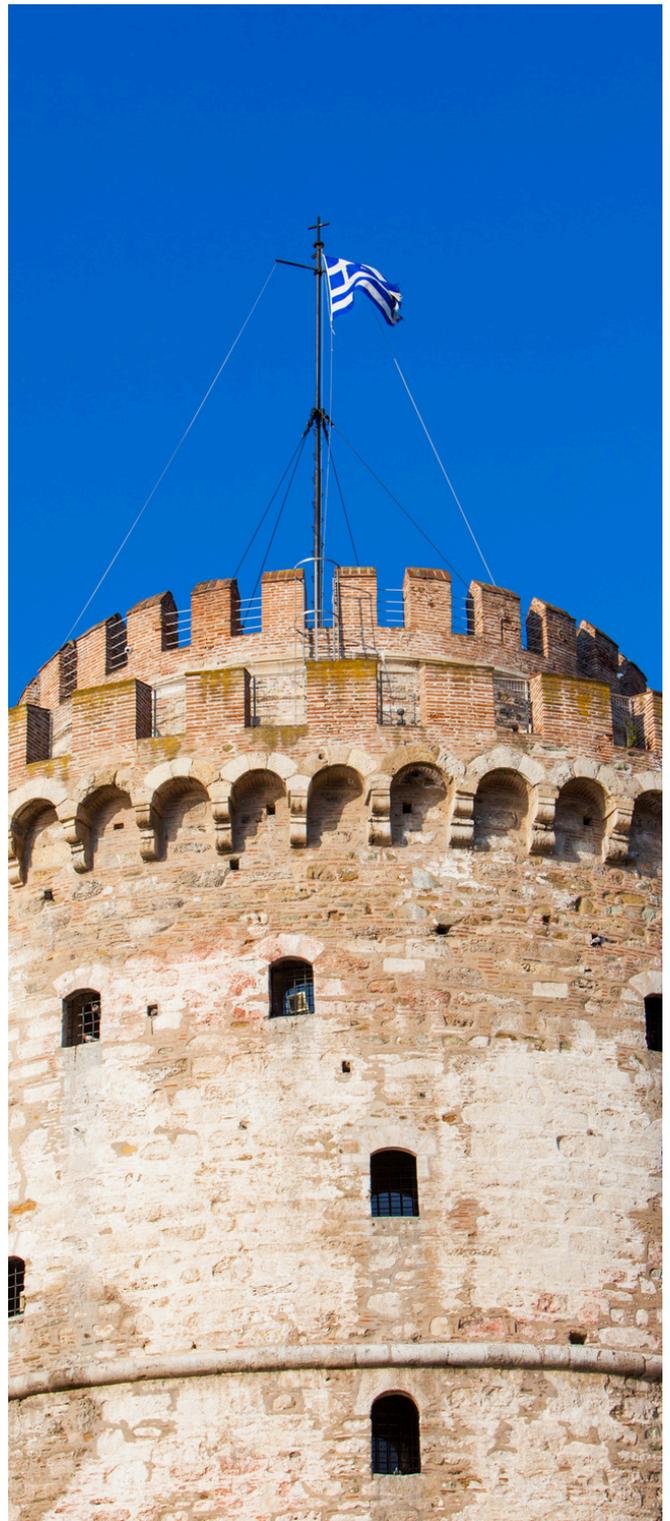
## Why Accessibility Matters

Thessaloniki is a city of stories, with centuries of history woven into its streets, monuments, and vibrant neighborhoods. Yet for many people, this richness has often remained out of reach. Physical barriers, lack of accessible infrastructure, and limited awareness have long restricted the ability of individuals with disabilities to explore and enjoy the city on equal terms. Accessibility, therefore, is not just a matter of convenience, it is a matter of rights, dignity, and participation.

When a city is accessible, it sends a message that all members of society are valued. It opens doors not only for people with disabilities, but also for families with young children, older adults, and anyone who benefits from safer, more thoughtful urban design. Accessibility transforms spaces into places of connection, belonging, and shared experience. For Thessaloniki, improving accessibility means making its cultural treasures, green spaces, and everyday life truly open to everyone.

## Principles of Inclusive Exploration

Inclusive exploration begins with the conviction that every individual, regardless of ability, has the right to enjoy and experience the city in ways that are safe, meaningful, and enriching. It is not merely a matter of removing physical barriers, but of fostering an environment where cultural heritage, natural landscapes, and everyday life can be shared equally by all. Accessibility in this sense extends beyond infrastructure to encompass the values, attitudes, and collective spirit of a community.



At INSPYRE, our vision of inclusive exploration is grounded in three fundamental principles: equity, autonomy, and participation. Equity ensures that opportunities to explore and enjoy Thessaloniki are open to everyone, eliminating the hidden forms of exclusion that prevent full participation. Autonomy emphasizes the importance of creating spaces and systems that allow individuals to move and interact with confidence, without relying unnecessarily on assistance from others. Participation affirms that people with disabilities are not passive recipients of solutions but active partners, co-creators, and leaders in shaping inclusive practices. Their voices and lived experiences guide the very design of our paths and tools, ensuring that the solutions we develop are authentic and relevant.

Flexibility is also essential. No two people have identical needs, and accessibility cannot be reduced to a single formula. An inclusive city recognizes diversity and designs its services, routes, and cultural opportunities in ways that can adapt to different requirements. Whether through multiple path options, varied interpretive tools, or a choice of digital and physical resources, flexibility ensures that every individual finds their own way of engaging with the city.

Beyond infrastructure and design lies the deeper work of awareness and empathy. True inclusion is achieved when society learns to see through the eyes of others, to understand the challenges faced by different communities, and to respond with respect and solidarity. Empathy is the bridge that transforms accessibility from a technical obligation into a shared cultural value. By cultivating awareness, Thessaloniki can foster a mindset where diversity is celebrated and inclusion becomes second nature.

These principles, taken together, form the foundation of INSPYRE's efforts. They invite us to imagine a Thessaloniki where inclusive exploration is the norm: a city where history, art, and daily life are woven into experiences accessible to all where citizens walk side by side, learning from one another; and where every street corner, cultural site, and green space offers not just a destination, but an affirmation of belonging. By embracing equity, autonomy, participation, flexibility, awareness, and empathy, Thessaloniki can evolve into a city that is not only physically accessible but also socially welcoming and emotionally inclusive, a place where every step tells a story of solidarity.

### **Key Accessibility Features Explained**

Accessibility in a city is often defined and measured through a series of tangible features that directly influence how individuals interact with and experience urban spaces. These features, though sometimes simple in design, carry profound importance because they determine whether a space is welcoming or exclusionary, empowering or limiting. Thessaloniki, with its vibrant history and diverse urban fabric, has a unique opportunity to demonstrate how thoughtful design can transform the experience of exploration for all.

Ramps and step-free access are among the most recognizable features of an accessible environment. They provide essential solutions for wheelchair users and individuals with mobility impairments, ensuring that stairs, high curbs, or uneven surfaces do not become insurmountable obstacles.





Their presence not only opens up monuments, public buildings, and everyday services to more people but also creates a smoother environment for families with strollers and older adults. By designing with ramps in mind, the city communicates that every entrance is an open invitation rather than a barrier.

Equally transformative is the use of tactile paving. These specially textured ground surfaces serve as critical navigational tools for people with visual impairments, offering guidance along pathways and warning of hazards such as street crossings or changes in elevation. Far from being a detail, tactile paving embodies a profound respect for independence, allowing individuals with visual impairments to explore Thessaloniki with greater safety and confidence.

Adapted toilets are another indispensable component of inclusive design. Outings to explore the city often last several hours, and without facilities that accommodate wheelchair users or people requiring additional support, many individuals may be forced to cut their experiences short. Toilets with wider doors, ample turning space, grab bars, and practical layouts ensure dignity, safety, and comfort, extending the possibility of longer and richer participation in cultural and social life.

Rest stops and seating areas, particularly those situated in shaded or scenic locations, provide opportunities to pause, recharge, and enjoy the city at one's own rhythm. Accessibility is not only about movement but also about rest and the freedom to decide the pace of exploration. Such spaces benefit all citizens, older adults, families, tourists, and those with health conditions reinforcing the idea that inclusivity enriches the entire community.

Cultural spaces, such as museums, galleries, and theaters, also have a vital role to play in shaping accessibility. Audio guides, tactile exhibits, and sign-language interpretation allow people with sensory disabilities to fully immerse themselves in Thessaloniki's artistic and historical heritage. These features invite individuals not only to observe but to interact, creating deeper, more engaging encounters with the city's cultural treasures.



Clear signage and wayfinding tools tie all these elements together. Signs with large print, high-contrast colors, pictograms, and universally recognized symbols ensure that navigation is intuitive and stress-free. For visitors with cognitive or sensory impairments, this clarity reduces anxiety and increases independence, allowing them to move through the city with greater ease. When wayfinding is well designed, the city itself becomes a welcoming host, guiding each person respectfully and thoughtfully.

Taken together, these features represent more than technical solutions; they embody a philosophy of inclusion. They remind us that accessibility is not an afterthought, but an integral part of how cities should be imagined and built. By integrating ramps, tactile paving, adapted toilets, rest stops, inclusive cultural tools, and clear signage into Thessaloniki's public spaces, the city not only removes obstacles but also enriches the shared experience of discovery. This thoughtful design brings Thessaloniki closer to a vision of inclusivity where every individual, regardless of ability, can engage with its streets, monuments, and stories, and where the joy of exploration truly belongs to all.

## The INSPYRE Paths

Thessaloniki is a city layered with history, diversity, and everyday vitality. The INSPYRE Paths were created to capture the essence of this unique urban fabric while ensuring that exploration is inclusive, comfortable, and welcoming to all. Each path has been carefully designed with accessibility as a guiding principle, offering safe infrastructure, cultural depth, and opportunities for discovery without barriers.

### **Path 1: The Historical Heart Walk**

The Historical Heart Walk is a journey into the ancient soul of Thessaloniki, a city that has stood at the crossroads of civilizations for more than two millennia. This accessible route, approximately three kilometers in length and designed to be enjoyed over two hours, links together monuments that are both symbols of the city and testaments to its enduring spirit. Among its highlights are the Rotunda, one of the oldest and most striking buildings in Thessaloniki; the Arch of Galerius, which recalls the Roman emperor's triumphs; and the Roman Forum, once the bustling center of civic life.

Accessibility has been integrated into every stage of this path. Smooth pavements, ramps, and step-free entrances allow wheelchair users and individuals with mobility impairments to experience the sites without unnecessary obstacles. Rest stops are placed strategically, providing opportunities for visitors to pause and reflect on the grandeur of the past. For individuals with visual impairments, tactile guides and audio descriptions enhance the experience by bringing the monuments' stories to life through sound and touch.

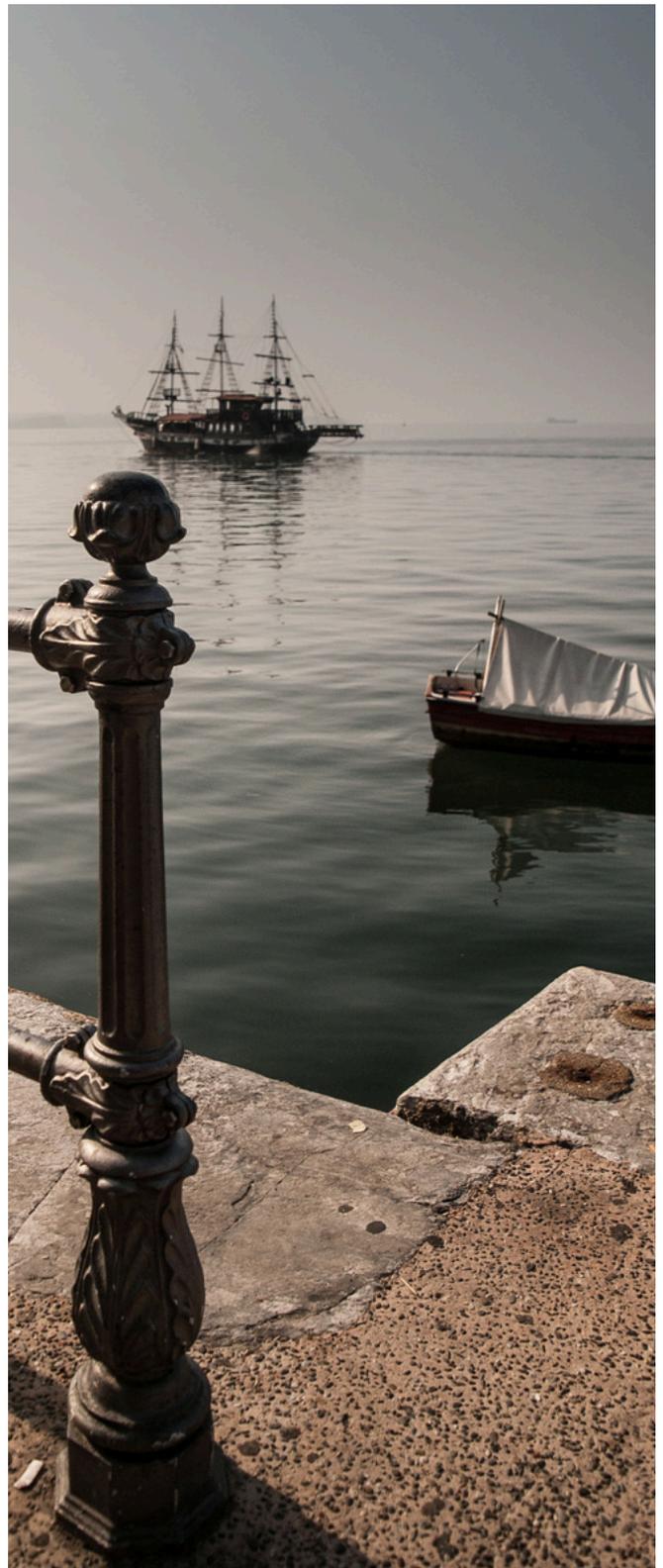
Walking through this path is more than a historical tour; it is a dialogue between past and present. It allows participants to feel part of Thessaloniki's unfolding story, reminding us that history belongs to everyone and should be accessible to all who wish to encounter it.

### **Path 2: The Cultural Exploration Walk**

The Cultural Exploration Walk celebrates Thessaloniki's vibrant artistic spirit, a spirit shaped by centuries of exchange between East and West. Stretching over 2.5 kilometers and designed for a three-hour experience, the route highlights two key institutions: the Contemporary Art Centre and the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art. Both embody Thessaloniki's role as a hub of creativity, dialogue, and innovation.

Accessibility is at the heart of this path. The museums included are equipped with ramps, elevators, and barrier-free entrances, ensuring that every visitor can enter and explore comfortably. Inside, adapted resources such as tactile exhibits, large-print guides, audio descriptions, and sign-language interpretation invite individuals with different abilities to fully engage with the artworks. These tools not only provide information but create opportunities for deeper, multisensory encounters with art.

This path also encourages reflection on the role of culture as a unifying force in society. By making art accessible, Thessaloniki affirms that creativity is a shared human experience, not a privilege reserved for a few. The Cultural Exploration Walk is an inclusive celebration of imagination, offering everyone the chance to discover, question, and be inspired.



### **Path 3: The Seafront Walk**

- The Seafront Walk captures Thessaloniki's most iconic and beloved experience: its waterfront promenade. Extending for nearly four kilometers, this route can be enjoyed over two to three hours, stretching from the White Tower, the city's emblematic landmark, to the Sculpture Park, where contemporary works punctuate the open seascape.
- The design of the promenade already offers one of the most accessible urban environments in Thessaloniki. Wide, flat walkways make navigation smooth for wheelchair users, families with strollers, and older adults alike. Along the way, shaded seating areas provide rest and relaxation, while accessible viewing points ensure that everyone can enjoy the sweeping vistas of the Thermaic Gulf. Evening walks are particularly enchanting, with the sun setting across the water and the city lights beginning to glow.
- The Seafront Walk is not only about scenery but about community. It is where locals gather to walk, cycle, chat, and enjoy the rhythm of the sea. For individuals with disabilities, it offers an environment free of obstacles and full of possibilities, a place where the horizon feels open, where exploration is effortless, and where inclusion is part of the city's natural rhythm.

### **Path 4: The Culinary Walk**

- Thessaloniki is often called the culinary capital of Greece, and the Culinary Walk is a celebration of this proud tradition. Covering approximately three kilometers and lasting between three and four hours, the route guides participants through the city's legendary food markets and eateries, from the bustling Modiano Market to the lively Athonos Square. Here, flavors, aromas, and sounds intermingle, creating an atmosphere that is as vibrant as it is welcoming.
- Accessibility plays a central role in this experience. Many of the participating restaurants and shops have been selected for their wheelchair access, adapted seating, and inclusive services. While some historic streets feature cobblestones, alternative routes have been mapped to ensure safety and comfort for all. Sensory accessibility is also a key focus: the Culinary Walk embraces the multisensory nature of food, inviting participants to engage not only through taste but through touch, smell, and sound, making the experience rich and inclusive for individuals with sensory impairments.
- Food in Thessaloniki is more than sustenance; it is a language of hospitality, identity, and community. The Culinary Walk demonstrates that this language should be spoken to everyone. By making gastronomy accessible, Thessaloniki extends its warmth and generosity to all who wish to partake in its culinary treasures.

### **Path 5: The Nature Walk**

- For those seeking peace and renewal, the Nature Walk offers an accessible retreat into Thessaloniki's greener side. Spanning 4.5 kilometers over roughly three hours, the path connects the historic neighborhood of Ano Poli with the Seich Sou Forest, creating a journey that blends culture, heritage, and nature.
- The route has been carefully chosen to maximize accessibility. Surfaces have been selected with mobility aids in mind, and rest areas with seating and shade are placed along the way. Sensory features, such as the sounds of birds, the fragrance of pine, and the gentle play of light through the trees, invite participants to engage with nature on multiple levels.



- For individuals with disabilities, the presence of rest points and accessible pathways ensures that the walk is not only possible but enjoyable and restorative.
- The Nature Walk is more than an excursion; it is an invitation to slow down, breathe, and connect. In the tranquility of the forest and the charm of Ano Poli's streets, participants discover that accessibility is not limited to the built environment but extends to the natural world as well. This path affirms that the healing power of nature should be open to everyone, offering serenity and inclusion side by side.

## Practical Information

Exploring Thessaloniki is an enriching experience in every sense: the city offers layers of history to uncover, vibrant streets to wander, and countless opportunities to connect with its people and culture. Yet the true value of exploration lies not only in what can be seen but in how it can be experienced. For visitors, and particularly for those with disabilities or their caregivers, the assurance of confidence, safety, and comfort is essential. A city can only be said to be fully welcoming when every person, regardless of their abilities, can move freely, access services, and enjoy the richness it has to offer without barriers.

This section of the Handbook has been carefully designed to provide essential guidance that will allow every visitor to experience Thessaloniki in a way that is smooth, inclusive, and enjoyable. It addresses the practical aspects of urban exploration: how to move around the city using its various modes of transport; where to find accessible facilities such as adapted toilets, rest areas, and medical services; and how to approach the experience as a visitor or caregiver with foresight and ease. These elements, though often taken for granted, play a decisive role in shaping the quality of one's journey, turning challenges into possibilities and uncertainty into confidence.

At the same time, the modern traveler can rely not only on the physical infrastructure of the city but also on the power of digital innovation.



Thessaloniki offers a growing selection of apps, tools, and online resources that help visitors plan their routes, discover accessible venues, and connect with assistance when needed. These resources ensure that exploration is not only feasible but enhanced by information that is immediate, reliable, and adapted to diverse needs.

Gathering together this practical knowledge, we hope to equip visitors with more than logistical support, we aim to provide peace of mind. Knowing that transport, facilities, and resources are available allows individuals to focus on what matters most: experiencing Thessaloniki's beauty, its heritage, and its unique atmosphere. With preparation, awareness, and the right tools, the city opens itself fully, offering journeys that are not restricted by barriers but enriched by inclusion.

### **Transport and Getting Around Thessaloniki**

Thessaloniki is a city that combines the intimacy of a compact urban center with the vibrancy of a metropolis. Many of its most cherished attractions, the waterfront, Aristoteles Square, the White Tower, and key museums, are situated within walking distance of one another. This makes the city particularly inviting for visitors who enjoy moving at a slower pace, exploring neighborhoods on foot, and discovering unexpected details along the way. The historic core, with its blend of Byzantine monuments, Ottoman remnants, and lively modern districts, is best appreciated through direct contact with its streets and squares. For many, simply strolling through the city center already offers a rewarding experience.

For longer journeys, however, Thessaloniki provides a network of public and private transportation options.



The city's bus system, managed by the OASTH organization, remains the primary means of public transport. Many of the buses serving central lines are modern vehicles with low floors, retractable ramps, and designated spaces for wheelchair users. Priority seating is marked clearly, and audio announcements assist passengers with visual impairments in following their journey. While accessibility can still vary depending on the route and the age of the vehicle, most major lines, especially those connecting the seafront, the university area, and the central market, are adapted to meet diverse needs. Planning ahead, particularly by consulting schedules or using transport apps, can help travelers anticipate which lines and times are best suited to them.

For visitors who prefer more direct transport, taxis are widely available throughout the city. Standard taxis can be hailed on the street or booked by phone or mobile app.

A smaller but steadily growing number of companies now offer wheelchair-accessible taxis equipped with ramps or lifts, making them suitable for passengers with greater mobility requirements. Since these vehicles are limited in number, advance booking is strongly recommended, especially during peak hours or for trips to and from the airport. Drivers are generally helpful, and the relatively short distances between key attractions mean that taxis remain an affordable and convenient solution for many.

Thessaloniki is also gradually investing in infrastructure that promotes alternative modes of movement, such as cycling and walking. The redevelopment of the waterfront promenade, one of the city's most celebrated public spaces, has created wide, flat paths that are ideal not only for pedestrians and cyclists but also for wheelchair users, families with strollers, and older adults. The seafront offers one of the most accessible and enjoyable routes in the city, free from heavy traffic and rich with opportunities to pause and enjoy the view of the Thermaic Gulf. In addition, smaller pedestrian-friendly zones are being introduced in other parts of the city, contributing to a more inclusive and sustainable urban environment.

Looking to the near future, the city is preparing to open its first metro system, a project that has been under development for several years and promises to transform mobility in Thessaloniki.

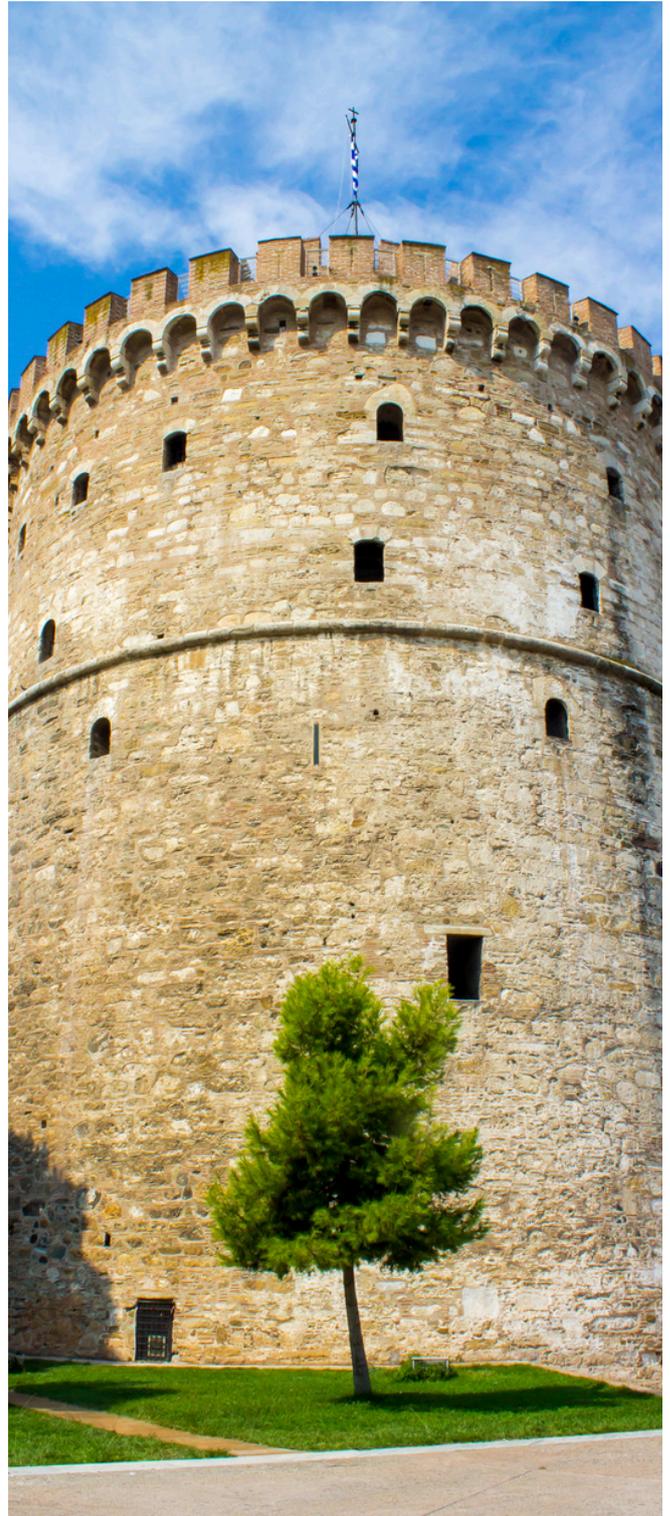
Designed with full accessibility in mind, the metro will feature elevators, step-free access at all stations, clear signage, and modern security systems. Audio-visual announcements will provide real-time information for passengers with sensory impairments, while spacious carriages will accommodate wheelchairs comfortably. Once completed, the metro is expected to provide an efficient and reliable alternative to buses, significantly improving connectivity across the city.

Taken together, these options mean that Thessaloniki is steadily moving toward becoming a city where mobility is inclusive. While challenges remain, particularly in older neighborhoods where narrow pavements or uneven streets can be an obstacle, the commitment to accessible transport is visible in new projects and ongoing improvements. For visitors with disabilities, the combination of walkable areas, increasingly adapted buses, accessible taxis, and the promise of the upcoming metro ensures that the city can be explored not only with practicality but also with confidence. Movement through Thessaloniki, in this way, becomes part of the experience itself: a reminder that a city reveals its true character not only through its monuments and landmarks but also through the ease with which it welcomes every traveler to discover them.

### **Accessible Facilities**

Accessible infrastructure is the foundation of inclusive exploration, ensuring that outings in Thessaloniki are not only possible but also comfortable, safe, and sustainable. For many visitors, the difference between a pleasant experience and a frustrating one lies in the availability of well-designed facilities that respond to diverse needs. Thessaloniki, as a city that balances its historical character with modern development, has made important steps toward providing such facilities in key areas.

Public toilets adapted for wheelchair users can be found in several central locations, most notably near the White Tower, the Archaeological Museum, and along the seafront promenade, which is one of the city's most visited areas.



These facilities are equipped with wider doors that allow easy entry, grab bars to ensure stability and support, and sufficient space for turning and maneuvering mobility aids. The presence of such toilets is crucial, as they allow visitors with disabilities to extend their outings without the constant worry of accessibility limitations. Some modern shopping centers and municipal buildings also provide adapted facilities, adding to the options available in the city.

Equally important are rest areas, which are thoughtfully distributed across Thessaloniki's most frequented spaces. The iconic Aristotelous Square offers benches and shaded corners where people can relax while taking in the views of the sea and the neoclassical architecture that frames the square. Along the New Waterfront Promenade, seating areas are integrated into the design every few hundred meters, making it an inviting place for leisurely walks where pauses are encouraged and accessible to all. These rest stops are not only functional but also create opportunities for social interaction, allowing locals and visitors to share the city's atmosphere together.

Cultural institutions have also recognized the importance of accessibility in their facilities. Many of Thessaloniki's museums, galleries, and theaters provide accessible seating areas, rest points, and barrier-free entrances. The Museum of Byzantine Culture and the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, for example, have made significant investments in ensuring that visitors with disabilities can navigate exhibitions comfortably, with resting areas integrated into the flow of the visit. Theaters and performance venues are increasingly introducing accessible seating options that allow people with mobility aids to participate fully in the city's cultural life.

Health and medical support are another critical aspect of inclusive infrastructure. Thessaloniki is home to several major hospitals, including the AHEPA University Hospital and the Papageorgiou Hospital, which are leading providers of emergency care and specialized medical services. These facilities are supported by an extensive network of smaller clinics and health centers across the city. In addition, pharmacies are widely available on nearly every main street, many of which are accessible and provide not only essential medicines but also advice and first aid support. Pharmacies operate on a rotating schedule, ensuring that at least one is open in every district at all times, including nights and weekends, a valuable service for both residents and visitors.

Taken together, these facilities make Thessaloniki increasingly navigable for people with disabilities and their caregivers. Although there is still progress to be made, particularly in older neighborhoods where historic infrastructure can pose challenges, the presence of adapted toilets, shaded resting areas, inclusive cultural institutions, and reliable medical support reflects the city's commitment to accessibility. More than simple amenities, these facilities provide peace of mind. They reassure visitors that their needs have been considered and that they can engage with the city fully, focusing on discovery and enjoyment rather than on obstacles or limitations.





### **Tips for Visitors with Disabilities and Caregivers**

Visitors with disabilities and their caregivers will discover Thessaloniki to be a warm and hospitable city, where the rhythm of daily life invites participation and discovery. However, as in many historic European cities, parts of Thessaloniki's urban fabric, particularly in older neighborhoods such as Ano Poli, can still pose challenges. Narrow pavements, uneven cobblestones, or steep inclines may make certain areas less accessible. With careful preparation and an awareness of the city's layout, these challenges can be managed, allowing visitors to enjoy their experience without unnecessary stress.

Planning in advance is one of the most valuable steps for ensuring smooth exploration. Before visiting cultural institutions, restaurants, or attractions, it is advisable to call ahead or check online for details about accessibility. Many institutions are eager to assist and will provide information on step-free entrances, available ramps, adapted toilets, or additional services such as audio guides or tactile exhibits. Restaurants, too, often accommodate requests if notified in advance, from arranging accessible seating to providing dietary adaptations. Such communication not only ensures comfort but also strengthens the culture of inclusion by encouraging local businesses to remain attentive to accessibility needs.

Visitors and caregivers should also consider practical preparations for the day. Carrying essential supplies such as prescribed medications, hydration, and assistive devices is particularly important, especially during the summer months when high temperatures can make outings more demanding. Lightweight clothing, hats, and sunscreen are recommended for outdoor routes, while a portable charger for mobile devices ensures continued access to digital tools like maps or communication apps. Having these items at hand gives both visitors and caregivers confidence and flexibility throughout the day.

Caregivers play a crucial role in shaping the quality of the experience. It is important to pace activities realistically, allowing time for breaks and moments of rest rather than attempting to cover too much at once.



Thessaloniki offers many shaded benches, cafés, and resting points, especially along the seafront, where pauses can become part of the enjoyment rather than an interruption. Building these pauses into the rhythm of the outing ensures that both the visitor and the caregiver remain comfortable and engaged.

Another strength of Thessaloniki lies in the hospitality of its people. Locals are known for their openness and willingness to assist, whether it is helping with directions, offering practical support, or simply extending a warm welcome. For visitors who may face occasional challenges with infrastructure, this readiness to help often makes the difference between a difficult moment and a pleasant memory. Approaching interactions with openness and flexibility enhances not only comfort but also the richness of the cultural exchange.

Finally, maintaining a spirit of adaptability is essential. While Thessaloniki has made significant progress in accessibility, unexpected situations may still arise, such as construction works or narrow sidewalks in older quarters. Being prepared to adjust plans, by taking an alternative route, visiting a different site, or allowing more time, ensures that such challenges do not overshadow the overall experience. Flexibility allows both visitors and caregivers to focus on the positives: the warmth of the people, the beauty of the sites, and the joy of discovering the city together.

In sum, Thessaloniki rewards preparation with a deeply human experience of inclusion and discovery. With careful planning, thoughtful pacing, and openness to the city's rhythms, visitors with disabilities and their caregivers can enjoy not only the monuments and landmarks but also the intangible atmosphere of a city where hospitality, history, and community meet.

### **Recommended Apps and Digital Tools**

In today's world, digital technology is a powerful ally for inclusive travel. For visitors to Thessaloniki, mobile apps and online resources can make the difference between uncertainty and confidence, particularly when it comes to navigating transport systems, finding accessible venues, or enriching cultural experiences. By combining the city's physical accessibility features with the possibilities offered by digital tools, exploration becomes smoother, more independent, and more enjoyable.

For navigation, Google Maps remains one of the most versatile tools. Beyond its standard directions, it now includes options that highlight step-free routes and indicate whether stations, pavements, or public entrances are wheelchair-accessible. Visitors can also use the "Street View" function to preview areas before setting out, identifying potential obstacles such as narrow sidewalks or stairs. Complementing this is Moovit, a popular app for public transport, which provides step-by-step guidance across Thessaloniki's bus network. Moovit's real-time updates help travelers track bus arrivals and departures, while its accessibility filters allow users to identify routes and stops that are most suitable for their needs.

For those relying heavily on the bus system, the OASTH Bus Tracker app is an indispensable local resource. It provides real-time information about the city's buses, including expected arrival times, route changes, and vehicle numbers. For people with mobility impairments, this information reduces uncertainty and waiting times, helping them plan journeys with greater ease and comfort.

Digital tools also enhance Thessaloniki's rich cultural offerings. Many of the city's museums and cultural institutions have invested in mobile applications that offer audio guides, visual resources, or even virtual tours. For example, the Museum of Byzantine Culture provides mobile-accessible content that allows visitors to engage with exhibits through descriptive narration and images. Such tools are particularly useful for individuals with sensory impairments, as they expand the ways in which culture can be experienced and understood. Increasingly, cultural apps are being developed with inclusive features such as adjustable font sizes, high-contrast modes, or sign-language content.

For visitors who are blind or have low vision, Be My Eyes is an innovative app that connects users with volunteers around the world who can provide real-time visual assistance through a smartphone's camera. Whether reading a sign, identifying a street crossing, or checking a restaurant menu, this tool can provide immediate support in unfamiliar environments. Similarly, Wheelmap offers a crowdsourced approach to accessibility by allowing users to locate and review places based on their level of wheelchair accessibility.



From cafés and shops to public toilets and cultural sites, Wheelmap builds a living database that grows with community input, empowering travelers to make informed decisions.

Other general accessibility tools can also be valuable during a stay in Thessaloniki. AccessNow, for example, functions like Wheelmap but on a global scale, providing reviews of accessible spaces in cities worldwide. Apps that support communication, such as Google Translate (with its voice-to-text and live camera translation functions), are especially useful for visitors with hearing impairments or those who do not speak Greek, allowing smoother interactions with locals and service providers.

At the heart of these resources is INSPYRE's own digital e-Handbook, which brings together curated walking routes, accessibility details, and cultural insights specifically designed for Thessaloniki. Unlike general-purpose apps, the INSPYRE e-Handbook is tailored to highlight the city's five inclusive paths, offering information that has been tested and verified by the project team in collaboration with people with disabilities. This ensures not only accuracy but also relevance, as the content reflects real needs and lived experiences.

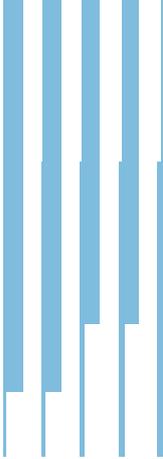
Together, these digital tools form an ecosystem that empowers visitors to explore Thessaloniki with independence and confidence. They reduce uncertainty, provide practical solutions in real time, and enrich cultural engagement. When combined with the physical accessibility features of the city, they create a powerful framework for inclusive exploration, one in which every visitor can discover Thessaloniki not as a series of challenges, but as a city open to all.

## Youth Voices and Community Stories

At the heart of INSPYRE are not only the carefully designed walking paths or the digital handbook that guides them, but above all the people who bring the project to life. Young volunteers, individuals with disabilities, caregivers, local businesses, educators, cultural institutions, and municipal representatives have all contributed their energy, creativity, and personal perspectives. Each of them adds a unique voice to the mosaic of Thessaloniki, and together they transform the idea of accessibility from an abstract principle into a lived reality.

INSPYRE was conceived as a project about inclusion, but it quickly became clear that its greatest strength lies in the connections it creates between people. Walking side by side through the city, young people and individuals with disabilities discover not only Thessaloniki's cultural and natural treasures but also each other's experiences, challenges, and hopes. These encounters dissolve stereotypes and build bonds of solidarity, demonstrating that accessibility is not a matter of charity but of justice and mutual respect. Every walk becomes both a journey through space and a dialogue between lives, where each participant contributes to the collective understanding of what it means to belong. The project has also opened spaces for caregivers, whose role is often invisible yet essential. Their voices highlight the daily realities of navigating the city with loved ones, and their insights remind us that inclusion must extend beyond individual adaptations to encompass family and community support.





In workshops and public events, caregivers shared how the presence of ramps, rest areas, or adapted toilets not only benefits individuals with disabilities but also eases the physical and emotional burden of those who accompany them. Their stories remind us that accessibility is about strengthening networks of care, ensuring that no one carries the weight of exclusion alone.

Local businesses and cultural institutions have likewise found themselves woven into INSPYRE's story. For many, welcoming inclusive groups was an eye-opening experience. Owners of cafés, restaurants, and shops described how seeing participants navigate their premises revealed both strengths and shortcomings in their facilities. Some made immediate adjustments, such as adding portable ramps or clearer signage, while others began considering longer-term changes. Their reflections show that accessibility is not merely a legal obligation but an opportunity: a way to widen their audience, foster loyalty, and demonstrate social responsibility.

Perhaps most inspiring are the voices of young volunteers, who embody the spirit of the European Solidarity Corps and the vision of INSPYRE. For many, this project marked their first direct engagement with issues of disability and inclusion. They describe how accompanying participants with disabilities during the walks changed their perspective on their own city. Places they had passed countless times, streets, monuments, markets, suddenly appeared different when seen through the eyes of someone facing physical or sensory barriers. These revelations have planted seeds of empathy and awareness that will shape their attitudes for years to come. The young people of INSPYRE are not only facilitators of inclusion today but also advocates and leaders of a more inclusive tomorrow.

This chapter is therefore dedicated to their voices and stories, which are the heartbeat of INSPYRE. They remind us that inclusion is not built solely through ramps, tactile paving, or accessible toilets, but through shared experiences, mutual respect, and the courage to imagine a city that welcomes all its citizens equally. Each testimony, reflection, and story of change adds depth to the project's impact and ensures that its legacy is not confined to maps or handbooks but lives on in the people who carry it forward. Thessaloniki's paths are more than routes to be walked, they are spaces where solidarity is practiced, where community is strengthened, and where every step tells a story of dignity and belonging.

### **Testimonials from Participants**

The voices of participants are the clearest reflection of INSPYRE's impact. They show how accessible paths are not only practical tools but also gateways to dignity, joy, and belonging. Each testimony reveals a different perspective on what it means to explore Thessaloniki inclusively, and together they weave a picture of transformation of the city, and of the people who walk its streets.

"I have lived in Thessaloniki all my life, but for years I felt as though many parts of the city were closed to me. Stairs, broken pavements, and a lack of accessible toilets meant that I often avoided outings beyond my immediate neighborhood. When I joined the Historical Heart Walk with INSPYRE, I rediscovered places I thought I had lost forever. The volunteers guided me with kindness, the path had ramps and resting spots, and for the first time in years I felt like a tourist in my own city. It was not only about the monuments, but about regaining a sense of freedom." – Maria, wheelchair user

"As a young person who volunteered for INSPYRE, I did not realize how much the experience would change me. Walking through the city alongside people with disabilities opened my eyes to the invisible struggles of everyday life obstacles I had never noticed because they did not affect me personally. Suddenly, every step, every curb, every inaccessible entrance became visible. I realized that accessibility is not only about ramps or elevators but about fairness and respect. INSPYRE gave me a sense of purpose: to be part of building a city where no one feels left behind." – Nikos, youth volunteer



“The Culinary Walk was an unforgettable experience. For someone like me with a visual impairment, eating out can sometimes feel overwhelming, menus I cannot read, tables that are difficult to reach, or environments that feel unwelcoming. But during the walk, I discovered restaurants that were not only physically accessible but also eager to adapt. One restaurant provided me with a Braille menu, and another had staff who described the dishes with enthusiasm. These small gestures made me feel included, respected, and valued as a customer. I realized that accessibility is not an extra, it is hospitality at its best.” – Elena, participant with visual impairment

“For years, I had been hesitant to let my son, who has mobility challenges, join activities outside school. I was afraid he would feel excluded or that the city would not be safe for him. But when we joined the Seafront Walk, everything changed. The wide promenade, the flat paths, and the welcoming atmosphere gave us the confidence to explore together. My son laughed, interacted with other children, and for the first time, I saw him enjoy Thessaloniki without fear. INSPYRE not only gave him independence but also gave me, as a parent, peace of mind.” – Katerina, caregiver and parent

“What I appreciated most about INSPYRE was the feeling of community. The Nature Walk was not just about discovering green spaces, but about sharing the experience with others. I walked side by side with people I had never met before, each with their own story, each overcoming different challenges. At one point, we stopped to rest and share a snack, and I felt that we were part of something bigger, a city where people support each other, where inclusion is not abstract but lived in small, everyday moments. That is what INSPYRE gave me: a sense of belonging.” – Dimitris, participant

These testimonials highlight the essence of INSPYRE: the creation of spaces where people feel free, respected, and empowered. They remind us that accessibility is not merely about infrastructure but about opening doors to human connection, dignity, and joy. The paths of Thessaloniki are transformed through these voices, becoming symbols of solidarity and shared experience.



# Stories of Change and Inclusion

The most enduring legacy of INSPYRE is not found only in the maps of its accessible paths or the digital handbook created for travelers. It lives in the small, meaningful stories of change that have unfolded throughout Thessaloniki: moments where individuals, families, and institutions experienced a shift in perspective and took steps, sometimes literal, sometimes symbolic, toward greater inclusion. These stories show us that accessibility is not merely a technical adjustment, but a transformation of culture, values, and relationships.

One early story came during the Historical Heart Walk, when participants, including wheelchair users, moved together past the Arch of Galerius. Local residents paused to watch the group navigate the route, and for many it was the first time they had witnessed people with disabilities actively reclaiming public space. A café owner nearby was struck by how a simple step at his entrance had made his shop invisible to them for years. The very next week, he purchased a portable ramp and began telling his customers about the importance of accessibility. What started as a small adjustment to his business became a catalyst for conversations in his neighborhood, inspiring others to consider how welcoming, or excluding, their spaces might be.

Another powerful moment unfolded during the Cultural Exploration Walk. At the museum entrance, staff initially seemed unsure how to accommodate a participant with hearing loss. With guidance from the INSPYRE team, they quickly arranged sign-language support and made extra effort to ensure the visit was meaningful.



The participant later described this as the first time a cultural institution in Thessaloniki had truly felt open to her. Moved by the experience, the museum leadership decided to expand accessibility by introducing captioned video content, large-print exhibition guides, and staff training in basic sign language.

A temporary adjustment had grown into a permanent commitment, showing how inclusion can begin with a single individual but ripple outward into long-term institutional change. The Seafront Walk offered its own stories of transformation. For a mother walking with her teenage son, who has mobility challenges, the wide promenade and step-free design offered a rare sense of freedom. She confessed that before INSPYRE she often hesitated to take him into busy areas, fearing logistical obstacles or uncomfortable stares. That day, however, her son raced along the flat walkways with confidence, joining other children and laughing under the open sky. Watching him, the mother said she felt a weight lift, suddenly the city no longer seemed a place of barriers but of possibilities. INSPYRE had given them not only a walk but a new vision of belonging.

Youth participants also carry their own stories of change. Many volunteers admitted they had never paid attention to accessibility before INSPYRE. Walking alongside people with visual impairments, they began noticing missing tactile paving, poorly marked crossings, or uneven sidewalks. For the first time, these features, previously invisible, became glaringly obvious. One young volunteer described it as “learning to see the city with new eyes.” Another explained that the project helped her realize inclusion is not someone else’s responsibility, but a duty shared by every citizen. These revelations transformed young people into advocates, planting seeds of long-term cultural change.

Even schools became part of this transformation. During outreach activities, students were asked to design “inclusive maps” of their own neighborhoods. The exercise sparked excitement: children proudly pointed out where ramps were missing or where benches could be placed to help older people rest.

Teachers later reported that the activity had lasting effects, with students continuing to talk about accessibility weeks after the workshops. INSPYRE had not only created immediate solutions but had also inspired a new generation to think differently about fairness and community.

These stories demonstrate that inclusion is not achieved only through infrastructure. A ramp, a sign-language interpreter, a shaded bench, or a kind volunteer might seem like small details, but they accumulate into a fabric of accessibility that enriches the lives of individuals and strengthens the city as a whole. Each story is a thread in this fabric, binding Thessaloniki's people together in solidarity.

The success of INSPYRE lies precisely in these lived moments: when a business owner takes action, when a museum rethinks its practices, when a caregiver gains new confidence, when a young volunteer learns empathy, when a child draws an inclusive map of their street. These are the quiet revolutions that, together, reshape a city. They remind us that accessibility is not an end point but a continuous journey, one that becomes richer and more meaningful when it is walked together.

### **Reflections from Local Businesses and Partners**

The INSPYRE project not only reshaped the lives of its direct participants but also touched the wider fabric of Thessaloniki through the engagement of businesses, cultural institutions, and community partners. Their reflections reveal the ripple effect of inclusion, showing how encounters with the project sparked new awareness, inspired practical changes, and shifted long-held attitudes about accessibility.

For many small business owners, the presence of INSPYRE was a moment of awakening. Thessaloniki's narrow streets and lively markets had long been part of the city's charm, but they also carried invisible barriers for many. Shopkeepers and restaurateurs admitted that before INSPYRE, they had not considered how a single step at an entrance or a crowded seating arrangement could exclude entire groups of potential customers. One café owner recalled watching the Culinary Walk pass his shop, realizing with sudden clarity that his establishment was inaccessible to half the group. "It struck me deeply," he reflected. "Not because I lost business, but because I saw people smiling and eager to join, yet unable to do so. That was the moment I understood that inclusion is not optional, it is essential." Within days, he had purchased a small portable ramp. Though inexpensive, this simple addition became symbolic, sending a message that his doors were open to all.

Larger businesses and cultural institutions also felt the project's influence. Staff at museums and galleries spoke about how the walks highlighted barriers they had previously overlooked. One museum director noted that accessibility had often been framed as a matter of compliance with legal requirements, but INSPYRE reframed it as a moral responsibility. "When you walk alongside someone who cannot read a caption, or who cannot enter a gallery space because of stairs, you no longer think in terms of checklists, you think in terms of people. That changes everything." Following these reflections, institutions began developing new programs: tactile exhibits, larger print labels, accessible digital content, and training for staff in disability awareness. These initiatives, sparked by encounters with INSPYRE participants, enriched the institutions themselves by expanding their audiences and deepening their connection with the community.





Local government representatives echoed similar sentiments. For them, INSPYRE was a reminder that policies and strategies mean little without the lived experiences of citizens. A municipal planner explained how joining the Seafront Walk provided insight no report could capture. “We often plan infrastructure in abstract terms, meters of pavement, slopes, materials. But when you walk beside someone in a wheelchair, you see how a slight incline, a broken tile, or a missing rest stop changes the entire journey. It gives urgency to our work. It makes inclusion real.” Municipal partners reflected that INSPYRE helped bridge the gap between policy and practice, highlighting the value of participatory planning where citizens themselves become co-creators of solutions.

Businesses also discovered unexpected benefits. Far from being a burden, accessibility became a way to strengthen their identity and expand their reach. A restaurant owner in Athonos Square reflected on the transformation after installing an accessible entrance: “At first, I thought of it as something small, something I did to support INSPYRE. But soon, I noticed new customers coming families with strollers, older people, tourists with mobility issues. Accessibility didn’t just serve people with disabilities; it made my restaurant friendlier to everyone. I realized it was not charity, it was good hospitality.” His words reflect a broader truth: accessibility enriches the whole community, not only those who depend on it most.

Equally important were the reflections about the role of young people. Many partners expressed admiration for the energy, empathy, and initiative of the youth volunteers who led INSPYRE. Business owners and municipal officials alike noted how inspiring it was to see young people take ownership of inclusion, not as a distant political issue but as a personal commitment. One cultural partner remarked, “The passion of the youth changed the conversation. They did not come to us with demands, but with collaboration. They showed us that accessibility is about solidarity, about imagining a city that belongs equally to everyone. That message was impossible to ignore.”

Through these reflections, it becomes clear that INSPYRE’s impact extended beyond ramps, routes, or digital handbooks.



It inspired a cultural shift, encouraging businesses, institutions, and authorities to see themselves as part of a collective journey toward inclusion. What began as small practical steps grew into broader commitments and long-term changes. Cafés adjusted their entrances, museums expanded their inclusive programming, and municipal authorities began consulting citizens with disabilities more systematically. These changes were not imposed from above but emerged organically from encounters between people, from the recognition of shared humanity.

The reflections of local businesses and partners remind us that accessibility is not a favor extended to a minority but a shared responsibility that strengthens the social fabric of the entire city. They reveal a Thessaloniki that is learning to view inclusion not as an exception but as the standard of true hospitality. INSPYRE gave businesses and institutions the opportunity to see their city differently, to recognize barriers they had once overlooked, and to act with empathy and purpose. In doing so, it has left a lasting imprint not only on the paths of Thessaloniki but on the values of the people who shape its everyday life.

## Sustainability and Inclusion

Sustainability and inclusion are not simply two separate goals of the INSPYRE project, but rather the twin pillars on which the entire initiative has been built. From its conception, INSPYRE sought to demonstrate that inclusion cannot thrive without sustainability, and that sustainability has little meaning unless it is inclusive. Together, these principles ensure that the project leaves behind more than temporary improvements: it creates a foundation for long-term change, rooted in respect for people, respect for the environment, and respect for the future of Thessaloniki.

### **Sustainability in Practice**

Environmental sustainability has been woven into the fabric of INSPYRE through the deliberate choice of walking as the primary mode of exploration. Walking is not only a healthy and low-impact way to discover the city, but it also minimizes dependence on vehicles, reduces emissions, and strengthens the connection between people and the urban landscape. By encouraging participants to slow down, walk together, and experience Thessaloniki at a human pace, the project nurtures a sense of stewardship toward the environment and the city's public spaces.

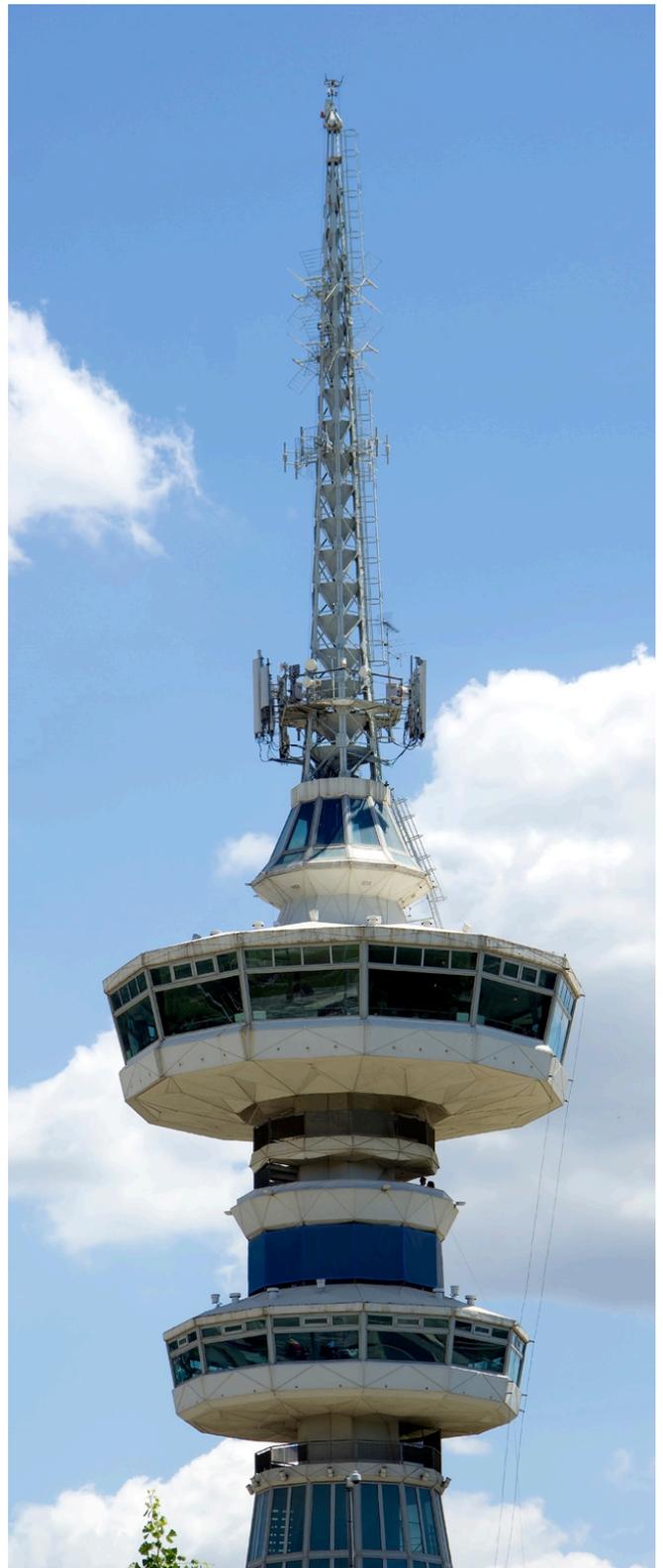
The decision to create a digital e-Handbook rather than relying on printed material reflects a commitment to environmentally responsible practices. The digital format reduces paper consumption and ensures that information can be updated regularly, preventing waste and keeping the resource relevant.

In addition, digital tools allow for broader accessibility, ensuring that users can access maps, instructions, and cultural content in ways adapted to their needs, whether through screen readers, large font settings, or audio guides. This dual focus on sustainability and accessibility reinforces INSPYRE's holistic vision.

Social sustainability, equally important, lies in the creation of structures and relationships that endure beyond the project's timeframe. INSPYRE invests in young people by equipping them with knowledge, skills, and a sense of responsibility for building inclusive communities. These volunteers are not only the facilitators of accessible walks but also the ambassadors of a broader cultural shift. By working side by side with individuals with disabilities, businesses, and cultural institutions, they have learned to see accessibility as a fundamental right rather than an optional consideration. Their continued advocacy ensures that the project's spirit will remain alive in Thessaloniki for years to come.

### **Inclusion as a Lasting Value**

The principle of inclusion runs through every aspect of INSPYRE. The routes were not designed for people with disabilities in a paternalistic sense, but with them, through direct consultation and testing. This participatory process ensured that the solutions reflected lived experiences rather than assumptions, and that individuals with disabilities became co-creators rather than passive recipients. Such collaboration not only improved the quality of the paths but also affirmed the dignity and agency of the people involved.



Inclusion also shaped the way the project interacted with the wider community. By involving businesses, cultural institutions, and municipal partners, INSPYRE demonstrated that accessibility is not a niche concern but a universal value that strengthens the city as a whole. A ramp at a café benefits wheelchair users, but it also helps parents with strollers and older adults with reduced mobility. A museum that invests in tactile exhibits does so for blind visitors, but it also enriches the experience of sighted children learning through touch. In this way, inclusion becomes a shared benefit that transcends categories, embedding itself in the everyday life of Thessaloniki.

Perhaps the most significant form of inclusion fostered by INSPYRE is attitudinal. Changing physical infrastructure is important, but changing mindsets is transformative. The project has shown residents, entrepreneurs, and officials alike that accessibility is not an external demand imposed by law but a moral and cultural imperative that makes their city stronger, fairer, and more welcoming. This cultural change is what ensures the project's long-term impact, making inclusion a lasting value that continues to grow and spread.

### **Looking Toward the Future**

The legacy of INSPYRE is designed to endure. The five accessible routes remain in place as permanent invitations for inclusive exploration, and the digital e-Handbook provides a living resource that can be updated, adapted, and expanded over time. Partnerships with local authorities, businesses, and cultural institutions have created networks that will continue to foster accessibility and innovation beyond the life of the project.

Looking further ahead, INSPYRE offers a model that can be replicated and scaled. Thessaloniki serves as the starting point, but the principles of youth-led accessible path creation can be applied in other cities across Greece and Europe. By sharing experiences, methodologies, and digital tools, INSPYRE has the potential to inspire a network of inclusive cities, each adapting the approach to its unique context while remaining united by the common commitment to accessibility and sustainability.

The integration of sustainability and inclusion also opens the door for policy development. By highlighting both the gaps and the solutions, INSPYRE provides valuable insights for urban planners, policymakers, and civil society organizations. Future initiatives may build on this foundation by investing in accessible public transport, eco-friendly urban design, and broader community engagement. Thessaloniki, through INSPYRE, positions itself as a pioneer of inclusive sustainability, demonstrating how a city can balance history and innovation, culture and accessibility, environment and human rights.

### **A City for the Future**

Ultimately, sustainability and inclusion are about legacy. INSPYRE seeks to leave Thessaloniki not only more accessible in the present but also better prepared for the future. By linking environmental responsibility with social justice, the project offers a vision of a city where no one is left behind and where the paths we walk today remain open for generations to come.



This dual commitment ensures that the work of INSPYRE does not end with the closing of the project but continues in the daily lives of those who experienced it, the institutions that embraced it, and the city that hosted it. Thessaloniki, through INSPYRE, becomes not only a place to be explored but a place to be reimagined: a city that demonstrates how sustainability and inclusion, when joined together, can shape a more just, compassionate, and resilient society.

### **Environmentally Friendly Practices for Explorers**

Exploring Thessaloniki is more than a cultural or recreational activity: it is an invitation to reflect on how we move through, use, and care for the spaces around us. A city is a living organism, shaped by its environment and by the actions of those who inhabit or visit it. For this reason, environmentally friendly practices are not only desirable but essential for ensuring that exploration remains sustainable. They allow Thessaloniki's historic monuments, vibrant neighborhoods, and natural landscapes to be enjoyed today without compromising the possibility for future generations to do the same. Within INSPYRE, these practices take on an added importance, as sustainability is understood not just as care for the environment but as a shared ethic that intersects naturally with accessibility and inclusion.

At the core of sustainable exploration lies the choice of walking. The INSPYRE paths encourage discovery on foot, reducing reliance on motorized transport and therefore limiting emissions, traffic congestion, and noise pollution. Walking is also the most inclusive and human-scaled way to experience Thessaloniki. It slows the rhythm of travel, allowing explorers to notice details in architecture, daily life, and natural surroundings that might otherwise go unseen. This unhurried pace deepens appreciation and encourages mindfulness, while also promoting health and well-being. In this way, walking embodies both environmental responsibility and personal enrichment.

Resource awareness is another vital dimension of environmentally friendly exploration. Thessaloniki, like many Mediterranean cities, faces seasonal challenges such as high summer temperatures and water scarcity.





Simple habits, such as carrying a reusable water bottle, refilling it at public fountains or cafés, and avoiding single-use plastics, help reduce waste while conserving resources. Reusable shopping bags and containers can also be employed when purchasing goods at local markets, aligning personal choices with broader efforts to reduce pollution and reliance on disposable materials. These actions, though seemingly small, accumulate into significant positive impacts, especially when practiced collectively by residents and visitors alike. The stewardship of public spaces is central to Thessaloniki's identity and requires active responsibility from explorers. Squares like Aristotelous, the waterfront promenade, and neighborhood parks are shared environments that serve as stages for daily life, leisure, and cultural expression. Treating them with care, by keeping them clean, respecting shared facilities, limiting noise in quiet areas, and avoiding damage to public installations, ensures their continued vitality. For people with disabilities, the maintenance of these spaces is especially important, as obstacles caused by litter, vandalism, or neglect can quickly turn shared areas into inaccessible ones. Thus, environmentally responsible behavior also reinforces inclusion, ensuring that public spaces remain open and welcoming to all.

Thessaloniki's natural landscapes, most notably the Seich Sou Forest, require careful and respectful exploration. This forest is both a recreational escape and a critical ecological system that supports biodiversity, improves air quality, and offers shade and coolness during hot seasons. Explorers are encouraged to remain on designated trails, avoid disturbing wildlife, and refrain from littering or damaging vegetation. Respectful silence and observation allow nature to be appreciated in its fullness while preserving its fragile balance. By treating such spaces with reverence, visitors acknowledge that nature is not merely a backdrop for human activity but a living system deserving of protection.

Cultural institutions also play a role in promoting environmentally friendly exploration. Museums, galleries, and heritage sites across Thessaloniki are increasingly adopting sustainable practices, such as providing digital guides, implementing e-ticketing systems, and reducing paper waste. Energy-efficient lighting, climate-sensitive exhibition design, and programs that raise environmental awareness are becoming more common. Visitors support these efforts by opting for digital materials, respecting guidelines designed to protect fragile collections, and engaging with exhibitions that highlight the connection between culture and sustainability. This alignment of institutional responsibility with visitor behavior creates a synergy that reinforces long-term sustainability.

Crucially, environmentally friendly practices and accessibility are deeply interconnected. Measures that reduce environmental impact often also enhance inclusion.

For instance, the adoption of digital maps and guides eliminates the need for excessive printed material while simultaneously allowing for adaptable formats screen readers, high-contrast modes, audio guides that meet diverse needs. Investments in modern, low-emission public transport with ramps and priority seating benefit both the planet and individuals with reduced mobility. Shaded seating areas along the seafront conserve energy by reducing heat stress and simultaneously provide essential rest opportunities for older adults, children, and people with disabilities. These overlaps illustrate that sustainability and inclusion are not competing values but complementary dimensions of the same vision: a city that is just, equitable, and resilient.

The practice of environmentally responsible exploration is also about cultivating the right attitudes. Travelers and residents alike are encouraged to approach Thessaloniki not as a resource to be consumed but as a heritage to be protected. This means embracing a sense of humility and stewardship, recognizing that the city belongs to everyone and that the actions of one individual affect the collective. Supporting local businesses that prioritize sustainability and inclusion, sharing public facilities respectfully, and encouraging others to adopt responsible habits are ways in which individuals can contribute to a broader culture of care.

Ultimately, environmentally friendly practices transform exploration from a private act into a communal one. They remind us that every step taken through Thessaloniki's streets leaves a trace not only on the pavement but also on the environment, the community, and the future. Through INSPYRE, exploration becomes an opportunity to embody the values of sustainability and inclusion, ensuring that Thessaloniki is not only accessible today but preserved and enriched for tomorrow.

The accessible paths created by the project thus symbolize more than routes for discovery; they represent an ethic of responsibility, a pledge to walk lightly, respectfully, and consciously through the city we share.

### **How Accessibility Benefits Everyone**

Accessibility is often mistakenly perceived as a specialized concern, directed only toward people with disabilities. In reality, accessibility is a universal good. When thoughtfully integrated into the design of public spaces, businesses, cultural institutions, and transport systems, accessibility enhances life for every individual, regardless of age, background, or ability. INSPYRE embraces this broader understanding: accessibility is not a concession, nor is it a luxury; it is a fundamental condition of a just, humane, and sustainable city. Thessaloniki's inclusive paths, created through the project, demonstrate vividly how accessibility becomes a shared benefit that enriches the entire community.

The most immediate and visible advantages are found in physical infrastructure. A ramp, for instance, is indispensable for wheelchair users, but it is equally helpful to parents maneuvering prams, travelers carrying luggage, delivery workers transporting goods, and older adults who may find steps difficult. Tactile paving provides crucial guidance for people who are blind or partially sighted, yet it also guides hurried commuters or tourists unfamiliar with their surroundings. Wider pavements, smooth surfaces, and step-free entrances may appear designed for a particular group, but in reality they improve mobility for everyone. What might begin as an accommodation quickly becomes a convenience, and what begins as a necessity for some ends as a benefit for all.



Accessibility also improves navigation, efficiency, and safety. Clear signage in large fonts with high-contrast colors is invaluable for individuals with visual impairments, but it is just as effective for tourists who do not read Greek fluently, for children learning to recognize symbols, or for anyone navigating the city in stressful conditions. Audio announcements on buses or in public spaces allow blind or partially sighted people to travel independently, but they also help distracted commuters, families managing small children, or travelers carrying heavy shopping bags. By embedding accessibility features into everyday systems, Thessaloniki reduces confusion, prevents accidents, and ensures smoother flows of people through the city.

The economic benefits of accessibility extend beyond individual convenience. Businesses that adopt inclusive practices expand their reach to new audiences. A café with a portable ramp not only welcomes wheelchair users but also becomes accessible to parents with strollers or older couples with mobility needs. Hotels with adapted rooms are not only essential for guests with disabilities but also more appealing to international travelers who increasingly value inclusivity as a marker of professionalism. As global awareness grows, cities that invest in accessibility strengthen their reputation, attract visitors, and enhance local economies. Thessaloniki, through INSPYRE, positions itself not only as historically and culturally rich but also as forward-thinking, inclusive, and competitive on the international stage.

The social benefits of accessibility are profound. Inclusive environments enable people with disabilities to participate fully in public life, visiting museums, attending performances, walking along the seafront, and enjoying cafés and restaurants. This participation strengthens the social fabric, as it brings together diverse groups who might otherwise remain separated by physical and attitudinal barriers. When people encounter one another in shared spaces, empathy grows, stereotypes diminish, and a richer, more connected community emerges. In this way, accessibility fosters solidarity and unity, reinforcing Thessaloniki's identity as a city of openness and hospitality.

Accessibility also carries emotional and psychological significance. For individuals with disabilities, accessible infrastructure provides independence, dignity, and the confidence to move freely through the city. For caregivers, it reduces both physical strain and emotional stress, making outings less exhausting and more enjoyable. For the wider population, the presence of accessible features communicates that the city values its people, creating pride, trust, and a sense of belonging. Accessibility, therefore, is not only about physical movement but about psychological well-being, about the right to feel welcome, respected, and included.

At a deeper level, accessibility embodies the principle of universal design. Universal design means creating environments that can be used by as many people as possible without the need for modification. This principle reframes accessibility from being a corrective measure applied after exclusion has occurred to being a proactive, inclusive philosophy that shapes planning from the outset. When streets are designed to be step-free, when cultural programs incorporate subtitles, or when digital resources are adaptable to different needs, the city demonstrates foresight. Such design not only serves current populations but also anticipates the realities of the future, including aging demographics. Thessaloniki, like many European cities, will see a growing population of older adults; universal design ensures they remain active, engaged, and independent citizens.





Accessibility should also be seen as a moral and civic investment. It is an investment in justice, ensuring that people are not excluded from opportunities due to factors beyond their control. It is an investment in democracy, affirming that public spaces truly belong to all citizens equally. It is an investment in sustainability, as inclusive and accessible environments often overlap with environmentally responsible practices: smooth pavements facilitate both wheelchair access and energy-efficient cycling; digital guides reduce paper waste while enhancing inclusivity for people with visual or hearing impairments. By investing in accessibility, Thessaloniki invests in fairness, resilience, and innovation.

Through INSPYRE, Thessaloniki is proving that accessibility is not a marginal concern but a central component of what makes a city livable, prosperous, and humane. When barriers are removed, possibilities expand. When environments are designed inclusively, communities grow stronger. When accessibility is prioritized, the benefits cascade outward: individuals gain freedom, caregivers find relief, businesses thrive, tourists feel welcome, and the city itself shines with pride.

Accessibility, therefore, benefits everyone, not as an abstract principle, but as a lived reality. It is present in the parent who pushes a stroller without difficulty, in the traveler who navigates the bus system without confusion, in the older adult who rests comfortably in shaded seating, and in the child who learns empathy by seeing diversity embraced. It is present in the pride of local businesses that welcome all customers, in the joy of participants walking together through inclusive paths, and in the identity of a Thessaloniki that has chosen to define itself not only by its monuments but by its values.

Embedding accessibility into its paths, INSPYRE has shown Thessaloniki what is possible. It has revealed that inclusion is not an additional layer but the very foundation of a city that works for its people. It has reminded us that accessibility is not a privilege granted to some, but a right that elevates all. And it has left a message for the future: that a city is truly great not when it excludes but when it welcomes, not when it builds walls but when it opens paths.



### **The Role of Youth in Building an Inclusive City**

Youth are the lifeblood of Thessaloniki, shaping its cultural rhythms, energizing its civic life, and driving its innovation. Within INSPYRE, young people are not passive supporters but central actors who design, lead, and advocate for accessibility. Their role in building an inclusive city is multifaceted: they are explorers who walk the paths, innovators who develop digital tools, educators who raise awareness, and leaders who inspire transformation in others. By giving young people a platform, INSPYRE has unlocked a reservoir of creativity and solidarity that demonstrates how inclusion flourishes when youth are empowered.

One of the greatest strengths of youth is their fresh perspective. They look at their city without the weight of entrenched assumptions and are often more open to reimagining spaces in inclusive ways. Where older generations may accept certain obstacles as inevitable, narrow sidewalks, steep stairs, or inaccessible entrances, youth volunteers approach them as challenges to be solved. During the mapping of the INSPYRE routes, young participants combined curiosity with determination, testing paths, identifying hidden barriers, and suggesting adaptations. Their willingness to learn directly from individuals with disabilities gave authenticity to the solutions, grounding them in lived experience rather than abstract planning.

Youth also play a crucial role as advocates and mediators. Many business owners and cultural institutions admitted that they had rarely considered accessibility before engaging with INSPYRE. When approached by young volunteers, however, they found the message compelling. The enthusiasm and sincerity of youth ambassadors made accessibility feel less like a demand and more like an invitation to be part of something meaningful. Conversations sparked during the walks often led to small but significant changes: cafés acquiring portable ramps, museums rethinking signage, or shops rearranging interiors for greater accessibility. These outcomes were possible not only because of awareness but because youth brought a sense of urgency and hope that inspired others to act.

Another field where young people have been indispensable is technology and digital innovation. As digital natives, they are naturally adept at using apps, mapping tools, and social media. Their skills were critical in the creation and promotion of the INSPYRE e-Handbook, ensuring it was not only informative but also user-friendly and engaging. Beyond technical expertise, youth brought creativity: integrating storytelling, images, and interactive features that made the digital resource more than a static guide. By amplifying INSPYRE's message online, they expanded its reach, connecting with audiences both locally and internationally. In this way, youth bridged the gap between accessibility as a practical reality on the ground and accessibility as a cultural movement that thrives in digital spaces.

Equally significant is the role of youth in education and awareness-building. During INSPYRE's outreach activities, young volunteers engaged with schools, peers, and community groups, sparking conversations about what inclusion means in daily life. Their testimonies carried authenticity, as they spoke not from textbooks but from personal experiences of walking alongside people with disabilities. These interactions helped normalize inclusion among children and adolescents, planting seeds of empathy and solidarity early on. By modeling inclusive behavior and attitudes, youth showed that accessibility is not an abstract policy goal but a lived reality that can be shaped by each individual.

Youth also embody the potential for intergenerational cooperation. Within INSPYRE, they worked closely with older adults, caregivers, and people with disabilities, learning from their experiences while offering their own energy and perspectives. This exchange was mutually enriching: older participants shared resilience, wisdom, and firsthand accounts of navigating inaccessible environments, while youth contributed technological fluency, innovative thinking, and enthusiasm. Such collaboration broke down barriers between generations and demonstrated that building an inclusive city requires contributions from all age groups, working in solidarity.

Perhaps the most profound role of youth lies in ensuring the sustainability of inclusion. Accessibility is not achieved in a single project or policy; it is built over time through culture, awareness, and commitment.



By engaging young people today, INSPYRE invests in the leaders, professionals, and citizens of tomorrow. These young participants will become the architects who design step-free buildings, the entrepreneurs who make their businesses inclusive, the teachers who integrate accessibility into education, and the policymakers who embed universal design into urban planning. Their experiences with INSPYRE ensure that inclusion will not be a temporary trend but a guiding principle carried forward into Thessaloniki's future.

The testimonies of youth participants already reflect this transformation. Many described how they had never noticed barriers until they walked beside someone with a disability. What was once invisible became impossible to ignore. For some, the experience reshaped their career ambitions, inspiring them to pursue fields like social policy, architecture, or community development. For others, it instilled a lifelong sense of civic responsibility, a conviction that accessibility is not an optional kindness but a universal right. These changes in perspective demonstrate the lasting power of youth involvement: they are not only acting in the present but shaping a more inclusive future.

In conclusion, the role of youth in building an inclusive city is indispensable. Their openness, creativity, and determination drive innovation and cultural change, while their advocacy and digital fluency amplify inclusion across multiple platforms. Engaging directly with businesses, institutions, and peers, they transform abstract principles into lived practices. Collaborating across generations, they build solidarity. And by carrying these values into their futures, they ensure that accessibility becomes embedded in the identity of Thessaloniki. INSPYRE has shown that when youth are trusted with responsibility and given the tools to lead, inclusion ceases to be a distant aspiration and becomes an inevitable reality. Thessaloniki's path toward accessibility is illuminated most brightly by the energy and vision of its young people, proving that they are not only tomorrow's citizens but today's architects of a fairer and more welcoming city.

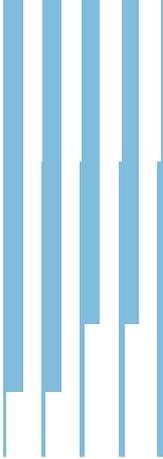
## Get Involved

The INSPYRE project is more than a set of accessible routes or a digital handbook; it is a living movement grounded in the belief that inclusion is built by people. Thessaloniki's transformation into a city of accessibility depends not only on municipal decisions or infrastructural investments but also on the willingness of its citizens, visitors, businesses, institutions, and youth to act. To "get involved" in INSPYRE is to recognize that inclusion is not a privilege offered to some, but a collective responsibility shared by all. It is to choose solidarity over indifference, to turn empathy into practice, and to walk together toward a city that belongs equally to everyone.

### **Youth as Leaders of Change**

Youth play a central role in sustaining INSPYRE's vision. Their energy, curiosity, and technological fluency make them ideal leaders for inclusive innovation. Through volunteering, they learn to map routes, identify barriers, assist participants during walks, and promote accessibility across schools and online platforms. But their involvement goes far deeper than logistics. When young people engage with INSPYRE, they become ambassadors of fairness, embodying a cultural shift where accessibility is seen not as an obligation but as a natural condition of a just society.





Many youth participants have shared that walking alongside people with disabilities opened their eyes to barriers they had never noticed before. What once seemed ordinary stairs at a café entrance, broken pavements, or lack of signage suddenly became symbols of exclusion.

This awareness, gained early in life, ensures that future architects, teachers, business leaders, and policymakers carry inclusion into their professional fields. In this way, youth involvement is not only about present contributions but about investing in the next generation of changemakers.

### **People with Disabilities and Caregivers as Guiding Voices**

The authentic heart of INSPYRE lies in the voices of people with disabilities and their caregivers. Their participation is not optional but essential, as they ensure that the project responds to real needs rather than assumptions. By testing routes, pointing out obstacles, or suggesting improvements, they guide the project toward practical and meaningful outcomes. Their insights into daily challenges whether navigating the seafront promenade, accessing cultural institutions, or finding adapted toilets transform INSPYRE into a project that reflects lived realities.

Caregivers, too, bring invaluable perspectives. Their knowledge of pacing activities, identifying safe rest areas, and balancing care responsibilities with exploration enriches the project. By contributing their voices, caregivers help shape a Thessaloniki where accessibility reduces burdens, enhances autonomy, and restores dignity. Their involvement also highlights a truth that lies at the core of INSPYRE: accessibility is not a marginal issue but one that affects families, relationships, and communities at large.



### **Businesses and Institutions as Partners in Inclusion**

No project of inclusion can succeed without the active participation of businesses and cultural institutions. When local cafés install ramps, when restaurants prepare Braille menus, when museums add tactile exhibits, or when theaters provide captioning, they are not only serving individuals with disabilities but embracing the principle of universal hospitality. These adjustments, often modest in cost, generate profound change in atmosphere. They signal that everyone is welcome, and they strengthen Thessaloniki's reputation as a city of openness.

Partnership with INSPYRE also demonstrates that accessibility makes good business sense. Inclusive spaces attract wider audiences: families with strollers, older adults with mobility limitations, tourists expecting international standards. Businesses that align with accessibility distinguish themselves as modern and socially responsible, creating stronger customer loyalty. Cultural institutions that integrate inclusion deepen their mission as spaces that belong to the whole community. Involvement, therefore, is not a favor to a minority but an investment in civic pride and economic vitality.

### **Citizens as Everyday Ambassadors**

The wider community residents and visitors alike also plays a crucial role in sustaining accessibility. Inclusion grows not only from ramps and handbooks but from everyday gestures of solidarity. Citizens who respect accessibility features, who offer help to someone navigating uneven streets, who advocate for improvements in their neighborhoods, all contribute to the spirit of INSPYRE. Visitors who choose accessible routes, support inclusive businesses, and practice empathy during their stay amplify the project's impact.

These acts, while seemingly small, carry symbolic power. A resident who insists on keeping a ramp clear of parked bicycles, or a tourist who praises an inclusive restaurant online, helps normalize accessibility as part of daily life. In this way, every person becomes an ambassador, carrying the message of INSPYRE beyond formal events and into the fabric of Thessaloniki's social life.

### **Practical Pathways for Participation**

Getting involved can take many forms, each equally valuable. Volunteers may assist with walks, guide participants, or contribute technical skills to the ongoing development of the digital handbook.

Educators may bring INSPYRE into classrooms, inspiring students to create their own inclusive maps. Municipal partners can integrate project findings into urban planning, ensuring new developments follow universal design principles. Businesses can adapt their premises and promote their inclusivity through INSPYRE's networks. Even those who cannot contribute time or resources can still play a role by sharing information, advocating for accessibility in conversations, or simply practicing awareness in their daily routines.

The flexibility of these pathways reflects a central truth: inclusion is built collectively, and every contribution counts. Whether it is a teenager guiding a visitor through a walk, a museum hosting an accessible exhibition, or a family choosing to support inclusive venues, each action adds another layer to the culture of accessibility.

### **Sustaining the Legacy**

INSPYRE's future depends on the commitment of those who keep its vision alive beyond the project's formal conclusion. Accessible paths and digital tools are valuable legacies, but their true worth lies in how they are used, expanded, and renewed. Sustained involvement ensures that accessibility continues to grow, that new routes are created, that awareness deepens, and that Thessaloniki becomes a model of inclusive urban life.

By getting involved, citizens, businesses, institutions, and visitors transform INSPYRE from a project into a movement. Their participation demonstrates that inclusion is not an isolated effort but a shared ethos that defines the identity of a city.

### **A Call to Walk Together**

To get involved in INSPYRE is to take part in something larger than oneself. It is to declare that accessibility is a universal right, that diversity enriches society, and that solidarity strengthens communities. It is to turn empathy into action and to affirm that Thessaloniki's beauty is not only in its monuments but in its people, walking side by side along paths that welcome everyone.

INSPYRE invites each individual young or old, resident or visitor, business owner or policymaker to join in this shared journey. Together, step by step, Thessaloniki can become not only a city to be admired but a city that inspires: a place where inclusion is lived daily, where accessibility is celebrated, and where every path leads to belonging.



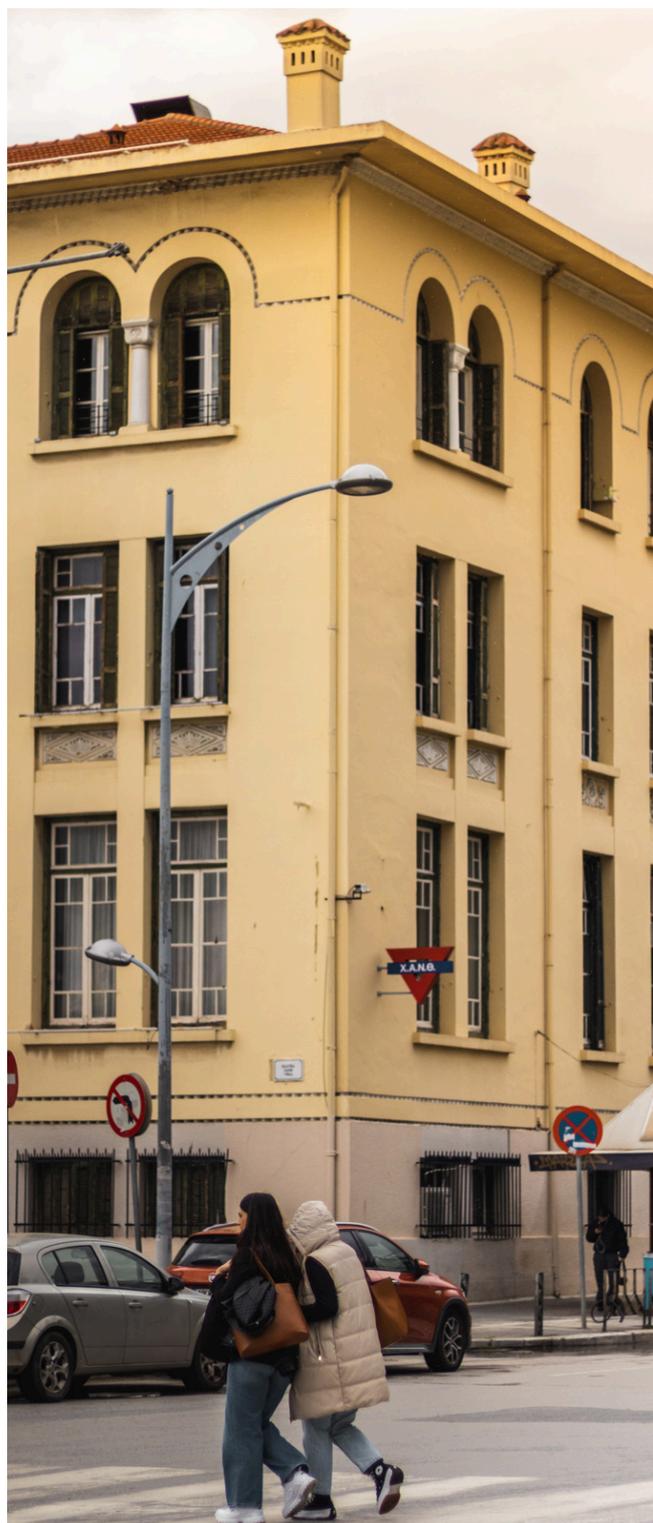
### **How to Join an INSPYRE Walk**

Participating in an INSPYRE walk is one of the most engaging ways to discover Thessaloniki while actively supporting its transformation into a more inclusive and sustainable city. These walks are designed not only as routes through monuments, neighborhoods, and public spaces, but as shared experiences that bring people together across differences of age, background, and ability. By joining, each participant becomes part of a movement that affirms the simple yet powerful idea that the city belongs to everyone.

The INSPYRE paths have been carefully selected and tested to ensure accessibility, comfort, and cultural richness. Whether walking through the historic heart of Thessaloniki, enjoying the cultural exploration routes, experiencing the serenity of the seafront promenade, discovering the city's culinary treasures, or reconnecting with nature in its green spaces, each route offers something unique. The walks are intentionally designed at a gentle pace, with opportunities to pause, rest, and reflect, so that everyone regardless of mobility or stamina can participate with dignity and ease.

### **Preparing to Join**

To take part, prospective participants can begin by consulting the INSPYRE digital e-Handbook, which provides detailed descriptions of each route, including distance, estimated time, accessibility features, rest areas, and nearby facilities. The e-Handbook also lists meeting points and any scheduled group walks organized in partnership with cultural institutions, youth associations, or municipal events. While many of the routes are available for independent exploration at any time, organized walks offer the added dimension of collective experience, guided storytelling, and mutual support.



Registration for group walks may be required, particularly when spaces are limited or when collaborations involve museums and cultural venues. The registration process is simple and designed to be inclusive, with options for online sign-up, assistance by phone, or in-person arrangements through partner organizations.

This ensures that no one is excluded due to technological or communication barriers.

#### **What to Expect During a Walk**

During organized walks, trained youth volunteers serve as facilitators and companions. Their role is not only to provide information about the route and the city's landmarks but also to assist participants in navigating the journey safely and comfortably. Volunteers are attentive to diverse needs, ready to offer guidance or physical support when requested, while respecting each participant's independence and autonomy. For individuals with disabilities, this presence ensures reassurance and a sense of solidarity; for others, it enriches the experience with opportunities to connect, exchange stories, and see Thessaloniki through different perspectives.

Accessibility is prioritized throughout the walks. Routes include step-free access, ramps, tactile paving, rest stops, and shaded seating wherever possible. Information about adapted toilets, medical facilities, and nearby accessible services is provided in advance to allow participants to plan with confidence. Caregivers accompanying individuals with specific needs are supported through clear information and the presence of volunteers who understand the importance of pacing and flexibility.

#### **What to Bring**

Participants are encouraged to come prepared with comfortable clothing and walking shoes, reusable water bottles to reduce waste, and any personal items that support comfort and safety, such as medications, assistive devices, or sun protection in summer months. For those joining cultural routes, headphones may enhance experiences with audio guides provided through digital tools. Above all, participants are asked to bring openness and a spirit of solidarity, as the heart of every INSPYRE walk is the shared journey itself.

## **The Value of Participation**

Joining an INSPYRE walk is not only a cultural or recreational activity but a statement of values. Each step taken on these routes affirms a belief in fairness, equality, and accessibility. Walking side by side youth and elders, citizens and visitors, people with and without disabilities creates a living image of the inclusive city Thessaloniki aspires to be. Participants often speak of the sense of connection that arises during the walks, as strangers become companions and public spaces become sites of belonging.

Moreover, every walk contributes to the visibility of accessibility. When groups move through the city, they remind residents, businesses, and institutions that inclusion is not a hidden issue but a collective concern. The presence of walkers sparks conversations, inspires adjustments, and encourages others to rethink their role in making Thessaloniki more welcoming.

## **A Shared Journey**

Whether you choose to attend an organized walk with volunteers and guides, or to explore independently using the e-Handbook, joining an INSPYRE path is an act of participation in something greater than yourself. It is a way of seeing Thessaloniki not only as a city of monuments and streets but as a community of people, each with the right to access, enjoy, and contribute.

To join an INSPYRE walk is therefore to join a movement. It is to step into a story of solidarity, to contribute to the city's transformation, and to walk together toward a future where accessibility is not an exception but an expectation. Each participant whether resident or visitor, young volunteer or caregiver, local business partner or curious traveler helps write this story with their presence.

In Thessaloniki, the paths of INSPYRE are open to all. The invitation is simple yet profound: come, walk with us, and help build a city where every step is shared, every voice is heard, and every person belongs.

## **Volunteer and Collaboration Opportunities**

The success of INSPYRE rests not only on its accessible routes and digital handbook but on the people and organizations that contribute their time, skills, and resources. At its heart, INSPYRE is a collaborative effort—a community of volunteers, local businesses, cultural institutions, schools, universities, and civic organizations working together toward the shared goal of an inclusive Thessaloniki. The opportunities to participate are diverse and flexible, designed to ensure that everyone can find a way to contribute according to their capacities and aspirations.

## **The Spirit of Volunteering**

Volunteering with INSPYRE is more than offering practical assistance; it is an act of civic responsibility and solidarity. Volunteers play many roles, from supporting the logistics of inclusive walks to contributing creative ideas for communication campaigns. Youth volunteers in particular have been central to the project. They act as guides during the walks, helping participants feel safe, informed, and welcomed. They also contribute to the design and testing of routes, ensuring that each path is not only accessible but enjoyable. Their fluency in digital tools has been invaluable in creating and maintaining the e-Handbook, making information about accessibility widely available.





Yet volunteering extends far beyond the role of youth. Older residents bring experience, local knowledge, and intergenerational dialogue. People with disabilities can volunteer as co-designers, offering direct insights into what makes a space accessible or exclusionary. Caregivers can share strategies for pacing, rest, and comfort, providing practical wisdom to both organizers and fellow participants. Professionals with skills in architecture, urban planning, communications, or technology can lend expertise that enhances the quality and impact of the project. In every case, volunteering is reciprocal: the city gains from the contribution, and volunteers gain valuable experiences, skills, and a deeper sense of belonging.

### **Collaboration with Local Businesses**

Local businesses are natural partners in INSPYRE's mission, as they play a direct role in shaping the everyday experience of the city. A café that installs a ramp, a restaurant that introduces a Braille menu, or a shop that rearranges its layout to allow wheelchair access does more than adapt its space—it sends a powerful message of hospitality. Collaboration with businesses may take many forms:

- Providing sponsorship for walks or events.
- Offering discounts or promotions for participants of inclusive routes.
- Displaying the INSPYRE badge to signify commitment to accessibility.
- Sharing feedback and ideas for further improvement.

For businesses, the rewards are tangible. Inclusive spaces attract wider audiences families with strollers, older adults, international visitors and enhance the reputation of Thessaloniki as a city of openness. Collaborating, businesses position themselves as leaders of social responsibility while also strengthening their customer base.

### **Partnership with Cultural Institutions**

Cultural institutions museums, galleries, theaters, libraries are equally crucial partners. They have the power to integrate accessibility into the cultural life of Thessaloniki, ensuring that art, heritage, and education are available to all.



Partnerships may include the creation of tactile exhibits for blind visitors, subtitled or interpreted performances for those with hearing impairments, or the adaptation of guided tours to include accessible formats. Institutions can also host exhibitions or events on accessibility, raising awareness and embedding inclusion into their programming.

Such collaborations benefit not only people with disabilities but also the institutions themselves. They diversify audiences, enhance cultural relevance, and fulfill the mission of culture as a shared public good. By working with INSPYRE, institutions become ambassadors of inclusion, inspiring others in their sector to follow suit.

### **Schools and Universities as Engines of Change**

Education plays a vital role in ensuring the sustainability of INSPYRE's vision. Schools can introduce students to the principles of accessibility by engaging them in awareness workshops, accessible walks, and creative projects connected to INSPYRE. Universities can integrate accessibility into curricula, involve students in research on inclusive design, or partner on mapping and evaluation projects. Such collaborations prepare the next generation of professionals architects, urban planners, business leaders, and policymakers to carry accessibility into their fields. They also foster civic engagement among students, showing them that inclusion is not only a subject of study but a lived reality in their own city.

### **Municipal and Civic Partners**

Municipal authorities and civic organizations are invited to collaborate by embedding INSPYRE's lessons into broader urban planning and policy. Local government can adopt universal design principles, consult INSPYRE's data when developing infrastructure, or co-host events that celebrate accessibility. Civic organizations can integrate INSPYRE into their networks, amplifying its reach and ensuring that inclusion becomes a citywide movement rather than a single project.

### **Shared Benefits of Participation**

The benefits of volunteering and collaboration are mutual. Individuals who participate gain skills, experiences, and the satisfaction of contributing to a better city. Businesses and institutions enhance their reputation and broaden their audiences. The city itself grows stronger, fairer, and more attractive as accessibility becomes embedded in its identity. The partnerships forged through INSPYRE extend beyond the project's duration, creating long-term networks of solidarity and cooperation.

### **How to Get Involved**

Getting involved is simple and flexible. Interested volunteers can sign up through INSPYRE's digital platforms or through partner organizations. Businesses and institutions can contact the project team to explore collaboration tailored to their needs and capacities. Schools and universities can develop projects or curricula in dialogue with INSPYRE coordinators. Even those who cannot give time or resources can contribute by spreading awareness, supporting accessible venues, or joining inclusive walks as participants.

### **A Collective Movement**

Volunteering and collaboration with INSPYRE are not limited to practical contributions; they are acts of solidarity that transform the culture of Thessaloniki. Each ramp installed, each route walked, each volunteer who offers their time becomes part of a larger story, the story of a city reimagining itself as inclusive and sustainable. This is not a responsibility that belongs to a single group but a collective mission that thrives when individuals and institutions work together.

Volunteering or collaborating, you join a movement that extends beyond Thessaloniki. You demonstrate that accessibility is not an afterthought but a universal right, that inclusion enriches culture and economy alike, and that solidarity is the foundation of a thriving community. INSPYRE invites all who share these values to participate, proving that when people unite, barriers give way to bridges and new paths open for all.

### **Share Your Feedback and Suggestions**

At the heart of INSPYRE lies the conviction that inclusion cannot be imposed from above; it must be built with the community, shaped by those who live in the city and those who walk its paths.



Thessaloniki is a place of movement, of encounters, of daily routines and spontaneous discoveries, and no single project team can fully capture its complexity. This is why feedback and suggestions are not secondary or optional elements of the project, they are essential. They are the means through which INSPYRE grows, adapts, and stays connected to the reality of everyday life.

Feedback is more than a commentary; it is a form of partnership. When a participant points out that a pavement is uneven, that a route feels too long without a rest stop, or that signage at a crossing is unclear, this information becomes a tool for immediate and practical improvement. These details may appear small, but together they shape the lived experience of accessibility. For someone navigating the city in a wheelchair, for an older person using a cane, or for a parent with a stroller, such feedback can make the difference between inclusion and exclusion. By offering this information, participants help ensure that INSPYRE is grounded in the reality of those it serves.

Suggestions take this collaborative spirit one step further. Where feedback often addresses the present, suggestions point toward the future. A resident may envision a new route connecting a neighborhood to a cultural landmark. A visitor may suggest integrating audio stories into the e-Handbook to enrich the experience for people with visual impairments. A caregiver may highlight the need for medical support points or shaded seating along certain walks. These ideas expand the horizon of what INSPYRE can become, ensuring that the project does not remain static but continually evolves with imagination and foresight.

Equally important are the stories of positive experience. Sharing moments of joy, pride, and satisfaction affirms that accessibility is not only about removing obstacles but about creating opportunities for connection. When participants recount the kindness of a volunteer, the professionalism of a museum staff member, or the relief of finding a clean and adapted toilet, they celebrate progress and inspire others to follow. These affirmations motivate local businesses, cultural institutions, and civic bodies to maintain and extend their inclusive practices. In this way, feedback is not only corrective but also celebratory, strengthening a culture where accessibility is recognized as both valuable and achievable.

The impact of feedback extends beyond INSPYRE itself. Reports of barriers are communicated to municipal authorities, encouraging improvements at the city level. Suggestions for digital innovations feed into the ongoing development of the e-Handbook, ensuring it remains a living, adaptable resource. Stories of positive practices circulate within the community, highlighting models of excellence and encouraging replication. Each piece of feedback, whether large or small, ripples outward into the wider civic ecosystem, demonstrating the power of citizen voices in shaping an inclusive Thessaloniki.

The process of sharing feedback has also been designed to be accessible and inclusive. The e-Handbook provides online forms where participants can record their observations. During organized walks, volunteers collect impressions and pass them on to coordinators. Partner institutions offer opportunities for participants to express their views, while community organizations act as intermediaries for those less comfortable with digital platforms.



For individuals who prefer direct dialogue, conversations with volunteers or coordinators ensure that no contribution is overlooked. In this way, the act of giving feedback reflects the very values of INSPYRE: flexibility, openness, and respect for diverse ways of participation.

Beyond its practical function, feedback builds a culture of dialogue. It tells citizens and visitors alike that their voices matter, that their experiences are valued, and that their perspectives can shape the city. This culture fosters trust between institutions and communities, reminding everyone that accessibility is not a finished product but a continuous process. The more people share their observations and ideas, the more the city learns about itself, and the closer it comes to achieving true inclusion.

Sharing feedback and suggestions, participants join the project not as consumers but as co-creators. They help weave accessibility into the fabric of Thessaloniki, ensuring that it is not treated as an add-on but as an essential element of urban life. This co-creation is what gives INSPYRE its vitality: it is not a project delivered to a passive audience but a movement built with active contributors.

Your feedback, therefore, is more than a comment it is a step on the path toward a better city. Each suggestion is a seed of change; each observation is a building block of improvement; each positive story is a spark of inspiration. Together, these contributions ensure that Thessaloniki continues to evolve as a city that welcomes, respects, and values every individual.

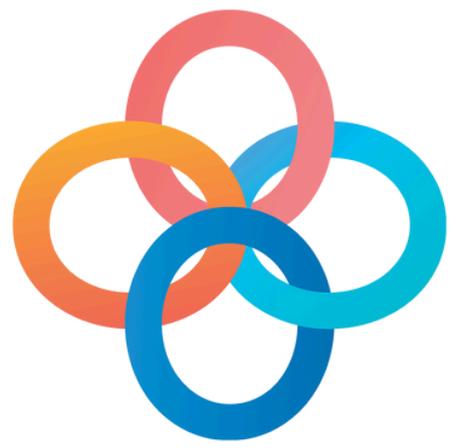
INSPYRE invites you to add your voice to this shared journey. Tell us what works well, what could be improved, and what new ideas could make the city more inclusive. Every contribution strengthens the movement, ensuring that accessibility in Thessaloniki is not a temporary achievement but a lasting legacy. Your suggestions help open new paths. Your stories encourage others to join. And your feedback ensures that Thessaloniki continues to grow as a city that belongs to everyone.



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## The INSPYRE Guide: Inclusive Journeys in the City

Project No:  
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