



PYLON ONE

INSPYRE

Inclusive Paths: Youth-Led Accessible Exploration in Thessaloniki

Preparation/Research and Community Interaction

Project No: 2024-1-EL02-ESC30-SOL-000235532

www.inspyre-project.eu



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INTRODUCTION

INSPYRE is an ambitious and forward-thinking project committed to transforming urban environments into spaces that are accessible, safe, and welcoming for all citizens, regardless of physical abilities. The project emphasizes active collaboration with people with disabilities, ensuring that their first-hand experiences and needs guide the design of city walking routes. By involving the community in the planning process, INSPYRE goes beyond theoretical solutions, creating paths and public spaces that are practical, inclusive, and barrier-free.



The ultimate goal of INSPYRE is to foster urban spaces where everyone can move freely, confidently, and independently. This means designing environments that remove obstacles whether physical, sensory, or social and ensure that every resident and visitor can participate fully in city life. Through co-creation, observation, and community engagement, the project aims to build cities that are truly inclusive, where accessibility is not an afterthought, but a core principle of urban planning.

FOCUS

The project is centered on research, careful preparation, and active community interaction. By engaging directly with residents, especially people with disabilities, INSPYRE seeks to understand real-life accessibility challenges that affect daily mobility in urban areas. This approach goes beyond theoretical planning it captures practical, lived experiences, revealing barriers that might otherwise be overlooked.

The insights gathered through community engagement are used to inform and guide the design of inclusive urban paths, ensuring that the solutions created are relevant, user-friendly, and truly accessible. By combining research with hands-on participation, the project lays the groundwork for urban spaces that are welcoming, safe, and barrier-free for everyone.



OBJECTIVES

- Identify physical and social barriers in urban spaces: Examine the city environment to pinpoint obstacles such as uneven pavements, narrow sidewalks, lack of ramps, inadequate signage, or social factors that limit accessibility. Understanding these barriers is essential for designing inclusive spaces.
- Engage people with disabilities to co-create accessible routes: Work directly with residents who experience mobility challenges to co-design walking paths. Their insights ensure that the routes are practical, safe, and meet real-world needs.
- Collect data to guide path design: Gather information through observations, surveys, interviews, and mapping. This data-driven approach ensures that route planning is based on accurate, real-life evidence rather than assumptions.
- Lay the foundation for sustainable and inclusive urban mobility: Establish long-term strategies and design principles that promote accessibility, inclusivity, and freedom of movement for all city residents, creating a model for future urban planning initiatives.

ACTIVITIES OVERVIEW

The project implements a series of practical and community-driven activities to ensure inclusive urban planning:

- Conducting city walks with people with disabilities: Participants explore streets, sidewalks, and public spaces together, observing real-life obstacles and accessibility challenges. These walks provide hands-on insights that cannot be captured through theory alone.





- Identifying accessibility needs and challenges: During the walks and other interactions, the team documents physical, sensory, and transportation barriers, creating a detailed picture of the city's accessibility landscape.
- Planning preliminary accessible paths based on feedback and observations: Using the collected information, the project team drafts initial walking routes that address identified barriers. These routes integrate community feedback to ensure they are practical, safe, and truly inclusive.

CITY WALKS EXPLAINED

City walks are a hands-on, participatory method that allows participants to explore urban areas together and observe accessibility challenges in real time. During these walks, participants identify obstacles such as:

- Uneven pavements or broken sidewalks that hinder safe movement.
- Lack of ramps and elevators, making navigation difficult for people with mobility impairments.





- Poor signage or confusing directions, which can create disorientation or limit access.
- Limited public transport accessibility, including buses, trains, and transit stops that are not barrier-free.

This immersive approach ensures that real-world challenges are directly observed, documented, and addressed, providing practical insights that guide the design of inclusive and safe urban walking paths.



IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Community participation is essential for creating truly inclusive urban spaces. People with disabilities bring first-hand knowledge and lived experiences that are often overlooked in traditional planning processes. By actively involving them, the project ensures that solutions are practical, realistic, and responsive to real-world needs. Their contributions help identify hidden barriers, inform design decisions, and enhance the usability of urban paths. Engaging the community also fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment, making accessibility improvements more sustainable and widely accepted. In short, participation transforms planning from a theoretical exercise into a collaborative process that delivers meaningful, inclusive results.



IDENTIFYING ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS

During city walks, participants actively observe and document barriers that affect mobility and access in urban environments. These barriers can be grouped into key categories:

- Physical barriers: stairs, narrow sidewalks, uneven pavements, and buildings that are difficult to access.
- Sensory barriers: poor signage, confusing wayfinding, noisy or visually overwhelming areas that impede navigation.
- Transportation barriers: buses, trains, and transit stops that are inaccessible, and a lack of ramps or elevators.





The purpose of documenting these barriers is to categorize, prioritize, and analyze them, creating a clear understanding of the challenges that need to be addressed. This process ensures that urban paths are designed to be safe, inclusive, and fully accessible for everyone.

PLANNING INSPYRE PATHS

Using the data and insights collected from city walks and community feedback, the project team begins designing accessible walking routes tailored to real needs. These paths are carefully planned to:

- Provide safe, barrier-free mobility: Ensure that every route is navigable for people with diverse abilities, removing physical and environmental obstacles.
- Connect key city areas and services: Link important locations such as public transport hubs, community centers, shops, and recreational spaces to create practical, convenient routes.
- Integrate participant feedback: Continuously incorporate suggestions and observations from community members to maximize usability, comfort, and inclusivity.



TOOLS & METHODS

To ensure accurate and meaningful planning, INSPYRE relies on a combination of research tools and practical methods:

- Surveys and interviews: Collect detailed personal experiences and insights from residents, especially people with disabilities, to understand real-world accessibility challenges.
- Observational mapping during city walks: Record and analyze barriers encountered in streets, sidewalks, and public spaces, providing a visual representation of accessibility issues.
- Mobile apps and GIS technology: Document and visualize barriers, enabling the team to analyze data efficiently and design routes that are safe, inclusive, and user-friendly.



EDUCATIONAL VALUE: CO-CREATION

Through active participation in INSPYRE, participants experience co-creation first-hand, working alongside planners and urban designers to develop practical solutions for accessibility challenges. This collaborative approach provides significant learning opportunities:

- **Inclusivity and participatory research:** Participants gain an understanding of how diverse perspectives contribute to creating urban spaces that serve everyone.
- **Design thinking and problem-solving:** Engaging in real-world challenges encourages creative and practical solutions, fostering critical thinking and adaptability.
- **Ensuring solutions reflect real community needs:** By incorporating feedback and lived experiences, participants learn to design paths and interventions that are genuinely relevant and effective.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Participation in INSPYRE provides opportunities to develop a wide range of practical and interpersonal skills that are essential for inclusive urban planning:

- Urban planning and accessibility assessment: Learn to evaluate city spaces, identify barriers, and design solutions that improve mobility for everyone.
- Communication and teamwork with diverse groups: Collaborate effectively with people of different abilities, backgrounds, and perspectives to co-create meaningful solutions.
- Problem-solving in real-world environments: Apply critical thinking and creativity to overcome challenges encountered during city walks and route planning.
- Empathy and understanding of accessibility challenges: Gain a deeper awareness of the daily obstacles faced by people with disabilities, fostering sensitivity and inclusive thinking.



PRACTICAL OUTCOMES

INSPYRE project delivers concrete, actionable results that form the foundation for inclusive urban planning:

- Identification and documentation of key accessibility barriers: Through city walks, surveys, and community feedback, the team systematically records physical, sensory, and transportation obstacles that hinder mobility. This comprehensive documentation provides a clear map of the challenges residents face, ensuring that no barrier is overlooked in future planning.

- Drafting preliminary accessible paths: Using the collected data, the project team designs initial walking routes that address identified barriers. These paths aim to connect important city areas such as public transport hubs, community centers, and recreational spaces, creating safe, barrier-free routes that are informed directly by the experiences of people with disabilities.
- Hands-on experience in inclusive urban planning for participants: By actively engaging in observations, mapping, and route design, participants gain practical skills in urban planning, accessibility assessment, and problem-solving. They also develop a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by diverse communities, reinforcing the value of participatory planning and co-creation.



CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

During the course of the project, several challenges emerged that required careful planning and adaptability:

- Diverse participant needs requiring flexible approaches: Each participant has unique abilities and mobility requirements. Designing activities and routes that accommodate everyone's needs required flexible strategies and personalized adjustments.
- Environmental limitations: Factors such as ongoing construction, roadworks, uneven pavements, or adverse weather conditions sometimes restricted access to certain areas. These limitations required creative problem-solving and route modifications to ensure safety and accessibility.





- Coordinating schedules and routes: Organizing city walks and engagement activities for a diverse group of participants proved challenging. Ensuring availability, accessibility, and convenience for all required careful planning, communication, and adjustments to itineraries.

Despite these challenges, the project team used adaptable solutions and proactive planning to maintain participant engagement and successfully continue the research and co-creation process.

SOLUTIONS AND ADJUSTMENTS

To effectively overcome the challenges encountered, the INSPYRE team implemented a combination of adaptive strategies, practical tools, and responsive planning:

- Designed adaptable walking routes: Understanding that participants have diverse abilities and that urban environments are constantly changing, routes were planned with built-in flexibility. This allowed the team to modify paths in real time to avoid obstacles, construction zones, or unsafe conditions, ensuring safe and barrier-free participation for everyone.





- Provided clear instructions and accessibility-friendly tools: To make participation smooth and inclusive, all participants were given concise, easy-to-follow guidance, including maps, visual aids, and tools tailored to accessibility needs. This approach empowered participants, helped prevent confusion, and ensured that everyone could fully engage in city walks and observations.
- Regularly incorporated feedback from participants: A continuous feedback loop was established, where participant observations and suggestions were actively considered and applied to improve routes, planning methods, and engagement activities. This ensured that the project remained responsive to real-world challenges and aligned with the needs of the community.

KEY INSIGHTS

Throughout the project, several important insights emerged that highlight the value of community-driven, participatory planning:

- Hands-on experience improves understanding and empathy: Direct engagement in city walks and accessibility assessments allows participants and planners to experience challenges firsthand, deepening their understanding of the obstacles people with disabilities face daily. This practical involvement fosters empathy, awareness, and more thoughtful decision-making.
- Collaboration with the community leads to practical, effective solutions: Working closely with residents, especially people with disabilities, ensures that solutions are grounded in reality. Co-creation and continuous feedback result in routes and interventions that are functional, inclusive, and genuinely responsive to the needs of those who use them.

IMPACT ON PARTICIPANTS

Participation in INSPYRE had a significant and positive impact on the individuals involved, both in terms of skills and personal growth:

- Increased awareness of accessibility issues: Participants gained a deeper understanding of the challenges people with disabilities face in urban environments, from physical obstacles to social and sensory barriers.
- Enhanced skills in planning inclusive urban spaces: By engaging in city walks, observations, and route planning, participants developed practical skills in accessibility assessment, urban design, and problem-solving.
- A sense of empowerment from contributing to a real-world project: Active involvement in co-creation allowed participants to see the tangible impact of their input, fostering a sense of ownership, confidence, and pride in shaping urban spaces that are truly inclusive.

ANALYSIS OF ACTIVITIES

Each activity in the project plays a specific and complementary role in achieving the overall goal of inclusive urban planning:

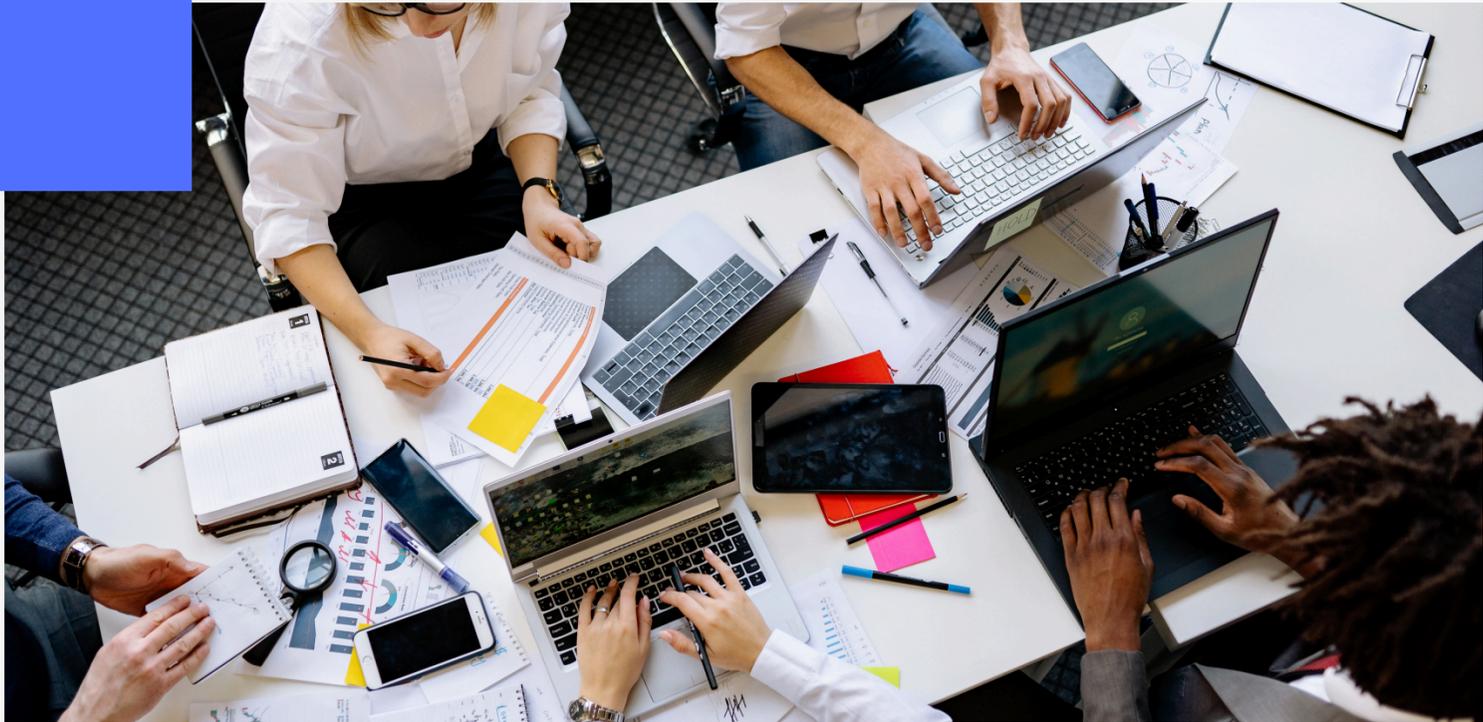
- Participants explore urban areas together, allowing the team to observe barriers in real-life contexts and engage directly with community members to understand practical challenges.
- Observations, surveys, and feedback from participants are systematically documented and analyzed to reveal key accessibility issues. This stage provides the foundation for informed decision-making.
- Using the collected data and community insights, the team drafts and refines accessible walking routes. This ensures that planning is evidence-based, inclusive, and responsive to real user needs.



TAKEAWAYS

The project has highlighted several key lessons and principles for designing inclusive urban spaces:

- Co-creation ensures urban paths are usable, safe, and inclusive: Actively involving people with disabilities in planning guarantees that solutions reflect real needs and remove barriers that might otherwise be overlooked.



- Early community engagement is essential for sustainable, impactful solutions: Engaging residents from the beginning allows planners to anticipate challenges, incorporate local knowledge, and build long-term acceptance of accessibility initiatives.
- Practical involvement fosters empathy, awareness, and actionable insights: Hands-on participation, such as city walks and collaborative planning, enhances understanding of accessibility issues and produces solutions grounded in real-world experience, rather than theory.



NEXT STEPS

As INSPYRE progresses, the project will focus on refining, implementing, and expanding its impact:

- Refine drafted paths using collected feedback: The team will review observations, participant suggestions, and documented barriers to improve and finalize accessible walking routes, ensuring they are practical, safe, and user-friendly.
- Prepare for implementation and broader community engagement: Plans will be made to introduce the accessible paths to the wider community, involving more residents in testing, feedback, and adoption, to promote city-wide accessibility awareness.
- Maintain a participatory, inclusive, and sustainable approach: The project will continue to prioritize collaboration with community members, embedding accessibility principles into long-term urban planning strategies and creating lasting improvements that benefit everyone.

CONCLUSION

INSPYRE is a groundbreaking initiative that demonstrates how urban planning can be inclusive, participatory, and evidence-based. By actively engaging people with disabilities, the project has identified barriers, co-created accessible walking routes, and provided hands-on learning experiences for participants.

The project highlights the importance of community involvement, co-creation, and practical engagement in designing urban spaces that are safe, barrier-free, and usable for all. Participants have gained skills, awareness, and a sense of empowerment, while the city benefits from routes and solutions grounded in real-world needs.

Moving forward, INSPYRE will continue to refine its paths, expand community engagement, and embed inclusivity into urban planning practices, setting a model for sustainable, accessible, and people-centered cities.



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