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AN INTRICATE ENCOUNTER? CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE AND ACCESSIBILITY IN THE CONSERVATION OF NINETEENTH- AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY MONUMENTS IN THESSALONIKI

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ABSTRACT

Located in the north of Greece, the city of Thessaloniki boasts approximately 320 monuments from the nineteenth and twentieth century. Addressed under Greek law as "modern" monuments, most of them were conserved over the past forty years, with little if any attention to the issue of adaptation to accessibility needs during initial works. Nonetheless, in more recent projects, specific care was displayed, largely through interventions aiming to facilitate physical access, with two cases of people with disabilities in mind: users of wheelchairs and people with restricted mobility.

In each of these interventions, two issues arise: on the one hand, the extent to which the safeguarding of cultural significance has placed limits on the pursuit of accessibility, and on the other, the degree to which the initiatives undertaken to ensure accessibility have affected cultural significance. Based on extensive on-site research and evaluation, this paper seeks to provide a complete picture and didactic appraisal of this two-way relation. To this end, it undertakes an analysis and assessment of the interventions completed so far in three main areas of accessibility improvement in the "modern" monuments of Thessaloniki: (1) establishing an entrance, (2) providing unobstructed horizontal circulation, and (3) ensuring smooth vertical movement. The respective analysis shows that a clear answer can be given

to the question posed in the title, in addition to revealing prospects for the enhancement of the encounter of cultural significance and accessibility in the most sizable segment of Thessaloniki's architectural heritage.

KEYWORDS: cultural significance; accessibility; conservation; "modern" monuments, Thessaloniki

Introduction

The city of Thessaloniki, one of the oldest and currently the second biggest urban center in Greece, boasts a remarkable number of nineteenth- and twentieth-century monuments, the vast part of which were conserved and restored over the past forty years. At the beginning of this endeavor, little if any attention was given to the adaptation of the historic buildings to accessibility needs. However, in more recent projects, specific care can be discerned in this area, largely achieved through interventions aiming to facilitate physical access, with two cases of people with disabilities in mind: users of wheelchairs and people with restricted mobility.

Two issues arise in each of these interventions: on the one hand, the extent to which the preservation and enhancement of cultural significance has placed limits on the pursuit of accessibility, and on the other, the degree to which the initiatives undertaken to ensure accessibility have affected cultural significance. Based on extensive on-site research and evaluation, this paper aims to provide a complete picture and didactic appraisal of this two-way relation, through a thorough analysis and assessment of the impact of cultural significance on the choice of accessibility interventions and the extent to which the completed works have enhanced or degraded the special character of the respective monuments.

I. The "modern" monuments of Thessaloniki and their conservation

Under Greek law, all buildings erected after 1830, when Greece became independent, are considered "modern" monuments (*neotera mnimeia*), in contrast to "ancient" monuments (*archaia mnimeia*) from prehistoric, ancient, Byzantine and post-Byzantine times.[1] Located next to the sea, Thessaloniki encompasses approximately 320 "modern" monuments that mostly date back to the first half of the twentieth century and are situated primarily in the once walled historic center, and secondly, in its western and eastern extensions along the seafront.[2]

Up until the early 1990s, the conservation of this sizeable architectural heritage constituted a field of limited action and was not necessarily aligned with the principles of international conservation charters. Still, as engineers with postgraduate degrees from abroad became involved in conservation and emphasis shifted to the city's historical identity upon its inauguration as the Cultural Capital of Europe in 1997, the preservation needs of its "modern" heritage began to be more fully addressed, culminating in the recent development and application of complete

1 For a classification of architectural monuments in Greece see: Law 4858/2021, "Kirossi Kodika nomothessias gia tin prostasia ton archaiotiton kai en genei tis politistikis klironomias (Ratification of legislative Code for the protection of the antiquities and cultural heritage on the whole)," articles 2 and 6.

2 For an overall picture of the location, historical development and architectural identity of the "modern" monuments of Thessaloniki, see: E. Kambouri (ed.), *Ta neotera mnimeia tis Thessalonikis (The modern monuments of Thessaloniki)*, Thessaloniki: Ministry of Culture – Ministry of Northern Greece, 1985-86; V. Kolonas, *Thessaloniki, 1912-2012, I architektoniki mias ekatontaetias (The architecture of a century)*, Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 2016.

conservation projects, on the basis of multi-disciplinary cooperation and full compliance with the latest guidelines of international doctrinal texts.[3]

It is within this framework that efforts began to be made to facilitate physical access for people with wheelchairs and restricted mobility. This was greatly accelerated by two major, nearly coincidental events: the provision of special clauses for people with disabilities or restricted mobility in the Greek Building Regulation (Law 4067/2012) and the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Greek legislation (Law 4074/2012). Under the former, all existing public-use buildings need to provide access to their functional spaces, while according to the latter, people with disabilities ought to be able to enjoy, as far as it is possible, access to all monuments of national cultural importance.[4]

Interventions completed thereafter in pursuit of these targets have stimulated action in three main directions: (1) establishing an entrance, (2) providing unobstructed horizontal circulation, and (3) ensuring smooth vertical movement. In all three cases, various solutions were applied, in part already acknowledged and extensively used in the wider European context.[5] These include the installation of ramps, handrails, platform lifts, stair lifts and passenger lifts, in combination with provisional removal or opening of door leaves, addition of beveled fillets at thresholds, and placement of tactile hazard warning strips at the edges of flights of steps. The precise criteria for selecting these options were evidently different in the case of each monument and in each of the three above directions, thus necessitating a separate discussion of the initiatives taken in each of the three fields, with respect to the already defined points of reference, namely the limitations rooted in the need to preserve and enhance cultural significance and the impact of the interventions themselves on the special qualities of the monuments.

II. Accessibility improvements toward establishing an entrance

The no action case

The ideal scenario for the establishment of a fully accessible entrance to a historic building in relation to the preservation of its cultural significance is obviously the use of its original entrance on a permanent basis, without any kind of intervention. On a practical basis, however, this would require for the latter to be on the same level as the street, and for its width to be adequate for a direct approach by manually propelled wheelchairs.

Such is the case of the former Technical School "Hamidie – Islahane", a late-nineteenth-century industrial complex, which currently functions as a cultural venue. Its entrance, originally

3 For a comprehensive review of the conservation of the "modern" monuments of Thessaloniki, see: M. Nomikos (ed.), *Apokatastassi - Epanachrissi Mnimeion kai Istorikon ktirion sti Voreia Ellada (Restoration – Reuse of monuments and historic buildings in northern Greece)*, vols 1-2, Thessaloniki: Editions Ergon IV, 2001.

4 Law 4067/2012, "Neos Oikodomikos Kanonismos (New Building Regulation)," article 26; Law 4074/2012, "Kirossi tis Simvassis gia ta dikaiomata ton atomon me anapiries kai tou Proairetikou Protokollou sti Simvassi gia ta dikaiomata ton atomon me anapiries (Ratification of the Convention for the rights of persons with disabilities and of the Optional Protocol to the Convention for the rights of persons with disabilities)," article 30.

5 For an indicative review of solutions in the wider European context see: *Easy Access to Historic Buildings* (London: English Heritage, 2004).

designed to facilitate unobstructed movement of bulky mechanical equipment, raw materials and completed products, nowadays serves as an ideal entry point, combining over-sufficient width and zero rise from the surrounding pavement (fig. 1). Worth noting, though, is that having been laid with relatively rough and uneven setts, the pavement in question renders the approach difficult for people with limited mobility. A preferable alternative, with minimal impact on the monument's special character, would have been to create a route with comfortable paving stones or cast materials, in the middle of the setted footpath.

Fig. 1. Former Technical School "Hamidie – Islahane."

Action on the main front

In contrast to the former Technical School "Hamidie – Islahane," the entrances to most of the "modern" monuments of Thessaloniki are not located at the same level as the surrounding area. More precisely, in keeping with the main principles of eclectic architecture, the ground floor is usually set slightly higher, in an attempt to define a base for the building's volume, with a flight of steps leading to the entrance. This difference in height poses a significant accessibility challenge. So far, the preservation of cultural significance has made a reconciliation possible through action directly on the main front only in cases of relatively short stairways, namely of no more than nine steps (approximate height difference: 1,5 meters), next to flat and long walls on at least one side. The above conditions are met in the buildings erected between the late-nineteenth and mid-twentieth century, which today house the Jewish Museum (fig. 2), the Archaeological Museum (fig. 3), the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA, fig. 4), the local branch of the National Bank of Greece (fig. 5), the branch of Alpha Bank on 21 Ionos Dragoumi Street (fig. 6), the Marasleion Lykeion (High School, fig. 7) and the branch of Plaisio Computers S.A. on 13 Venizelou Street (fig. 8). In all seven cases, the relatively short rise of the entrance has prompted the installation of single ramps, which provide a side approach to the point of entry, with the exception of the branch of Plaisio Computers S.A., where the minimal rise makes direct approach possible. It is worth noting that, with the exception of the Jewish Museum (where the ramp leads to another, equally prestigious entrance due to insufficient space), the remaining ramps lead exclusively to the original points of entry, thus allowing for the optimum and permanent transformation of the latter into fully accessible entrances.

Fig. 2. The Jewish Museum.

Fig. 3. The Archaeological Museum

Fig. 4. The YMCA Building.

Fig. 5. Branch of the National Bank of Greece.

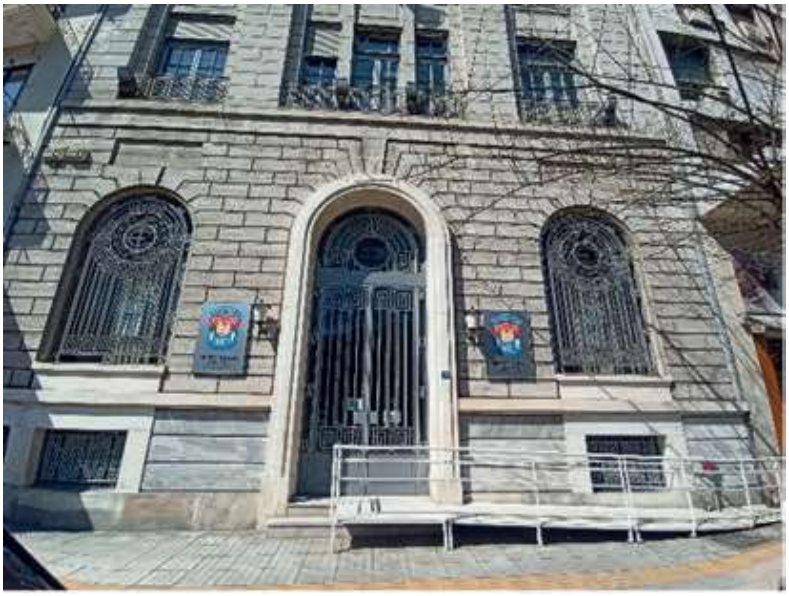

Fig. 6. Branch of Alpha Bank.

Fig. 7. Marasleion Lykeion.

Fig. 8. Branch of Plaisio Computers S.A.

As concerns the aesthetic impact of the applied ramping, its scale and proportion, in combination with the continuity of materials and evidently simple yet elegant design and finish of the permanent features installed at the Jewish Museum, the Archaeological Museum and the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), account for three discreet interventions that have no substantial impact on the appearance of the respective monuments. On the other hand, the permanent ramp at the branch of Plaisio Computers S.A., laid with black granite slabs, and the temporary prefabricated metal ramps at the local branch of the National Bank of Greece, the branch of Alpha Bank and the Marasleion Lykeion leave much to de desired, particularly in terms of design and use of materials. Which is more, the curved balustrade at the top of the ramp in the branch of Alpha Bank creates an obstacle for those approaching it, while the clearly out-of-scale installation at the Marasleion Lykeion makes it an unsightly intervention.

The poor outcome of the last four initiatives could have been averted, firstly, with a more sympathetic selection of materials in terms of texture and coloring at the branch of Plaisio Computers S.A. Construction of a permanent ramp with simple and elegant design (like the one at the YMCA building) would have produced optimum results at the local branch of the National Bank of Greece. The same applies for the branch of Alpha Bank, provided that the landing in front of the entrance was combined with steps stretching in the opposite direction of the ramp (similarly to the solution applied at the Jewish Museum). Such a layout would have allowed for a linear balustrade to be installed, instead of a curved one, thus providing access for people with and without disabilities alike. Lastly, as concerns the Marasleion Lykeion, the evidently inadequate space for ramping should have given precedence to the much more discreet installation of a short-rise, scissor-type platform lift, with glass sides, on one side of the conveniently rectangular landing of the broad stairway.

Action on other fronts

If the ground floor rises higher than ten steps from the surrounding area, or if the height difference is less than nine steps, but there is insufficient space for a ramp, the preservation of cultural significance has so far prompted a shift away from the main entrance of the building, in search of alternative points of access. This particular solution is encountered in a considerable number of historic buildings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which currently house administrative services (former residence on 25 Theophilou Street, former Allatini Mansion, former Administration Building), educational activities (former Annex of the First Gymnasium, former Building of the School of Philosophy), museums (former Modiano Mansion) and even private residences (former Ahmet and Giousouf Kapandji Mansion).

Fig. 9. The former Allatini Mansion.

The option of a secondary entrance leaves the main

front conveniently untouched, with only two, relatively minor exceptions: the fixing of discreet tactile hazard warning strips at the edge of the steps leading to the main entrance, a solution applied in most of the "modern" monuments of Thessaloniki, and the addition of handrails on both sides of the stairway at the former Building of the School of Philosophy and the former Allatini Mansion (fig. 9). Though simple in form, the overall design and finish of the last two features render them highly visible and consequently unnecessarily intrusive. Cast iron handrails, with darker coloring and elegant form, would have made a better fit in the historic context, thus safeguarding the monuments' distinctive character.

Turning to the established secondary entrances, it needs to be noted that, in all seven cases, they are reserved exclusively for people with disabilities, far from their optimum use by all visitors alike, while keeping the main points of entry open. Moreover, in three cases, they are located at the back of the respective monuments, namely at the former Annex of the First Gymnasium, the former Ahmet and Giousouf Kapandji Mansion (fig. 10) and the former residence on 25 Theophilou Street (fig. 11).
This focus on less sensitive fronts facilitates adjustments, such as the use of existing basement doors, made accessible through ramps cut into the ground (former Annex of the First Gymnasium, former Ahmet and Giousouf Kapandji Mansion), or the use of existing ground floor doors, whose short rise is resolved with a temporary, prefabricated metal ramp (as in the former residence on 25 Theophilou Street). In the first two cases, the overall layout and use of materials render the respective interventions harmless to the special character of the treated monuments. By contrast, in the third case, the design and finish of the installed feature comprise a poor adaptation. This could have been avoided with the construction of a simple, permanent ramp, with materials similar to those of the exterior of the historic building in terms of texture and coloring, or even by relaying the back courtyard at a slope, in order to eliminate the short rise at the door step.

Fig. 10. The former Ahmet and Giousouf Kapandji Mansion.

Fig. 11. Former residence in 25 Theophilou Street.

In the remaining four cases, the monuments are eminent buildings, with all fronts intended to be visible from the start. This particular characteristic renders adjustments more intricate, although in the former Administration Building (fig. 12), the existence of a side basement entrance, which has adequate width and is situated not far from the main point of entry and at the same level as the pavement, provides an easy and appropriately discreet solution.
Regrettably, the same does not apply in the other three cases. At the former Building of the School of Philosophy (fig. 13) and the former Modiano Mansion (fig. 14), where the entrance is located at the elevated ground floor, the considerable difference in height is resolved with highly intrusive stair lifts, fixed on one side of the stairway leading to the alternative point of entry. Much worse, at the former Allatini Mansion (fig. 15), access to the ground floor is provided through an unsightly external passenger lift, accommodated in a recess of the building's volume and stretching to the top floor, with a hugely negative impact on the monument's appearance.
A more sensitive approach in the case of the former Building of the School of Philosophy could have been adopted even on the main front, by installing a discreet, scissor-type platform lift, with glass sides, next to the landing of the principal entrance. As regards the former Modiano Mansion and the former Allatini Mansion, a similar solution could not have been applied, due to the inconvenient layout of landings and adjoining balconies. Appropriate action could have involved setting entrances at basement level, with a ramped approach cut into the ground at a conveniently low depth, since the basement of both buildings stands out considerably, rising over two meters above ground.

Fig. 12. Former Administration Building.

Fig. 13. Former Building of the School of Philosophy.

Fig. 14. The former Modiano Mansion.

Fig. 15. The former Allatini Mansion.

Last resort action

The last case to be examined here is that of historic buildings with a significantly elevated ground floor, i.e. by more than ten steps, which excludes the installation of ramps on the main front, while at the same time, the layout of these structures rules out the option of placing entrances on the other sides. The most characteristic example of this is the late-nineteenth century building that now houses the Museum of Macedonian Struggle (fig. 16). Its principal face is in a narrow courtyard, and the three other directly border streets and private properties, thus rendering any adjustments virtually impossible. On the other hand, the similarly dated building that houses the local School for the Blind (fig. 17), though placed in the middle of a sizeable courtyard, with all fronts free, features secondary entrances of inadequate width, which additionally lead to similarly narrow internal stairways, with no room for accessibility improvements.

In view of this intricate mixture of constraints, the two monuments have provided the field for a compromise. Unlike the previously examined cases, preservation of cultural significance has allowed interventions on the main front, as last resort action in view of the unavailability of solutions on the remaining sides. In both cases, this margin was met by installing stair lifts on one side of the stairway that leads to the entrance.

Though seemingly unavoidable, the features in question prove highly intrusive, thus making it necessary to exhaustively review available solutions. In this framework, there is the more discreet option of installing scissor-type platform lifts, with glass sides, next to the rectangular landings in front of the main entrance. This would diminish visual disruption, even though it would require removing a small part of the stone balustrade from the landing at the Museum of Macedonian Struggle, and of an equally small section of iron railing at the landing of the School of the Blind, which could nonetheless be fixed to turn in a 90-degree angle, when the lift is in use.

Fig. 16. The Museum of Macedonian Struggle.

Fig. 17. The School of the Blind.

III. Accessibility improvements toward free horizontal circulation

Once an accessible point of entry is secured, effortless movement of wheelchairs and people with restricted mobility along the main routes on each floor becomes a key issue. However, related action in the "modern" monuments of Thessaloniki proves rather scarce, which could be initially attributed to the enforcement of tight restrictions regarding the preservation of interior forms and decorations. Still, the overall rarity of even minimal interventions that have no substantial aesthetic impact (e.g. automatic doors, added support in narrow door frames, temporary floor coverings) indicates that this issue is largely disregarded, rather than put on hold due to respect for cultural significance.

Fig. 18. The Former Modiano Mansion.

Even so, the preservation of the latter has so far allowed a notable array of improvements, primarily in the form of unobtrusive, small-scale interventions that aim to facilitate movement along flat surfaces. The initiatives in question include the temporary opening of connecting doors at the Archaeological Museum, and the similarly provisional removal of selected doors leaves at the Jewish Museum, the former Allatini Mansion and the former Modiano Mansion (fig. 18). The impact of such action on the special character of the respective monuments is clearly minimal, although in the second case with the

significant contribution of the fact that a considerable number of doors remain in place, thus making their role in the overall aesthetic design adequately evident.

A second group of interventions is identified in areas with short level changes. In acknowledgment of the obvious need to resolve them, the safeguarding of cultural significance has provided room for localized adjustments through a variety of solutions, depending on height difference and available space. For instance, at the Jewish Museum, the former Technical School "Hamidie – Islahane" and the Archaeological Museum, the minimal rise of thresholds and timber decks (approximately 3-5 centimeters) is covered with discreet bevelled fillets.

At the same time, the slightly higher difference in height between the atrium and the surrounding halls of the former technical school (approximately 20 centimeters) is resolved through temporary, prefabricated metal ramps, placed in front of each of the connecting entrances (fig. 19). Though simple in terms of design and material, the size and form of these ramps render them considerably intrusive, while the consequent diminishing of the clear surface of the atrium hinders the perception of its distinctive spatial qualities. Such shortcomings could have been averted by relaying the entire pavement to a slope. This would have eliminated the low rise of the surrounding entrances with no aesthetic complications.

Fig. 19. The former Technical School "Hamidie – Islahane."

In cases of even greater level changes, as encountered on either side of the entrance hall at the Archaeological Museum (approximately 85 centimeters), scissor-type platform lifts have been preferred, with minimal disturbance to the interior, which is already cluttered by exhibition panels and artefacts (fig. 20). Alternatively, at the entrance hall of the local branch of the National Bank of Greece (fig. 21), a similar difference in height has been resolved with a stair lift at one side. Though intrinsically intrusive, the feature in question does not stand out in the overall context. This is largely due to the very character of the hall, which serves as an intermediate space, actually a passage between the entrance of the building and the doors leading to its main hall. At the same time, the considerably elevated ceiling limits the attention drawn to the stair lift accommodated at one side of the broad stairway. Also worth noting is the strict symmetry of the hall and its functional-ornamental features – a characteristic that would have made the installation of a clearly bulkier short-rise platform lift less compatible.

Fig. 20. The Archaeological Museum.

Fig. 21. Branch of the National Bank of Greece.

IV. Accessibility improvements toward smooth vertical movement

The equally vital, yet more intricate issue of facilitating circulation between separate floors has been repeatedly addressed in the "modern" monuments of Thessaloniki, remarkably through a very narrow array of solutions. To be more precise, in acknowledgment of the need to complement the formation of an accessible entrance and the provision of unobstructed horizontal movement with smooth vertical circulation, the preservation of cultural significance has allowed localized action for the enhancement of the latter, with a clear preference for the installation of passenger lifts. This comes as no surprise, considering that, though certainly not a small-scale intervention, the integration of lifts can be achieved in a sympathetic manner, also providing the invaluable benefit of easy access to all floors, particularly to the basements, where accessible entrances are often located.

Convenient integration would initially require the installation of the lift in a neutral section of the historic building, e.g. in a secondary space or a wholly redesigned area. Both options are encountered in the "modern" monuments of Thessaloniki, with the former witnessed in buildings whose original layout has remained largely unaltered, thus requiring preservation and minimal disturbance. This is the case of the former Ahmet and Giousouf Kapandji Mansion (fig. 22), the former Modiano Mansion and the former Administration Building (fig. 23). In the first two cases, the lifts were placed within the walls of subsidiary rooms, conveniently located on the main circulation routes, while their shafts were hidden behind plastered partitions, thus minimizing (to an acceptable degree) the overall aesthetic impact. As concerns the Administration Building, a set of lifts was installed in the light well of a secondary staircase, though with its shining metal shell exposed on all sides, rather than being clad with plastered panels, for optimum integration as in the other two cases.

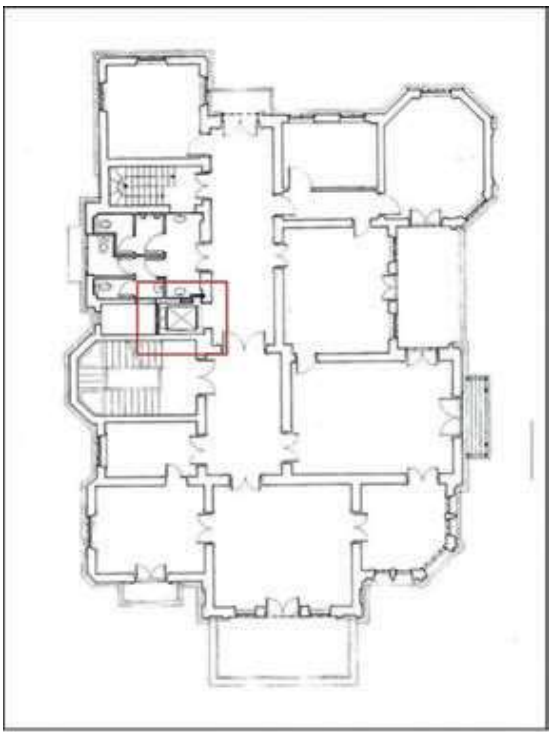

Fig. 22. The Former Ahmet and Giousouf Kapandji Mansion, plan of the first floor, with the location of the passenger lift.

Fig. 23. Former Administration Building.

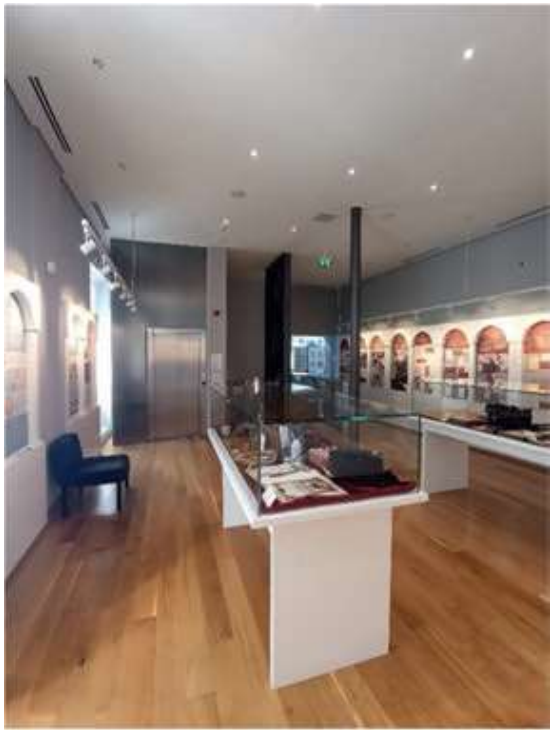

Fig. 24. The Jewish Museum.

The alternative option of installation in wholly redesigned areas is encountered in three monuments, whose respective sections either suffered drastic alteration in the past or retained a neutral character, with no significant features. The latter include the historic buildings that today house the Archaeological Museum, the branch of Plaisio Computers S.A. and the Jewish Museum (fig. 24). With the surrounding context wholly renewed, lift integration proves harmless in these buildings, even though two of them feature vividly modern structures of glass (Archaeological Museum) and steel (branch of Plaisio Computers S.A.).

Aside from the ideal scenario, in two other cases, one notes lifts that were placed in primary, rather than secondary spaces, of monuments that have retained the bulk of their original layout. These monuments comprise, first of all, the former Annex of the First Gymnasium (fig. 25), where the lift was accommodated in one of the principal rooms next to the main corridor. Considering that the latter as well as the other primary rooms remain untouched, while the

lift is enclosed within plastered panels and positioned in such a way that the shape and form of the surrounding space can be easily identified, the overall outcome proves positive, despite the fact that a principal space was occupied.
By contrast, at the local branch of the National Bank of Greece (fig. 26), the insertion of the lift in the light well of the building's main staircase, with a shell of non-transparent glass, hinders the clear perception of the stairway's distinctive spatial and morphological qualities. Taking into account the absence of a secondary staircase with an adequately sized light well, this severe compromise could have been avoided with the accommodation of a lift in one of the secondary rooms bordering the main circulation routes, with the shaft covered with plastered partitions.

Fig. 25. Former Annex of the First Gymnasium, first floor, view of the passenger lift (on the right, back) from the main corridor.

Fig. 26. Branch of the National Bank of Greece.

A small deficiency that can be identified in all the above cases is the fact that none of the lifts has doors on opposite sides, which would ensure maximum facilitation of wheelchair movement. Nonetheless, this particular layout is not entirely absent from the "modern" monuments of Thessaloniki. To be more precise, it is encountered in the already mentioned external lift at the former Allatini Mansion (fig. 15). A truly unsightly intervention, with a hugely negative impact on the appearance of the nineteenth-century monument, it should have been rejected in favor of installing a lift inside the building, where many suitable secondary spaces were available.
Apart from passenger lifts, one observes alternative efforts to facilitate vertical movement, through adjustments at the staircases that link the separate floors. This solution was implemented only in two cases: at the YMCA Building (fig. 27) and the former Building of the School of Philosophy (fig. 28). In the former, a stair lift was fixed on one side of the stairway leading from the entrance to the main hall. A clearly intrusive feature, it proves unavoidable, considering the inadequacy of space for a ramp or platform lift, and the absence of an alternative entry into the building. In the latter case, a similar lift was installed along the full span of one of the two primary staircases that stretch from the basement to the second floor. Much more disturbing than the lift at the YMCA Building, primarily as a result of its shiny appearance and protrusive installation right next to an elaborate cast iron balustrade, the lift in the former Building of the School of Philosophy has an additional major defect: it obstructs the use of the stairway as an escape route, by occupying

(when in operation) the full width of its narrow segments. This poor outcome could have been avoided by accommodating a discreet and less obstructive passenger lift in one of the subsidiary spaces next to the main circulation routes.

Fig. 27. The YMCA Building.

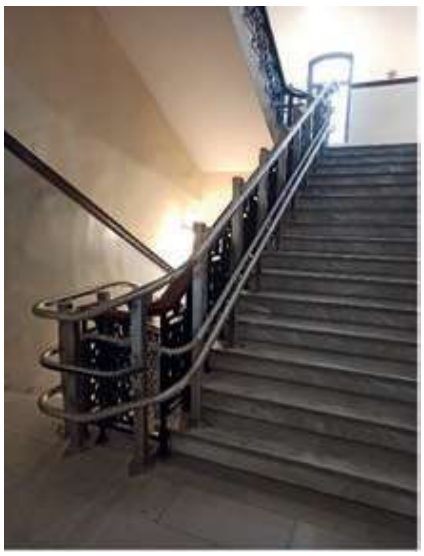

Fig. 28. Former Building of the School of Philosophy.

Conclusions

The question posed in the title of this paper can receive a clear answer in view of the preceding review and appraisal of the so far adopted solutions. As was made evident, the preservation and enhancement of cultural significance have so far placed rather clear limits on the pursuit of accessibility in the "modern" monuments of Thessaloniki. On the other hand, the interventions undertaken to ensure accessibility have created a substantial benchmark for improvements that do not compromise the distinctive qualities of the historic buildings. Consequently, the encounter of cultural significance and accessibility in the "modern" architectural heritage of Thessaloniki proves certainly not intricate, but rather balanced, with considerable prospects for an even better coexistence, mostly as regards the impact of accessibility improvements on cultural significance. Such progress requires, on the one hand, additional emphasis on the installation of features that are compatible with the historic context, in terms of disposition, size, design, use of materials and finish. On the other, it necessitates a more exhaustive exploration of alternative options, especially the solutions that have been developed abroad, but remain largely overlooked in the local context, e.g. the installation of scissor-type platform lifts and the relaying of open spaces to a slope, in order to eliminate steps. Lastly, if optimum action is to be assumed for the sustainable preservation and management of the "modern" monuments of Thessaloniki, accessibility ought to be addressed not only in relation to users of wheelchairs and people with restricted mobility, but also in connection with people with sensory impairments and learning difficulties, not to mention by facilitating, not only their physical access, but also their understanding and enjoyment of the city's late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century historic buildings.

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