

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS – ATHENS

COMMUNITY QUESTION I

- **What is your favorite and what is your least favorite aspect of city life nowadays?**

COMMUNITY RESPONSES

- ✓ Unfortunately, the city hasn't changed much and if so it is only for the worst the last ten years. It is an ugly city but with the literal meaning of the Greek word “ά-σχη-μος” which means without shape. That is very frustrating but at the same time charming. What shapes a city is its population's behavior towards its inhabitants. People in their majority of people don't love themselves and, as a consequence, the city they live in, violating even standard social rules. Nevertheless, Athens is my city and although I've lived abroad, it is here I've experienced beautiful & sad moments. On its streets, against building walls, on small picturesque alleys and squares I've had stimulating discussions, I've exchanged feelings, I've lived. As a conclusion, my favorite part of the city is my memories and the ones I'm going to create in the future, whereas my least favorite is people's cruelty and apathy.
- ✓ Well, I think, and most people would agree with me, that the best aspect of urban life is its diversity. Not only one has a huge variety of places and activities to choose from but also with all its different features it is vibrant and full of life. Most cities, especially the biggest capitals of the world, combine the old with the new, the classic with the modern, and that's what makes them, for me, an ideal place to live. By being “multidimensional” it is possible for us to appreciate one of its aspects in terms of the rest. My least favorite aspect is the fact that city life lacks the tranquility and serenity that country life abundantly offers. Sure you can stay home and recollect and do whatever it is that each one of us does to relax but this does not come even close to the peace of mind a life beyond the city offers.
- ✓ I have been a citizen of Athens my entire life; therefore I feel I have the right to claim that I have seen all sides of this city. What I mostly hate about it is not just the fact that it lacks all the proper organization of a European capital but that its own citizens often treat it with disrespect, making it an impossible place to live in. There are very few people with original ideas of how to improve it inside-out or how actually to take action but they have no support from the state. I am, however, very glad to be living in Athens at the same time. There is just a feeling about it – a familiarity of walking on its streets without fear even late at night. I love the fact that I can find in it secret spots of pure city beauty.
- ✓ Living in the city one has the great advantage of being able to attend various cultural events. The theatrical and musical scene is more diverse than the one found in more remote places and can be experienced fully with better stages and equipment. In general cultural development occurs more easily in the city

where there is access to more material, be it informative or performative. The biggest disadvantage of city life is the chronic problem of pollution. Apart from the ecological issue, the air feels stuffed and in addition to the absurd amount of people it creates a feeling of nervousness and tension that seems to dominate everyone.

- ✓ My favorite aspect of city life is the amount of opportunities I have for education and the diversity in the things I can do in my free time, in other words I can choose among many types of entertainment. My least favorite aspect is the noise coming from the streets. I need calm during the night that is why I prefer less busy neighborhoods.
- ✓ My favorite aspect of city life at the moment is the diversity of available places to visit in Athens. You can go to museums, galleries, ethnic restaurants and areas with their own unique style and character, like Monastiraki or Gazi area. My least favorite aspect of the city I must say is the accumulation of garbage everywhere. I think it brings down the image of the city. It is really unpleasant to walk around beautiful areas and see trash everywhere. Of course this is also highly hazardous for health reasons as well.
- ✓ Contemporary city life bears no resemblance to the one of the past. Judging from my experience, I think that the most favorite aspect of city life is the availability it offers in terms of educational and employment opportunities. Actually there is a host of universities, academic libraries and employment prospects that cannot be found in the provinces. Managerial positions, superior posts and bright academic future are mainly features of modern city life. However, it also abounds with disadvantages. In my opinion, impoliteness, cruelty, alienation and depression are among its main weaknesses. People have lost their sense of hospitality, and kindness on the contrary they have transformed into indifferent creatures, completely individual and of course alienated from their fellow citizens. Lastly, as a result of the economic crisis, depression and cruelty plague modern society, both because people have lost their hope in a better future and because they are driven sometimes into acts of violence and cruelty such as robberies and armed attacks in order to guarantee a minimum financial aid.
- ✓ In the contemporary, consumerist society, there is a profusion of opportunities to grasp as far as work and career are concerned, whereas there are lots of places to entertain yourself (cafés, bars, restaurants etc.). Moreover in big modern cities many cultural events are often organized, while the majority of young people are drawn to study in the universities. Nonetheless, it seems that, due to the downgraded conditions that the economic crisis has brought, many people tend to return to suburban areas to lead a more decent life. The life in big cities is characterized by anonymity, and apathy among people, mundane routine and frustration, a life away from nature; there is no hint of humanity, cruel antagonism prevails and all tend to praise money and sacrifice everything to accumulate it.
- ✓ My least favorite aspect of city life nowadays is the great amount of demonstrations that take place almost everyday in the city center. Streets are

full of people, shops are closed and the traffic is unbearable. On a daily basis people (like me) who use the public transport face lots of difficulties due to this situation. On the other hand, my favorite aspect of city life is the variety of alternatives it offers when it comes to spending your spare-time. Theatres, cinemas and shops of every kind make our life in cities much more fascinating and pleasing at times of leisure.

- ✓ As city life develops in our days one could state that there are plenty of things one hates or loves about it. In my personal view the fact that in modern cities everything is nearby is a major benefit. You can commute anywhere and visit any part of the city you like. Despite this closeness though, people have never been more apart. Everyone is “hidden” behind his responsibilities and anxiety, and ends up alienated. This loneliness is the worst aspect of city life in my view.
- ✓ My favorite aspect of city life (though not true for all cities), is the fact that walking is a main mode of transportation. In Athens, I love that I can walk to work, the supermarket, and even when I’m not going anywhere specific, I love just walking around an urban landscape. My least favorite aspect is the detachment from nature. I miss sitting under a tree, lying on the grass, watching the sunset. In a city you have to go out of your way to find a natural setting. I wish nature could be part of my every-day life.

COMMUNITY QUESTION II

- **Could you mention the most important reason/problem of Athens that would prevent a visitor from coming to the city? Could you suggest a solution?**

COMMUNITY RESPONSES

- ✓ I think that one of the most important reasons for which visitors are prevented from visiting Athens is the constant strikes. Perhaps adequate notifications /announcements could help, so that visitors plan their trips better.
- ✓ We need a political solution that would defend citizens' rights & the right and ethical responsibility to hospitality (Derridean sense). The city would be more attractive if racism was extinct and people cared for each other!
- ✓ Generally I believe the major discomfort would be the public transport which is far worse than most E.U.'s countries but right now the problem is, in my opinion, that Athens is advertised as an "unsafe" city for one to visit.
- ✓ I think that Athens is not a very clean city. Garbage outside the houses is a usual sight as well as obscene messages written on the walls of historical buildings. Damaged buildings or statues are also usual. The community should protest and through their representatives demand that the mayor and council people deal with this problem.
- ✓ The city of Athens could be the most beautiful city in the world but it is not. I think that as our country, Athens faces many problems. In my opinion the most important is the image of the city center which prevents a visitor from coming to the city. Grey huge buildings, some of them completely deserted, traffic are two of the basic problems that Athens faces. The image of the center does not remind me at all the view of a European city and it makes me feel sad. It is depressing. So I firmly believe that a tourist will be terribly disappointed by that. I think that the government can not take very drastic measures due to our financial condition. But I believe that we can start painting the old buildings, so that a happy image of the center of Athens is projected. We could also find all the free spaces in the center and plant trees so that all this grey and depressing image will improve.
- ✓ I think the most important problem is the squalid roads, parks, and, generally the garbage "ornaments" of our city. Also, as a European city, Athens should have more green spaces. Therefore, I firmly believe that it is the combination of both lack of cleanliness and green spaces. As solutions I would propose fees for those who pollute the environment, organize groups of cleaning + picking the garbage and promote an environmentally-friendly attitude (through internet, TV, seminars etc.).
- ✓ Bad infrastructure, there is not a central source of information or an updated website that provides information about central, social, and traditional/folklore events.

- ✓ As we're in the middle of an economic crisis and the world has a twisted perception of the Greek lifestyle, tourists hesitate to visit our country. The most important reason for that is the lack of proper advertisement and the amount of money that they have to spend here. The high prices keep people away. So we should try to keep prices at a low level, as much as we can, and also advertise our places and our archeological sights in a better and more effective way.
- ✓ In my opinion, the most important problem that prevents visitors, especially foreigners, from coming to the city is this universal propaganda created by foreign media. That is, that Athens is a city of violence, of strikes and that people destroy and damage the streets and the buildings in the centre/the heart of the city. Unfortunately, I don't think that this is something we can change, even if we try hard. What we could do, though, is to inspire people find ways of protest that would be more effective and massive, that could demolish and tear down all this unfairness and injustice that makes people suffer, continuously. A very serious problem, we could solve, on the other hand is traffic. If we all used the public transport means, we could avoid traffic & stop polluting the environment, as well.
- ✓ First, I believe that the question is provocative and take for granted that there are reasons or problems that exclude visitors to come in Athens. All these reasons are constructed by different groups such as media and government. Second, if I would give an answer that is the problem of the rise of nationalism. The real exclusion is created by the abolition of the "other."
- ✓ One of the reasons somebody does not visit our country is prices. I believe that the appropriate campaigns that would advertise the benefits of travelling to Greece should pay attention to focusing on the affordable prices.
- ✓ If we set aside the financial problems we are facing, I would say that the national media promote a rather negative aspect of Greece and specifically, Athens. Furthermore, the streets are full of homeless people or drug addicts that generate a feeling of desperation and misery. I would suggest that we should stop polluting the city and help our fellow citizens.
- ✓ I think that one issue that would be a deterrent of a visit in Athens would be that daily life becomes inconvenient and problematic under different weather conditions, such as a heat wave or rain. As far as a heat wave is concerned, smog and pollution are to blame and could be limited through the amelioration of public transport, especially the underground. As regards rain, a more thorough cleaning of the streets from litter is necessary.
- ✓ In my opinion, many tourists are discouraged to visit Athens because of the economic crisis and the political and social upheavals this has provoked. The country's image abroad is very negative and European citizens put the blame

on Greeks for having destroyed the economic balance of the European Union. Athens is the capital of Greece and tourists believe that it is a poverty-stricken and politically and socially disorganized city in which crime predominates so they are hesitant to visit. In view of these problems, we have to ameliorate our country's image abroad and help tourists understand that Athens is a safe and beautiful place to visit. We have to prove that Greeks can deal effectively with economic and social difficulties. We have to promote Greek hospitality and cultural heritage and most of all to take advantage of our country's morphology and its potential to be touristically developed.

- ✓ I think one of the main reasons that would prevent a visitor from coming to Athens is the current events evolving on the political level. Greeks suffer from economic issues and political imbalance. International TV and worldwide news depict this situation as the most threatening and exaggerated one, making everyone the least willing to visit such a dangerous and chaotic city. What a solution might be, is the projection of what Athens really is. It is not just a centre of problems and unhappy people, but a city with history and beautiful places that make you feel alive. People are not always moody. We are Greeks after all, and we know about laughter and hospitality. A video could depict all this "brightness" that lays in Athens, spread the meaning, and send away the fear and "darkness" that has made visitors to choose not to come to Athens.
- ✓ Athens recently looks like a neglected city. All visitors see is a grey town a very shadowy one without an element of art or something that pleases the eye. Moreover, except the ugliness, the poverty, the abandoned places that need to be taken care of, a visitor needs to have options to amuse themselves. There have to be cultural places with interest to provide an entertaining and warming experience to the visitor. Greece and especially Athens, have such great history, such great places to visit but unfortunately neither our history, our culture nor public buildings are well preserved and promoted, they way they should be so as to attract visitors. So instead of an ugly, chaotic and moody city, Athens must take care of its cultural places and become a more attractive and tidy city. The ugliness must be replaced by beauty. Athens must seem as a city that its people love instead of a neglected city, where nobody finds interest, culture and amusement.
- ✓ Probably the most important problem (for me) that is being highly displayed in the foreign media and would make a visitor prefer another country, than Greece in overall, is the extreme racist and anti-foreigner practices that are being in action currently in the center of Athens. I know that this is a political issue and that this emerged from our own political neglect. Obviously, the basic solution is to take our political rights more seriously. I stick to the belief that a city represents the people that live in it. And anyway, why should someone want to visit a city (that is proud of giving birth to democracy) whose citizens do not even respect the value of democracy themselves? Would they respect them as plain visitors?
- ✓ To my opinion Athens is a beautiful city, or rather it has all the potentials to become one; but it is actually a dirty city. The buildings are old and dirty,

between the street and the pavement one can see garbage, the garbage bins are often full (that's true because of the strikes of the state employees as well). People don't really know what "recycling" means, and how important it is for the environment; I often see the bins where recyclable materials are put, full with garbage, people throw litter on the street without any hesitation. Walking down the street one can see those beautiful neoclassical building all covered up with nonsensical graffiti.

- ✓ Depending on the visitor the problems would vary. A major problem would be the chaotic essence of a big city. So it is vital for a visitor to be able to move around and have fun and take the most out of a city like Athens. So, whenever he/she is staying, the public transport should be user friendly, that is he/she should be able to find out how he/she will go where he/she wants, through maps, information posts and things like that. A city guide of this kind would be useful, too, in the sense of informing visitors about shows, theatres, bars, cafes and things like that, anytime anywhere. An idea to solve the problem could be touch screens with all the necessary pieces of information in strategic places in many neighborhoods of the city.
- ✓ One problem that is becoming more and more apparent in Athens and generally in Greece is that of racist attitude toward people who do not look like Greeks that is people whose ethnicity is more or less apparent from their physical traits. The increasing number of immigrants, especially in the center of Athens, who are usually without legal papers have made people apprehensive, suspicious and afraid of "non Greeks" to the point that this discriminative disposition is starting to spread itself. Of course racism always existed but political-economic conditions of contemporary Greece combined with misery, unhappiness, shattered dreams and anxiety about the future have made people vulnerable and nationalistic. The solution would be to help people understand that being different is not being dangerous. Loving your country does not mean hating everyone else because they do not fit in our "high culture standards." We need to fight the disabling, dark powers that try to penetrate our hearts so as everyone enjoys the right of walking freely down the street without fear, without feeling a stranger with a lost identity, struggling to say "I am me and I love being me."
- ✓ In my opinion the main reason/problem that would prevent a visitor from coming to Athens are the Media and their propaganda. The Media emphasize on the situation of poverty and criminality. I don't want to talk about the Media and political well-played games, which are the source of the problems but I can suggest a solution, to make our city colorful and beautiful. For example, in Thessaloniki volunteers started painting all the bus kiosks green, orange and blue. People from every region of Athens (and Greece) could cooperate with the public sector and as volunteers start changing their neighborhoods. We also should renovate our old public buildings. There are many public buildings in Athens and their beauty is hidden behind their bad shape. I think that the public sector could give some walls and colors to the young artists in order to perform their graffiti in an artistic way. Also our city should be full of trees and parks, the whole city of Athens should be like the national garden.

- ✓ Tons of concrete that make it seem lifeless. Walking around the streets I get the feeling that every single element of life, creativity, inspiration, and freedom is suppressed underneath lifeless concrete walls. Faceless buildings, chaotic roads, where rare instances of art present in various forms statues, monuments, parks is lost in the chaotic rigid vastness of the city. I need to see the city changing. Life brought back on the streets art taking over concrete, plants, green, gardens reintroduced in our lives. But not only as mere elements that have no interaction with our life and to which we don't have a real access to. This I think would give a solution to another problem that becomes apparent in Athens gloominess. On the streets you can only see people walking hastily, being depressed and truly lonely. Interactive art could also function as a means to overcome the anonymity of the crowd. The other, a term so much feared in Athens nowadays. So let us give people a chance to alter their perspective from seeing the other as an enemy by reaching out and creating bridges of real communication.