

Kinga's adventures



Introduction

The aim of the following report is to draw the attention of the town authorities to the accessibility of the town and present the place from a different perspective. As Amarante is a frequent tourist destination, implementing improvements in a matter of accessibility can have a significant impact to popularity and a general image of the place. Also, making architectural changes will have an influence on the Amarante residents' lives. The solutions suggested in the following document are based on the experience and observations of the author as a person using a wheelchair on a daily basis. To avoid mistakes, the implementation of any changes should be consulted with a specialist in the area of accessibility or universal design.



AVENIDA GENERAL SILVEIRA

The sidewalk presented in the picture is close to the Youth Center (Casa da Juventude de Amarante). The oblique end of the sidewalk and its considerable height causes that an independent attempt to descend from the sidewalk may result in a fall (one wheel will contact the ground faster than the other). It forces a wheelchair pedestrian to descend and enter the sidewalk directly at the crosswalk or in a slightly distant place. The curb is not lowered in any place (also in the place of the slant) and to overcome it a wheelchair pedestrian needs to be supported by a third person. Both independent descending from the sidewalk and entering it is dangerous and requires a lot of force. To solve the problem, it is necessary to lower the curb at least in one place or to add a cement or metal ramp to enable safe descent and entry.



Also, the curb in the exit of CJ is lowered, but it is too steep, which makes it dangerous to enter and exit the sidewalk and requires a lot of force or help from a third person. To change it, the ramp must be installed with a milder angle of inclination. The task is not easy because the softer angle requires the longer ramp and the sidewalk is directly on the street.



THE SÃO GONALO CHURCH

There is a threshold at the entrance to the church and there are many other steps inside. Uneven ground causes that a person in a wheelchair needs the help of a third person and cannot go to the church alone. Also, the barriers are difficult to overcome with help, especially if they have to be overcome in the crowd. In the following case, the steps are a danger for the able-bodied believers.

To solve the obstacle, it is needed to use one metal ramp (or more than one separated ramp depending on the angle of inclination) to enable safe entry into and exit from the building.



RUA DE 5 OUTUBRO

There are numerous cafes with tables on the street. As a result, a wheelchair pedestrian can only move on a very narrow part of the sidewalk, which is additionally equipped with concrete pillars, which, due to the previously mentioned tables, cannot be gone around/omitted.





In many cases, the free side of the sidewalk cannot be sufficiently wide for bigger types of wheelchairs, especially electric wheelchairs. Legally, a person in a wheelchair is subject to the same regulations as a pedestrian, so he cannot move on the road when there is a sidewalk nearby. Besides, the free surface to be moved has different surfaces, which makes it uneven and may forbid or significantly inhibit the independent movement of a person in a wheel-chair. It is also worth noting the existence of an area of public toilets. They are inaccessible and there is no alternative for a tourist moving around in a wheelchair. Steep stairs and lack of marking are also a danger to the elderly and others who walk, although it involves effort. The least invasive way to solve some of the problems described above is undoubtedly to reduce the number of tables or to place them in such a way that everyone could move around the city space safely and with the least possible effort, regardless of the way pedestrians move.





COFFEES, SHOPS AND SERVICES – A GENERAL OVERVIEW



Many cafes, shops, and service points (hairdressers, banks, etc.) are often accessed by high, difficult, or impossible to overcome thresholds partially forced by the terrain, which limits or inhibits the use of such places by people with reduced mobility.

A partial solution to the problem is the installation of metal ramps, but if the usage of them is to be safe, they cannot be installed too steeply (the higher the threshold, the longer the ramp), so it may not be possible everywhere.

A solution for small stores (if it is not possible to install the ramp) may be to install outside buttons alerting that someone needs help (e.g. a tourist who wants to buy a souvenir/ an ice cream can buy it without entering the building). The implementation of such a solution requires a discussion with the owners of the buildings. The solution itself is also not ideal, because it limits the choice of the buyer. In the case of cafes, a similar solution can be used, combined with the display of a single table outside.

In many places, the curbs are not lowered at crosswalks, which can be dangerous. This also causes difficulties or makes it impossible for a wheelchair pedestrian to descent/enter the pavement independently (depending on a person's physical abilities).

At crosswalks, there are no sensory markings for the blind and visually impaired.

In many places on the sidewalks, there are also streetlamps located so that only a narrow space remains. The space is not big enough in most cases, especially if the pedestrian uses an electric wheelchair. A pedestrian is forced to suddenly descent the sidewalk and move along the street, which is dangerous.





STATION RODONORTE AMARANTE - TERMINAL RODOVIÁRIO BUS

Unlike the side entrance, the main entrance is not accessible for wheelchair users. To facilitate people finding it, it should be marked. The angle of inclination of some ramps makes their use by a person in a wheelchair dangerous, especially when the one wants to do it independently. It is also noteworthy that travellers cannot find out if the bus they are waiting for is low-floor, which makes it necessary to always travel with an accompanying person or suddenly change plans. The solution to the problem may be to create a schedule and use special signs to mark low-floor buses' courses. The stairs make further passage impossible and force a wheelchair pedestrian to take another longer way. The sewage grilles create the risk of the wheel of the wheelchair getting stuck and, as a result, the pedestrian's falling. The solution may be to paint the grilles with bright paint.

CARS

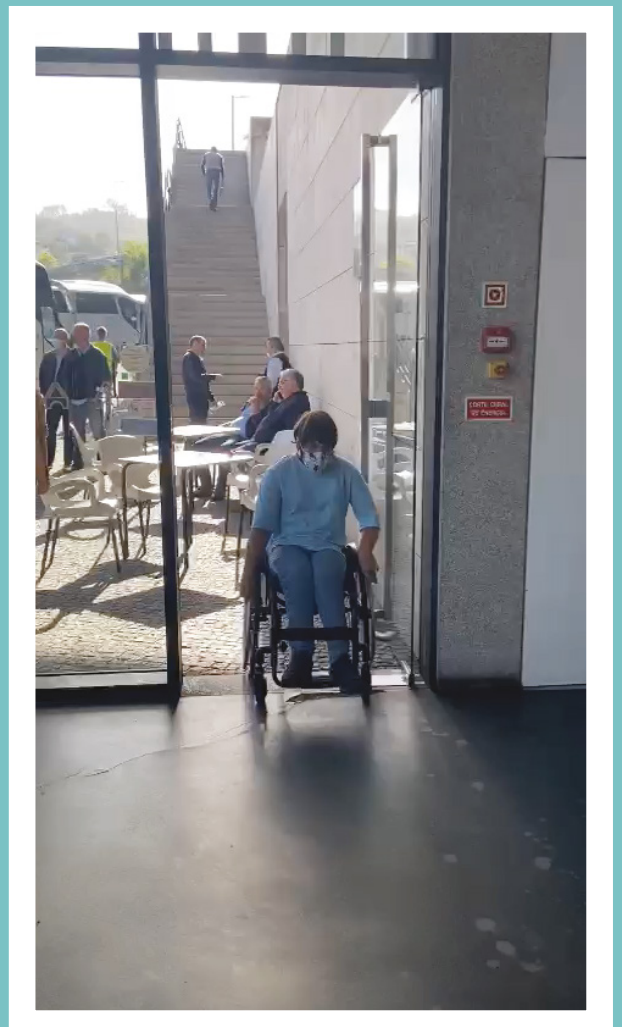
Cars parked on sidewalks are often seen, which makes it impossible to use the sidewalk space. Sudden descents and entries forced by cars can be dangerous because of the rare curb lowering.





PARQUE FLORESTAL DE AMARANTE

The recesses at the edges of alleys to drain water can be difficult for a person in a wheel-chair to overcome because it requires considerable effort. The solution to the problem is to place metal plates on a fragment of the cavities. The solution applied fragmentarily will not cause any problems with the drainage of water.



MUNICIPALITY BUILDINGS and ALAMEDA TEIXEIRA DE PASCOAES

In the photographed places there are only very high, not lowered curbs.

There is no ramp at the stairs and no other way to bypass them.

The photographed ramp is a danger, especially when a passer-by with a disability wants to pass it alone because it is too steep.

There is not a lowered curb on the other side of the street.

No curb lowering also at the crossing point.

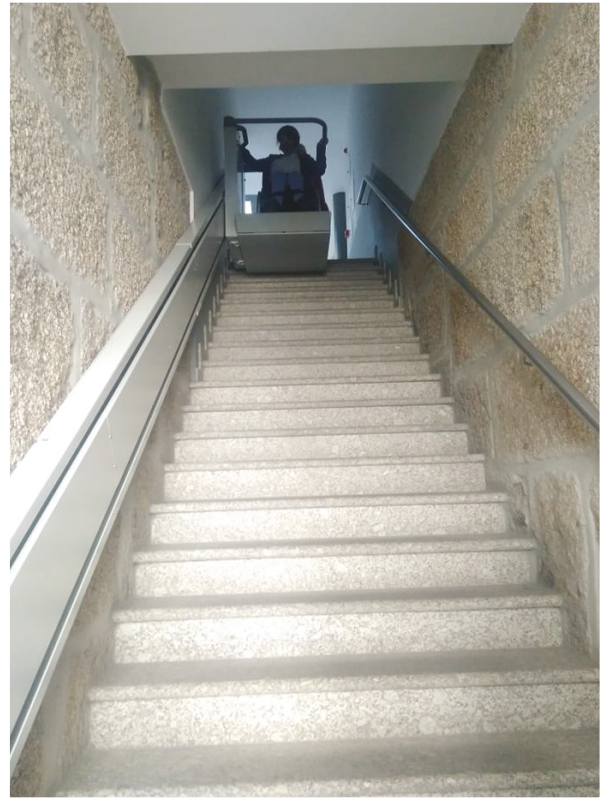
Renovation prohibits to use of the crossing and sidewalk and parked cars are blocking the lowering curbs.

A pedestrian with a disability cannot enter the main entrance to the office. Besides, there is no information about the elevator placed on the other side of the building. The use of the elevator only with the help of an office worker is impossible due to the very high step located in front of the stairs, and therefore also the elevator. The step makes it impossible to enter and leave the elevator by oneself. The solution is to make a ramp.

In Invest Amarante to use the elevator, it is necessary to use the key provided by the office staff. The waiting time for the key and the use of the elevator during a photographed visit was about 30 minutes.

The solution to the problem may be conducting training for the staff and placing a board with a contact number near the entrance, thanks to which a person in need will contact the staff.



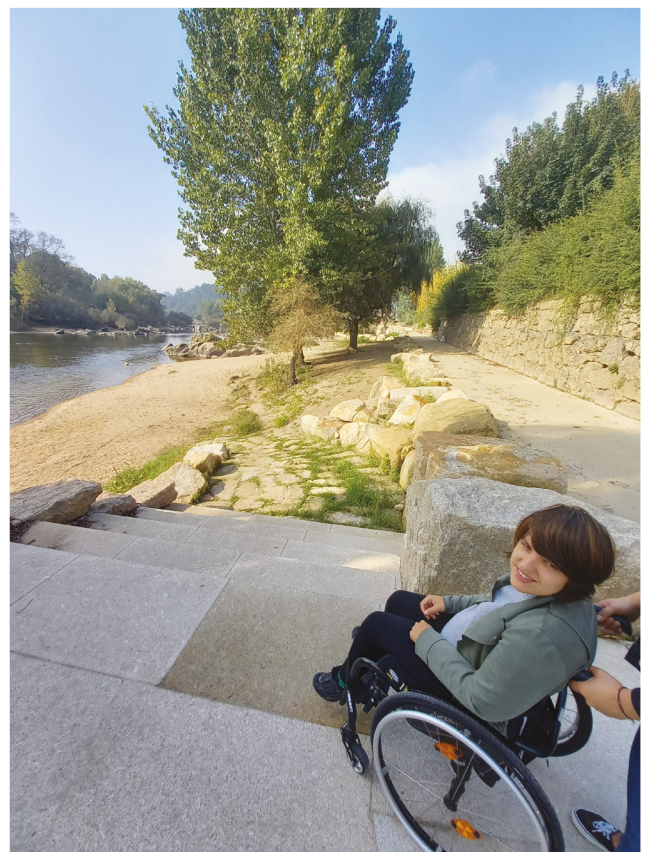


AZENHAS PATH

The road that leads to the “youth village” is lined with granite cubes and is partially sandy. Both solutions are potentially problematic for a wheelchair user because the surface of the granite cube is uneven, causing shocks.

The solution can be to replace part of the paving stones with concrete.

In the sand, however, the wheels of the wheelchair are potentially sunk. In many places, there are cavities in the paving stones, which can cause the wheels of the wheelchair to be come stuck in them while moving and result in a fall. In addition, in one place, recently built, there are stairs that lead to the beach and no ramp. There is also no other way to pass them, since the lateral access was completely covered with stones.



MERCADO MUNICIPAL DE AMARANTE

On the Municipality Market there are numerous stairs that make it impossible for a wheel-chair user to make purchases at the market or even get inside of it. Although there is a ramp, due to the high angle of inclination, it can be dangerous for a person in a wheelchair to use the ramp independently. Worth mentioning that there is a lack of information on whether it is possible to use at least part of the area. Also, noteworthy is the disinfectant dispenser, which is operated by pressing the foot of a special pedal, so a person in a wheelchair is not able to take the disinfectant on their own.



SANTA LUZIA



WITHDRAWAL MACHINES

There is a lack of low-installed cash withdrawal points, which makes it impossible for a person in a wheelchair to make transactions on their own. The person is forced to entrust the management of her own finances to a third person which involves risk and deprives the person in a wheelchair of the possibility of deciding on his or her ownership.

KINGA'S CONCLUSION

Despite the difficult terrain Amarante hides a great potential to be wheelchair-friendly. Many steps have already been taken to achieve the goal, but there are still some changes and improvements to be made. Some of these will require more effort, some much less, but the rebuilding done once will last for years. The document includes solutions, suggestions and observations that can be helpful both in a process of elimination of architectural barriers in places build years ago and in the case of planning to build new public objects or properties. Providing people with disabilities with greater comfort of movement within the area of the town certainly influences their safety and independence. It will also have an impact on their comfort of life, social integration and their involvement in the development and promotion of the town. Many of the suggested solutions will also make life easier for the elderly and parents raising kids.

During these six months, we realized how small improvements could mean a lot to a person with reduced mobility. During our work, we did some research to inspire us on models of accessible cities and with great surprise, we realized that at the time of the pandemic, many cities have invested in creating accessible cities. The policymakers have used the time and started to notice that part of the population is rarely included in the planning of public works. The policymakers have begun to take a closer look at the obstacles and creating solutions. We are talking about the Access City Award: <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-196392?&lg=EN> The Access City Award is a part of The European disability strategy 2010-2020 (<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1484&langId=en>) that aims to promote a barrier-free Europe and empower people with disabilities so that they can enjoy their rights and fully participate in society and economy. At a time when Amarante is investing in new infrastructures and services, we believe it is appropriate to issue a challenge to the municipality of Amarante: are you ready to redesign a more accessible city? Portugal is not on the list of Access City Award yet...do you want to be the first?