



Broken mobility: An exploratory study on public transport and youth-mistrust in contemporary Greece

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, Greece's mobility infrastructure has been increasingly criticized for its unreliability, territorial disparity, and lack of transparency. These systemic issues have been exacerbated by socio-political unrest and tragic events, most notably the 2023 Tempi railway disaster. Through a mixed-methods approach; combining surveys, qualitative interviews, and participatory workshops, this study analyses how a group of Greek youth experience and interpret public transport. The findings reveal a fragmented system shaped by underinvestment, poor planning, and civic disconnection. Beyond infrastructure, the research highlights the emotional and political dimensions of mobility, with recurrent distrust in institutions, normalized resignation, and reliance on individual strategies. Ultimately, the article argues that transport in Greece might not simply be a technical challenge but also a perceived erosion of democracy, and calls for a redefinition of transport policy as a central element of social justice and public accountability.

1. Introduction

According to the EU Transport Statistical Pocketbook 2025 (European Commission, Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport, 2025), Greece has a population of approximately 10.4 million inhabitants over a territory of 131,700 km². Its nominal GDP in 2023 reached €225.2 billion, while GDP per capita in purchasing power standards (PPS) stood at only 69% of the EU-27 average. These figures reflect Greece's persistent structural economic inequalities within Europe, which directly constrain the country's capacity for sustained public investment in infrastructure. This relative deficit in resources translates into a fragmented transport system, marked by territorial disparities and limited technological modernization. As such, mobility challenges cannot be understood in isolation but must be situated within a broader macroeconomic and political framework that shapes both the supply of services and citizens' confidence in them.

Against this backdrop, between February and April 2025, a series of research sessions and surveys was conducted within the Erasmus+ TEAMIT+ project (TEAMIT+, 2025) to analyse the complex and highly politicized state of public transportation in Greece.

This paper synthesizes the findings of that exploratory study, which combined qualitative and quantitative approaches. First, it contextualizes the current political and infrastructural landscape of Greek transport. It then presents insights from a focus group with young Greek

adults (N = 4) and a pre-study comparing the perceptions of Greek citizens and international tourists regarding transport infrastructure (N = 29). Finally, it discusses the results of a broader survey among a Greek study-group (N = 62), primarily young people, exploring their attitudes toward public transportation, usage patterns, and levels of trust in the system.

2. Contextual background and state of research

The transportation crisis in Greece must be analyzed through a comprehensive lens that takes into account both the accumulated national trauma and the current political landscape. The enduring impact of a series of mobility-related disasters, combined with the increasing politicization of public discourse against the existing system, intensifies societal unrest and fuels broader narratives of structural inefficiency and institutional corruption.

From a modal perspective, Greece stands out as the EU country with the lowest share of passenger transport by rail, barely 0.5% in 2023, compared to the European average of 8.4% (European Commission, Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport, 2025). At the same time, it has undergone the steepest reduction in railway infrastructure across Europe, with a decline of nearly 30% over recent decades, far above the EU average of around 1.5%. This structural loss has further eroded public confidence in the railway system, a trend dramatically

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accelerated by the Tempi tragedy. In contrast, Greek mobility relies predominantly on road and maritime transport, reinforcing unsustainable patterns of dependency and limiting the development of collective alternatives.

To fully grasp this sociopolitical landscape, it is necessary to recall a series of key episodes, beginning with one of the most devastating events in the country's transport history.

Historically, railway development in Greece lagged behind road infrastructure, as governments prioritized highways and fuel-tax revenues over trains (European Union Agency for Railways, 2022). By the late 2000s, the Hellenic Railways Organization (OSE) had amassed €10.7 billion in debt, with TrainOSE incurring annual deficits of €1.2 billion. In 2010, under pressure from the EU and IMF bailout, Greece passed a restructuring law that cut nearly one-third of railway lines and reduced OSE's staff by more than 2600 employees (Spourdalakis, 2015).

Privatization followed; in 2013 rolling stock maintenance was separated, and in 2017 TrainOSE was sold to Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane for just €45 million, far below expectations and still subsidized by the Greek state with €50 million annually to maintain unprofitable but socially necessary routes (Perriguer, 2023; Kalteziotis et al., 2023). Thus, even after privatization, public funds continued to sustain the rail system while ownership passed to a foreign state company.

Between 2010 and 2018, austerity measures profoundly reshaped Greece's public transport system. Hiring freezes, wage cuts, and reduced subsidies led to staff dismissals, 15,000 public employees in 2012 alone, and stalled modernization projects. The EU-funded ETCS signaling upgrade on the Athens-Thessaloniki line, launched in 2014, faced repeated delays and remained unfinished nearly a decade later, leaving much of the network reliant on outdated manual systems (Perriguer, 2023; Kalteziotis et al., 2023).

Urban transport in Athens also suffered: reduced budgets, poor bus maintenance, delayed metro expansions, and fare hikes sparked strikes and even nationwide shutdowns in 2010 (Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport of Greece, & European Commission, 2019). Over time, services were cut, especially in rural and island areas, deepening dependence on private cars or intercity buses.

Interurban buses (KTEL) absorbed much of the displaced demand, carrying up to 80% of passengers on Greece's 117,000 km road network. Yet this shift meant replacing public rail with private buses whose coverage and fares often undermined accessibility. In the Peloponnese, rail shrank from 706 km in 2000 to just 68 km in 2019, widening territorial inequalities between Athens and the periphery. Overall, austerity translated into fewer staff, fewer routes, and deteriorating infrastructure across all modes.

These long-term cuts and structural neglect not only reshaped mobility patterns but also eroded the safety margins of the railway system itself. The consequences became tragically evident in February 2023, when a railway accident, widely known as the Tempi Tragedy, claimed the lives of 57 people and injured more than 180 others (Committee of Experts, 2023). The subsequent investigation uncovered a chain of systemic failures: poor operational management, the absence of adequate safety protocols, and repeated inaction in response to warnings about the deteriorating state of the railway infrastructure (EODASAAM, 2025).

Two years after the disaster, the Greek government has yet to implement substantial reforms to improve railway safety (Saini, 2024). This institutional vacuum sparked an unprecedented wave of social mobilization, driven by a public that increasingly views the state's structures as profoundly corrupt and ineffective. Protests intensified in 2025, reaching levels of participation unseen since the financial crisis (EODASAAM, 2025; Saini, 2024).

Tragically, the Tempi Tragedy is not an isolated incident. Exactly twenty years earlier, in April 2003, another traumatic event shocked the nation: a school bus collided with a freight truck in the same region of Tempi, resulting in the deaths of 21 students and dozens of injuries (Hellenic Supreme Court Areios Pagos, 2010). The causes of the crash

included illegal overloading, lack of vehicle maintenance, and driver fatigue. The collective grief that followed was met with an institutional response widely regarded as insufficient and unsatisfactory.

In this context, the concept of collective national trauma becomes especially relevant (Alexander et al., 2004). The continued exposure to failures in public safety and governance has deeply eroded public trust in institutions and fostered a kind of learned helplessness regarding systemic transportation issues. Recent studies emphasize that, particularly among younger generations, the Tempi disaster triggered a "moral shock" and led to widespread emotions of anger, despair, and disillusionment (Eteron Institute, 2023).

Understanding the emotional and political weight of these tragedies is only the starting point. To grasp the full extent of their impact on Greek society, it is crucial to examine how the population perceives and internalizes these events.

Despite the growing public and political relevance of public transport in Greece, academic research addressing users' perceptions and lived experiences remains limited. Existing studies on Greek public transport have largely focused on service quality, efficiency, and satisfaction through quantitative or econometric approaches, particularly in metropolitan contexts such as Athens (Milioti et al., 2022). For instance, research on the Athens metro system has examined determinants of user satisfaction and service performance, emphasizing operational variables and infrastructure characteristics rather than broader questions of trust, safety perception, or institutional accountability. Other studies have similarly assessed perceived quality and satisfaction across transport modes, often concluding that higher service quality does not necessarily translate into increased public transport use, but without engaging with the socio-political or emotional dimensions of mobility.

More recently, a small number of contributions have begun to acknowledge the importance of perception, context, and user experience in transport planning, including work that explores accessibility, urban mobility challenges, and subjective evaluations of transport systems in Greek cities (Bouhouras et al., 2025; Milioti et al., 2022). However, these studies remain fragmented and limited in scope, often focusing on specific modes, urban environments, or technical indicators, and rarely addressing young users, peripheral regions, or the role of institutional trust and crisis memory in shaping mobility perceptions. As a result, there is a notable gap in research examining how public transport is experienced as a public service in post-crisis Greece, particularly from the perspective of young people in territorially disadvantaged areas. This study seeks to contribute to this underexplored field by combining qualitative and exploratory quantitative methods to examine perceptions of public transport, safety, and institutional reliability in a peripheral Greek context.

3. Methodology

This study follows an exploratory mixed-methods design, appropriate for research questions that address complex social phenomena for which limited empirical or theoretical grounding exists, and where subjective perceptions and lived experiences constitute central objects of analysis (Tiznado-Aitken et al., 2020). Mixed-methods approaches are particularly useful in such contexts, as they allow researchers to combine qualitative exploration with broader empirical observation, without requiring hypothesis testing or statistical generalization (Milioti et al., 2022; Gogo and Musonda, 2022).

The research was structured sequentially (see Fig. 1). An initial qualitative workshop was conducted to identify key issues and contextual dimensions related to public transport experiences. This was followed by a small exploratory pre-survey with international tourists, designed as a contrastive exercise. Finally, a broader exploratory survey was administered to local residents in order to examine whether the patterns identified in earlier phases were shared more widely within the local population.

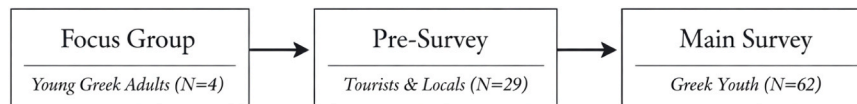


Fig. 1. Visual description of the methodology.

3.1. Qualitative exploratory phase: focus group workshop

The first phase of the study consisted of a focus group workshop with young Greek adults ($N = 4$) living in Kozani, a peripheral and landlocked region of Northern Greece characterized by limited transport connectivity and the closure of key railway services. The workshop was conceived as an exploratory exercise aimed at understanding how public transport is experienced in everyday life and which issues are perceived as most relevant by young users.

Workshops and focus groups are commonly used in exploratory research to allow participants to collectively articulate experiences, identify shared concerns, and surface dimensions that may not be evident through structured instruments alone (Shiftan et al., 2003). This approach is particularly suitable in contexts marked by institutional dissatisfaction or normalized dysfunction, where problems may be experienced as routine and therefore remain under-articulated in individual accounts (Milioti et al., 2022).

Through open discussion and collaborative mapping activities, participants highlighted recurring issues related to service reliability, safety, accessibility, and perceived institutional neglect. These dimensions were used to inform the design of subsequent data collection instruments, rather than being treated as standalone findings.

3.2. Contrastive exploratory phase: tourist pre-survey

Following the workshop, a small exploratory pre-survey was conducted with international tourists ($N = 29$), specifically Finnish visitors from Jyväskylä, within the framework of the Erasmus+ project supporting this research. The purpose of this phase was not comparative analysis or representativeness, but contrastive exploration, as other similar works (Fetters et al., 2013).

Tourists were selected as a relevant contrast group because they are not structurally dependent on Greek public transport systems and are less embedded in the country's socio-political context or collective memories related to transport failures. The pre-survey aimed to explore whether perceptions of transport deficiencies were exclusive to local users or also noticeable to short-term visitors with limited exposure to the system.

The questionnaire (reproduced in Annex 1) collected qualitative information on transport modes used in Greece, sources of information, overall experience, and comparisons with transport systems in other countries. This phase allowed for a preliminary assessment of whether observed issues reflected localized perceptions shaped by long-term experience, or more immediately visible characteristics of the transport system.

3.3. Exploratory survey

The final phase of the study consisted of an exploratory survey administered to Greek residents ($N = 62$), primarily young adults, in the Kozani area. The survey instrument, presented in Annex 2, was developed based on the issues identified during the workshop and informed by insights from the pre-survey.

The survey addressed frequency of use of different transport modes, perceived safety, access to information, and overall satisfaction. Numerical scales (0–10) were used to facilitate intuitive responses and to identify general patterns, while open-ended questions allowed participants to explain their evaluations in their own terms.

This survey was not intended to test hypotheses or to produce

statistically generalizable results. Its objective was to explore whether the perceptions and concerns identified in earlier phases were shared by a broader group of local users, and to provide empirical grounding for the qualitative insights generated at the beginning of the research process.

3.4. Methodological limitations

This study has several limitations. The samples are relatively small, non-random, and geographically concentrated in a single peripheral region. The majority of participants are young adults, which reflects the focus of the research but limits the applicability of findings to other age groups. Furthermore, the exploratory nature of the study precludes causal inference or statistical generalization.

These limitations define the scope of the study rather than constituting methodological weaknesses. The research aims to contribute context-specific insights into how public transport systems are perceived and experienced in post-crisis settings, particularly among younger users, rather than to offer comprehensive evaluations of transport performance at the national level.

4. Recollected data

The following section outlines the empirical basis of this study, which draws on a varied and rigorous mixed-methods design to capture mobility perceptions both locally and comparatively. Data were collected through a focus group with young Greek adults ($N = 4$), a pre-survey with international tourists ($N = 29$), and a structured citizen survey ($N = 62$).

4.1. Qualitative exploratory phase

4.1.1. Service Reliability

Frequent schedule changes without prior notice, especially during holidays, create confusion among users. Moreover, connectivity is poor, particularly in rural areas near major cities, where transport lines have limited frequency and availability.

Another problematic aspect is the inefficiency of customer service, which should provide updated information and assistance to citizens. However, according to participants, these services are either nonexistent or nonfunctional. As a result, users must learn schedules empirically and anticipate recurring service delays; “it’s an everyday problem”.

4.1.2. Safety

According to the participants' opinions, following the Tempe incident, train usage drastically declined due to a lack of trust in the railway system's safety. Participants consider extra-urban transport particularly unsafe, while intercity transport, although also unreliable, is perceived as less risky.

Additionally, testimonies highlight the aging infrastructure and equipment used in public transportation. The state of public transport infrastructure and vehicles is concerning; “not healthy at all”. Issues such as rust, water leaks, structural damage, and broken or missing seats in buses have been identified. According to testimonies, most buses in circulation were acquired second-hand from other European countries after being discarded due to obsolescence.

4.1.3. Corruption

According to participants, Greece's mobility problems stem from

poor planning and execution of public policies. They believe that the country suffers from weak political management and that, due to an individualistic mentality, citizens prefer not to engage in collective issues. One testimony reflects this sense of resignation with the statement:

“I think they’re laughing in our faces, and we accept it.”

Greece’s transportation infrastructure investments have also been scrutinized. Participants have questioned the logic behind certain projects, citing cases such as the construction of a metro system with only four stations in a city with significant transportation needs. Such projects raise doubts about the transparency of decision-making and the allocation of public resources.

4.1.4. *Transport methods*

Given the described situation, many citizens prefer using private transportation, as they perceive it as a more reliable and safer option. In some cases, students frequently use taxis to commute to university, avoiding the problems associated with public transport.

On the other hand, sustainable mobility options, such as cycling, are not considered viable due to the lack of adequate infrastructure. Participants point out that urban roads are hostile to this type of mobility, discouraging its adoption.

Additionally, alternative transport options such as car-sharing or ride-hailing apps remain underdeveloped in Greece compared to other European nations.

4.2. *Contrastive exploratory phase*

According to the collected data, 69% of respondents reported using some form of public transportation in Greece, while 13% stated they had not used these services.

In this regard, buses were the most common choice, with a 55% usage rate. However, some participants noted that bus frequency and coverage could be inconsistent, limiting their efficiency.

Similarly, maritime transportation was widely used, with 45% of respondents traveling by boat or ferry, highlighting the importance of this mode of transport for connectivity between the country’s numerous islands. Nevertheless, some respondents pointed out that ferry costs could be high and that route availability might be limited during certain times of the year.

Private rental vehicles also played a significant role in mobility, with 40% of participants choosing this option. Likewise, 35% of respondents reported using taxis or ride-hailing services like Uber, emphasizing their convenience and availability, especially in tourist areas where other transportation options are less accessible.

In contrast, rail transport, including trains and metro, was used by only 20% and 10% of participants, respectively.

Finally, alternatives such as trams, motorcycles, scooters, bicycles, or shared cars were rarely mentioned as used options. This may be largely due to a lack of information, as 50% of respondents stated they were unaware of certain public transportation options.

However, in terms of satisfaction, respondents rated their experience with the Greek transportation system on a scale from 0 to 10. 80% gave a rating of 8, with an average score of 7.55, comparing it to the Finnish system or other European countries.

4.3. *Survey assessment*

To gain deeper insights into the usage patterns and perception of transportation in Greece, a survey was conducted with 62 Greek citizens, primarily focusing on young adults under 30 (55 participants).

All participants in the latter were from the Kozani area, the capital of

Western Macedonia, a mountainous and landlocked region of northern Greece with a municipal population of around 67,000 (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2024). Kozani illustrates many of the challenges of peripheral territories: relative isolation from major urban centers, limited transport connectivity, and the closure of the Kozani-Amyntaio passenger rail line in 2010, which curtailed regional alternatives.

At the same time, the municipality has been among the first in Greece to adopt a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP), signaling an emerging commitment to address mobility deficits through innovative policies (European Commission, 2022). This triangulation of perspectives, integrating local youth, tourists, and citizens, offers both comparative richness and a grounded account of how transport is experienced in a post-industrial, peripheral Greek context.

The results, detailed in Table I, were analyzed using box plots and frequency maps, allowing for the exploration of three key dimensions: the frequency of use of various transportation modes, the perceived safety associated with each, and the accessibility of information on available transportation options. The methodology is both quantitative and qualitative, with some responses being open-ended.

4.3.1. *Frequency of use*

The survey results reveal a clear preference for traditional and accessible modes of transportation (see Fig. 2). Walking stands out as the most frequently used mode, with consistently high usage levels reported across all analyzed time frames (“last week”, “last month”, “last five years”, etc.). This pattern suggests both a potential limitation in the availability of viable alternatives and a deeply rooted cultural dimension of pedestrian travel.

Following walking, the most frequently used modes of transport are the bus, private car, and taxi/Uber, although with greater variability in usage among participants. In contrast, options such as the tram, metro, bicycle, or car sharing show low penetration among respondents, with many indicating they have never used them.

One of the most recurring reasons for the lack of use of certain transportation modes (tram, metro, train, car sharing, etc.) was their non-existence in the respondents’ area of residence (mentioned by 13 participants). This underscores the perception of a deeply unequal transportation system, where options are concentrated in specific urban centers, leaving rural or peripheral populations without adequate access.

Additionally, 10 respondents stated that they had not needed to use certain modes, which could be interpreted as a passive adaptation to an environment with limited options, where daily routines (such as going to university) are adjusted to existing availability.

Furthermore, 8 participants prioritized comfort, speed, and control when choosing their transportation modes. This reflects how people seek functional solutions within a system perceived as unreliable or absent. Taxis, private cars, and walking emerge as ways to regain control in the face of this perception.

Finally, the lack of economic resources also emerged as a significant barrier (mentioned by 6 respondents), highlighting that, even when certain transportation modes are available, the cost can be prohibitive,

Table I
Sample distribution.

Age range	Gender		Total participants
	Male	Female	
18–20	21	13	34
21–25	4	10	14
26–30	5	2	7
31–35	3	0	3
36–40	0	0	0
41–45	0	1	1
46–50	1	0	1
51–60	1	1	2
Total Participants	35	27	62

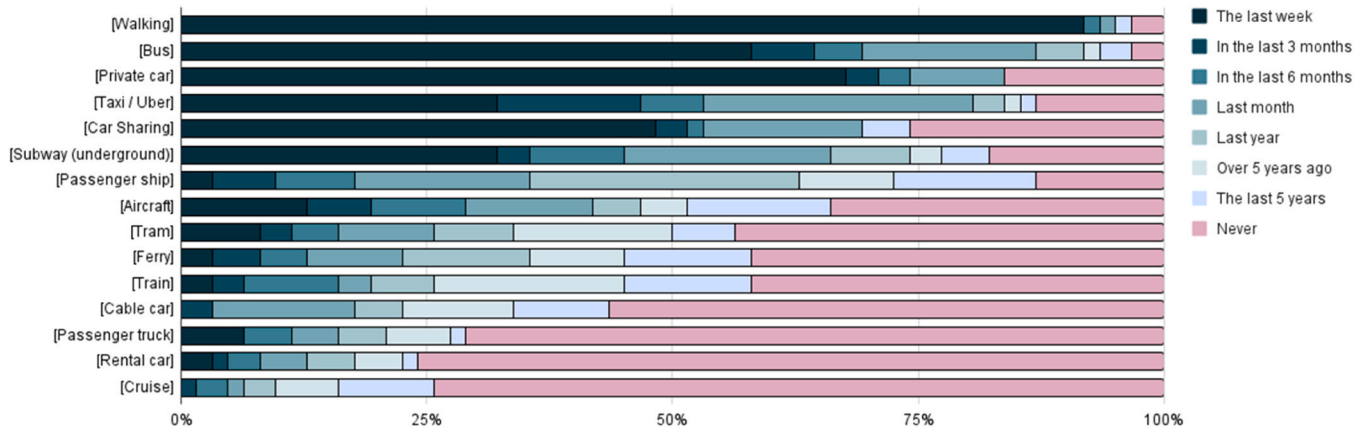


Fig. 2. Distribution of frequency of use through transport methods.

creating class barriers to mobility access.

4.3.2. Perceived security

In terms of perceived security, Fig. 3 shows large differences between modes. Air (aeroplane), sea (ferry, cruise ship, passenger ship) and private cars are among the best rated, with high median perceptions of safety (around 8–9 on a scale of 0–10). On the other hand, trains, probably affected by the memory of the Tempi tragedy, are among the worst rated in this dimension.

The responses show a clear tension between the practical need to get around and the emotional and rational distrust of public transport.

Many people express a perception that the modes are not really safe, not because they are dangerous per se, but because they do not trust who manages them and how (8 responses);

“Safety is the driving force behind the use of any means and it would be good to have infrastructure that carry thousands of passengers every day, not putting themselves at risk.”

It is also explicitly mentioned that drivers do not take safety seriously, which conveys a sense of vulnerability to the user;

“I think that most means of public transport are not safe enough because many of the drivers consider it routine and do not pay special attention to the safety of the people who attend these means”

The Tempi accident appears directly as an emotional turning point. This shows how the memory of the disaster is still present in the collective imagination, especially among those who have to use transport with no alternative (such as the urban bus);

“Based on recent events, it seems that even our choice to use mass media is risky. Citizens' lack of information reinforces my suspicion and insecurity. Nevertheless, my daily life requires me to travel for which I need a city bus. I don't use a car, but even if I had, if I felt safe, I would probably choose these for my commute, purely for the protection of the environment.”

The most significant responses, however, are those that adopt a more neutral or pragmatic stance (5 responses). These comments can be interpreted as a way of normalizing risk, or even as a defense mechanism to continue using a system that is not completely trusted;

“Safety is subjective... a vehicle may be safe but no one guarantees you that there won't be an accident” “Safety is very important to me but you can't guarantee it”

4.3.3. Access to information

The analysis of the results on access to information reveals a marked disparity. Conventional and widely established means of transport (such as airplanes, buses, ferries, and private vehicles) exhibit greater

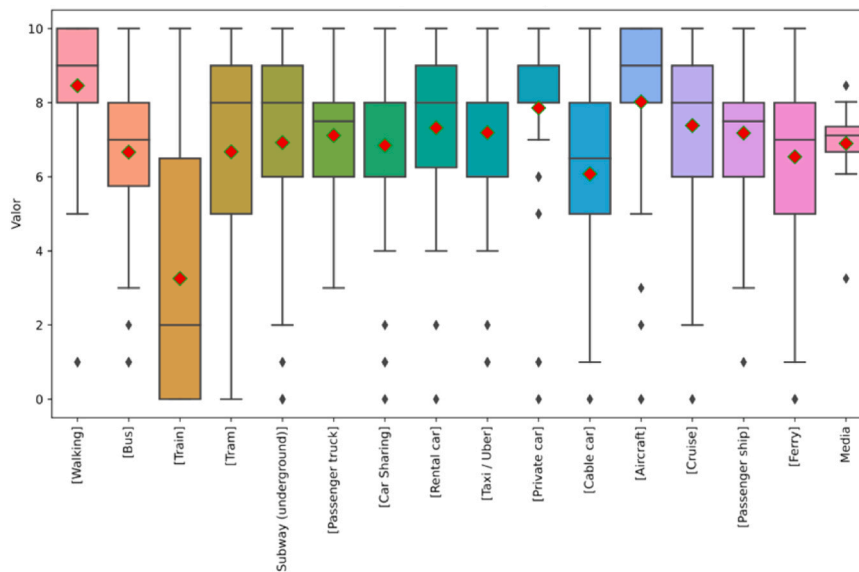


Fig. 3. Distribution of perceived security through transport methods.

information availability. In contrast, alternative or less common transport options (such as car sharing, cable cars, or scooters) receive low scores, indicating a deficiency in visibility and adequate institutional communication (see Fig. 4)

When inquiring about the origin of knowledge regarding the various means of transport in Greece, the Internet and digital platforms (reviews, mobile apps and social networks) emerge as the predominant sources, with 27 responses, indicating self-directed access to information with little institutional mediation.

A significant number of people indicated that they obtain information from:

- Their direct personal experience (13).
- Their close circle (10).

The analysis of the responses reveals two main patterns in the perception of available information on public transport; lack of structured information and perception of security.

Multiple participants (5) expressed deep frustration due to the lack of clear and organized information on means of transport. The main complaints focused on the lack of transparency in crucial aspects such as safety, operation and service coverage. These comments suggest that information opacity is not an isolated problem, but a symptom of poor communication management.

Several users (3) pointed out that the lack of information contributes to a feeling of insecurity when using buses and taxis;

“I don't know how safe the means of transport are, for example the bus, because I don't know how much attention they pay to their services and taxis, I don't know information about whether the driver is good, safe, etc.”.

The Tempi accident was even mentioned directly:

“Due to the collision of the 2 trains in Tempi, the insecurity of the trains has been discussed a lot in the last 2 years”.

This illustrates how insufficient information can exacerbate fear and insecurity, especially after traumatic events.

4.3.4. Overall satisfaction

Finally, satisfaction with means of transport reflects a similar trend to the previous dimensions, with an overall satisfaction through the transportation methods of 5.87 out of 10. Walking, plane, private car

and ferry stand out as the means of transport with the highest perceived satisfaction, while options such as train, tram or car sharing appear as the least satisfactory (see Fig. 5)

With regard to the justifications for quality, the responses to this question show a wealth of nuances, but in general they revolve around five main axes of criticism and perception.

One of the most repeated points (10 responses) is that the infrastructures are old and poorly maintained, with low frequency of services and certain areas are not well connected.

“Because the routes are not enough, as a result they are almost always full or even do not exist within a certain time.” “The bus is slow and dirty and unreliable in terms of transit times.”

This is combined with delays, inaccuracies and malfunctioning of apps (7 responses).

“A few routes never even come, breakdowns and various other things.” “Many times the bus routes do not appear in the app.”

A cross-cutting theme is the perception of abandonment of the system. or outright dangers. This not only leads to malfunctioning, but also to insecurity and lack of trust in the system (4 responses).

“I consider the taxi to be dangerous and expensive.” “A few times, we put way more people on the bus than it can fit, resulting in us standing up and on top of each other without any safety.”

Some respondents (3 responses) simply state that ‘they work, but could be improved’, or give vague answers. These responses can be interpreted as moderate satisfaction or resignation, especially when no other options are available.

“The measure serves but there should be a connection to more areas.” “We have all the means, just everything has room for improvement in terms of reliability and modernization.” “I am satisfied with the available means of transport that exist, however it would be much better if they existed in all cities as they are in most EU countries.”

There is a clear consensus on the culpability of the system, attributing responsibility in a shared manner, but with a strong emphasis on the State and successive governments.

The responders to this question (31) point to the Greek State as the main responsible party, explicitly mentioning the lack of planning, maintenance, and investment. Furthermore, the systematic disinterest of officials, as well as structural corruption, are highlighted as contributing

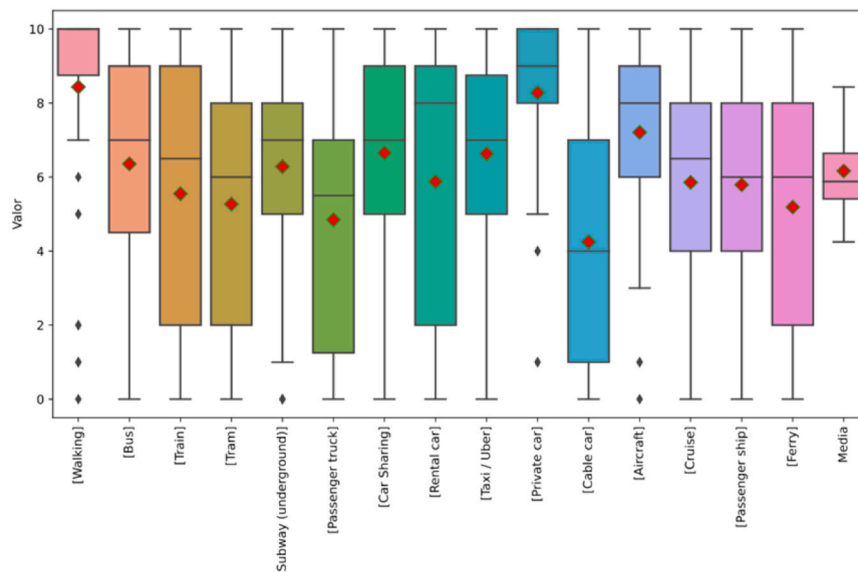


Fig. 4. Distribution of perceived access to information through transport methods.

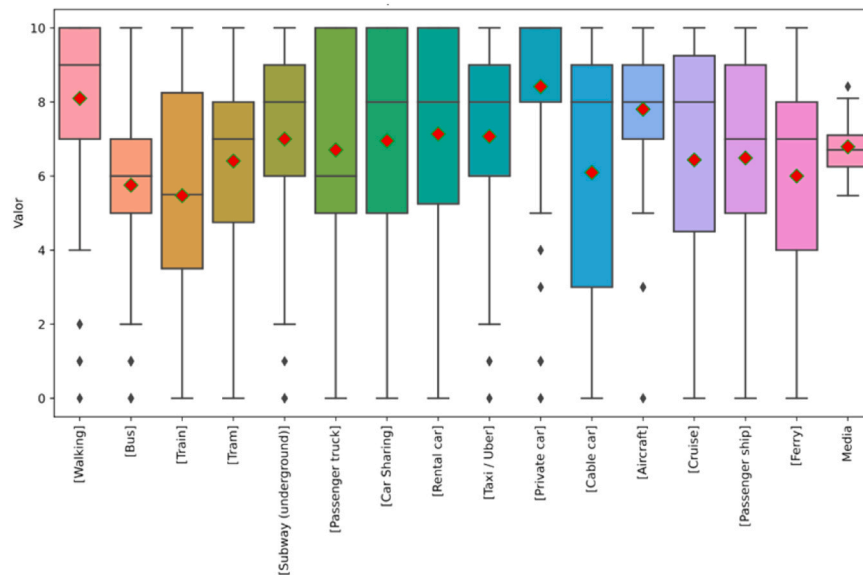


Fig. 5. Distribution of overall satisfaction through transport methods.

factors.

“The annual lack of investment in this sector, due to political choices.”, “The state and specifically the transport ministers. Not only the current minister but those who have passed through this position”.

Several participants (12) not only blame the government, but also consider citizens as passive accomplices. These responses reflect self-criticism, recognizing a culture of resignation, low participation, and little civic demand.

“Clearly the government that does not care, but also the temperament of the Greek that does not allow him to develop and obtain a better quality of life.”

A smaller number of participants (5) attribute responsibility to the transport companies, pointing out the lack of effective regulations and the prioritization of profits over safety. It is perceived that there is a lack of control over these companies, and that in many cases economic benefits are prioritized over the well-being of users.

5. Conclusions

This study reveals that the perception of the study group about the state of public transport in Greece is not the result of isolated inefficiencies, but rather the outcome of long-standing structural neglect, political mismanagement, and institutional erosion. The repeated perception of insecurity and the deterioration of infrastructure are deeply rooted in a historical pattern of underinvestment, lack of maintenance, and absence of strategic planning.

Following the economic crisis and successive waves of austerity, the transport sector was subjected to privatizations and budget cuts that left systems understaffed, underfunded, and technologically outdated. Safety mechanisms, particularly in the railway sector, were dismantled or never implemented, despite repeated warnings. The Tempi tragedy in 2023 was not a tragic exception, but a foreseeable consequence of this systemic neglect, an event that has since reshaped public perception, fueling mistrust and civic disillusionment.

The degradation of infrastructure is visible in both urban and inter-urban transport, where rusting vehicles, infrequent services, and poor physical conditions have become normalized. This material decay is compounded by a lack of reliable information and institutional communication, making navigation through the system opaque and

frustrating, especially for those with limited time, resources, or digital access.

Perceived insecurity, therefore, does not stem from irrational fear, but from lived experiences of danger, abandonment, and invisibility. Users do not distrust the modes of transport per se, but the institutions responsible for their operation and oversight. This sentiment is echoed across both qualitative testimonies and quantitative data.

Ultimately, mobility in Greece seems to be not only about transport, but a reflection of a broader democratic deficit from the eyes of the studied group. The absence of safe, accessible, and reliable public transport signals a deeper failure of the State to uphold its social responsibilities. The system’s deficiencies are not just logistical, but moral and political. Addressing them requires more than technical fixes: it demands a renewed social contract based on transparency, accountability, and the recognition of mobility as a public right rather than a private struggle.

Authors’ contributions

“A.D. wrote the primary draft of this paper, conceptualization and analysis of this paper and corrected and edited this manuscript.”

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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Annex 1. Pre-survey’s questions

- Have you ever tried public transport in Greece?
 - Yes
 - No

You've been in Greece, but you did not use the public transport.

- Why?

You've been in Greece, and you did use the public transport.

- Which one(s)?

- Walk
- Bus
- Taxi / Uber
- Subway
- Airplane
- Train
- Tram
- Motor
- Bike
- Bicycle / E-Bicycle
- Scooter / E-Scooter
- Rented Vehicle
- Shared Car
- Ship / Boat

- Do you know if you had another option(s)?

- Yes
- No

- How did you find out your option(s)?

- How was the experience?

- 0–10

- Why?

- How long were the travels? (time)
- How long were the travels? (distance)
- Is it the same as your country?

- Yes
- No

- Why?

- From the countries you've been into, which had the best public transport? Why?

Annex 2. Survey's questions

- I declare that I have read and understand the above information.

- I agree to participate in the study under these conditions.

- What country do you come from?

- Specify your gender

- Male
- Female
- Other

- Determine your age range

- 18–20
- 21–25
- 26–30
- 31–35
- 36–40
- 41–45

- 46–50
- 51–60
- 61–70
- 71–80
- 81–90
- 90 +

- Of the following means of transportation, when was the last time you used them?

- [Walking]
- [Bus]
- [Train]
- [Tram]
- [Subway (underground)]
- [Passenger truck]
- [Car Sharing]
- [Rental car]
- [Taxi / Uber]
- [Private car]
- [Cable car]
- [Aircraft]
- [Cruise]
- [Passenger ship]
- [Ferry]

- Of the following means of transportation, what was your overall satisfaction (0 being the worst and 10 being the best)?

- [Walking]
- [Bus]
- [Train]
- [Tram]
- [Subway (underground)]
- [Passenger truck]
- [Car Sharing]
- [Rental car]
- [Taxi / Uber]
- [Private car]
- [Cable car]
- [Aircraft]
- [Cruise]
- [Passenger ship]
- [Ferry]

- For the unused or recently used mobility options, is there a reason for this?

- On a scale of 0–10, with 0 meaning no information and 10 meaning all necessary information. How would you rate the information you have for each mode of transport?

- [Walking]
- [Bus]
- [Train]
- [Tram]
- [Subway (underground)]
- [Passenger truck]
- [Car Sharing]
- [Rental car]
- [Taxi / Uber]
- [Private car]
- [Cable car]
- [Aircraft]
- [Cruise]
- [Passenger ship]
- [Ferry]

- Where did you get most of your information from?
- Would you like to comment on the subject of the information you have as a user of these services?
- On a scale of 0–10, where 0 is not at all safe and 10 is completely safe, how would you rate the safety of each mode of transportation?
 - [Walking]
 - [Bus]
 - [Train]
 - [Tram]
 - [Subway (underground)]
 - [Passenger truck]
 - [Car Sharing]
 - [Rental car]
 - [Taxi / Uber]
 - [Private car]
 - [Cable car]
 - [Aircraft]
 - [Cruise]
 - [Passenger ship]
 - [Ferry]
- If someone close to you (such as a friend or family member) gives you a good opinion or recommendation about a means of transportation, how much does it affect your perception of safety? Rate from 0 to 10, where 0 means "not at all" and 10 means "absolutely reliable".
- Would you like to comment on your perceived security as a user of these services?
- Overall, how satisfied are you with the available means of transportation? 0 not at all satisfied 10 completely satisfied.
- Why?
- Who do you think is responsible for the current state of public transport in Greece?

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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