

Parking in Thessaloniki

(a suggestion on how to solve the parking problem in Thessaloniki and other cities)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

What are we going to do with all these cars?

If you have tried walking in Thessaloniki recently, you know what I mean. The streets are full of cars. The sidewalks are full of cars. There are cars parked along the curbs of every single street, on every square meter of free space, even in parks and playgrounds.

Our cities were not built for so many cars. Our city centres are based on traditional street plans that have existed for centuries. And those streets were quite adequate when they were built – and for a long time afterwards – because the traffic on the streets consisted mainly of pedestrians, with a few horses and carts among them.

The first cars appeared on our city streets only in the early years of the 20th century. And even then, there were very few of them. One or two cars driving by on the street didn't really cause any traffic problems.

Cars in Thessaloniki actually started to be a problem only about 25 years ago. Suddenly, everyone had a car! And there was simply nowhere to put them. It would be fine if we didn't build such tall houses. If our houses were only 2 storeys high, then there would be room on the street in front of the house for a car for every family. But given that we build houses of six – seven – eight storeys, the situation is quite hopeless. The stretch of street outside the house has room for maybe 2 or 3 cars at the most.

We could of course build underground parking garages. The City Council could pass a regulation that all new buildings must have at least one parking space for each flat. But then, what do we do with all the houses that have already been built?

I have a suggestion to make. All we need to do is to prohibit all shops at street level. We simply make it illegal to operate a store or office or restaurant or café at street level. All stores and shops on the ground floor have to move up to the first floor. All the space at street level has to be converted to parking facilities.

That way, there would be room for pedestrians on the streets. But of course, there wouldn't be many pedestrians. With no shops to go shopping in, no cafés to have a cup of coffee in, we wouldn't have any reason to walk on the streets at all.

Thank you.

(415 words)