Practices of solidarity in Athens. Reconfigurations of public space and urban citizenship[1]

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Abstract

The multi-faceted crisis that has hit Greece and other (southern) European countries has had severe consequences on people's everyday lives. In an attempt to cope with, but also resist, dramatic changes in lifestyles, incomes and welfare, several initiatives have sprung up all over the country at many different scales, with diverse targets, varying actors and outcomes. Many people have abandoned their privacy to participate in public actions of solidarity, in initiatives that often involve new or alternative uses of urban space. It seems that practices of solidarity and claims around material spaces are becoming an important "laboratory" for shaping a different public sphere. Drawing from relevant examples in Athens, the paper aims to reflect on the ways in which such practices and claims arise and develop; how different types of rights and forms of doing politics are enacted in situations of crisis and deprivation; and finally how such practices reconfigure public space and shape notions of belonging, which ultimately (re)define urban citizenship.

Keywords: collective action, crisis, public space, solidarity initiatives, exclusions

Introduction

Greece, as it is widely known, has been heavily hit by the repercussions of the world financial crisis of 2008. Indeed, the financial crisis seems to have deepened and unveiled its severe political, social and humanitarian aspects. Austerity policies, implemented as "remedies" to the crisis of sovereign debt, have led to the shrinkage of what used to constitute social citizenship: income guarantees, housing rights, basic social services, pensions and unemployment benefits are heavily curtailed or not supplied any longer by states – and Greece is a prime case here – which are tied through ever stricter agreements/memoranda to the logic of interest and sovereign debt payments and stock market operations. Against this background, which produces socially and spatially unequal exclusions, a whole range of grassroots practices have developed, contributing in many ways to re-configurations of public space and urban citizenship: "Occupations, demonstrations, transient revolts, non-competitive forms of social cooperation, grassroots organising of community living and sharing, micro-acts of environmental justice, scattered forms of re-appropriation, alternative and informal economic circuits" (Grazioli, this issue) are some of these practices also identified in Athens and in other parts of Greece.

In this paper we focus in particular on "solidarity initiatives" which sprung in the aftermath of the "indignados/squares" movements of 2011 in many urban neighbourhoods of Athens, as well as other major Greek cities. In earlier work, we have discussed such initiatives in more detail, looking in particular at how they contribute to reconfigure public space (Vaiou & Kalandides 2015). The aim here is to expand our spatial emphasis and critically examine some of the ways in which such initiatives are approached, along the lines of three concepts: "resilience", "social innovation" and "urban commons". The first part of the paper introduces the context of the crisis in Athens pointing at its consequences among the most vulnerable groups of the population; in this part we propose a tentative categorisation and discuss the different types of "solidarity initiatives". The second part discusses three possible theoretical frameworks for the conceptualisation of "solidarity initiatives", namely *resilience*, *social innovation* and *urban commons*; here we also introduce examples of particular initiatives as illustrations of analysis and comment on the theoretical frameworks. In the third and final part we propose an approach of "solidarity initiatives" as an entry point to reconfigure citizenship and public space.

1. The crisis and solidarity initiatives[2]

Several years into the financial and economic crisis that has unravelled Greece since at least 2010, the political and humanitarian disaster only seems to deepen. Unemployment has peaked at 27.1% in 2013 and dropped to 24.6% in 2015, with women and young people hit disproportionally: women's unemployment rate went from 31.1% in 2013 to 28.3% in 2015 (24.1 and 21.5 respectively for men), while youth unemployment also dropped from 59.0% to 49.5% with women again figuring worse (ELSTAT, *Labour Force Surveys*, 2013, 2015). In the past five years, GDP per capita has fallen cumulatively by 23.6%, dropping to 1964 levels after two decades of real convergence with the EU15 mean, while the purchase power of wage earners plummeted by 37.2%.

The effects of austerity on a large part of the population in Greece are striking. According to the Bureau for State Budget of the Greek Parliament, 3.8 million Greeks are near the poverty line (at 432 euros per month per person) and 2.5 million under the poverty line (at 233 euros per month per person), while cases of extreme poverty are not uncommon (including lack of adequate food, access to electricity, heating and water supply)[3] (see also INE/GSEE 2014). Recent research data published by "Prolepsis" (Institute of Preventive Medicine, Environmental and Occupational Health) show that school children face food insecurity, 61% of them live in households with at least one unemployed parent, while in 17% of households there is no employed adult. Of those pupils, 11% do not have health insurance, 7% have lived in homes without electricity for more than a week in 2014 (www.prolepsis.gr)[4].

Urban studies – and academia in general – have tried to address this "conjunctural urban crisis" (Hall and Massey 2010), by looking at it though different lenses: urban movements, resistance and spontaneity (e.g. Vradis 2009; Leontidou 2010, 2012), reconfigurations of public space through street struggles (Kallianos 2013) or in the context of The Right to the City movements (Petropoulou 2014). This discussion has lately been enriched by a shift from heroic accounts of resistance towards the nitty-gritty of the everyday (Kaika 2012), the consequences of the crisis on women (Vaiou 2014) or towards solidarity initiatives (Vaiou

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[2] We use the term "solidarity initiatives" to underline the grassroots and voluntary character of what we are studying and differentiate them form relevant structures and NGOs, funded privately, by municipal or state programs or by the church, which are active in poverty relief.
[3] The program for Humanitarian Aid of the Ministry of Labour, implemented by the new government since June 2015, has received more than 300.000 applications from households for food support and more than 120.000 applications for re-connection to the electricity network
[4] The on-going refugee crisis, with thousands of war refugees and migrants entering the EU through Greece, is yet another aspect of the crisis, which is out of the scope of this paper.

and Kalandides 2015) and a lot more. It is in this context that we have been studying solidarity initiatives in Athens since 2011, trying to connect them to broader debates in urban studies[5].

By "solidarity initiatives" we mean here a broad range of practices that share a common goal of alleviating or easing some of the effects of the crisis, broadly organise around the slogan "nobody alone in the crisis" and reciprocally engage and empower those who are hardly hit by it. The particular areas of action as well as the motives and ideological contours vary considerably, ranging from responses to immediate survival needs (e.g. soup kitchens, food distribution) to local assemblies and meeting places which debate possible alternative futures. As a rule they are voluntary and spontaneous associations of individuals, often already active locally or in broader movements (e.g. migrant support, feminist groups, left or anarchist groups). Those who engage in the provision of food and basic services, in principle, struggle for the time when their existence will no longer be necessary; at the same time their practices and mode of operation consciously prefigure alternative ways of delivering, using and sharing material resources and services. In this sense, their relation with institutions, local or state, is a matter of hot debates and varies considerably among initiatives.

In Table 1, we have grouped according to their type of activity an almost exhaustive sample of solidarity initiatives in Athens identified through our research. It has to be noted from the start that the terrain is changing, with new initiatives appearing and others becoming inactive for longer or shorter periods of time or changing their areas of activity; in this context it is not possible or desirable to produce a neat taxonomy. The table, however, is indicative of the vast range of practices and initiatives (second column) and their geographical distribution in the metropolitan area of Athens (first column)[6]. Practices include collective action for immediate day-to-day survival in terms of food and subsistence (soup kitchens, social groceries, communal cooking, exchange networks); initiatives for the provision of basic services (most prominently social medical clinics and pharmacies); schemes for educational support and cultural events; actions based on broader political claims and practices of living together (e.g.

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[5] The material that we present in this paper is based on indexing of newspaper clippings about "solidarity initiatives" and forms of "collective action" from five newspapers (*Avgi, Epohi, Eleftherotypia, Efimerida ton Syntakton, Kathimerini*) since 2011 and from relevant internet sites (www.solidarity4all.gr, www.enallaktikos.gr, www.festival4sce and sites of particular initiatives) and remains open to new additions/removals. Particular initiatives from different "categories", including the ones cited in this paper, have been studied in more detail through observation of (and sometimes participation in) their activities, informal discussions with members and at least one formal interview per case.

[6] The last three columns relate to the three perspectives we discuss in the next section of the paper

social spaces, local assemblies, advice and support centres, occupied public spaces, or "no intermediaries" initiatives); attempts of making a living collectively (e.g. employment collectives, like cooperative cafes and groceries, creative cooperatives for music, photography, software production, translation, publishing etc). The typology is useful for our discussion in this paper along the lines of the three perspectives mentioned above. But the "types" are in no way exclusive, since many of the initiatives host or organise more than one (type of) activities, which also change over time, and engage in different practices from different political standpoints. In this sense inclusion or identification with one or more of the three theoretical perspectives (columns three to five) is only provisional, as will be discussed in the following sections of the paper.

Some of the initiatives are mostly local in scale, or started as such: regular actions in a public square (e.g. food distribution) or in a building given out, rented or occupied for the purposes of the initiative. Others have been supra-local from the start both in terms of the types of actions and in terms of the targeted groups. However, the issue of spatial scale is more complicated: it depends on the particular focus and activity and has evolved through time, as initiatives network and establish contacts with each other. For example, direct contacts of a social grocery with food producers across the country cross over the "local" as well as the boundaries of a system of food distribution based on intermediaries. In a similar vein, local cafes and groceries extend their activities across scales as they attract customers from all over the city and make their provisions from similarly-minded producers across the country. Social pharmacies and medical clinics started as local services and gradually extended to broader spatial scales, as increasing numbers of people lapsed out of their entitlement to health services; some of them have established European and international contacts through appeals and campaigns for medicine and equipment. In this sense, solidarity initiatives and their complex spatialities are also place-making practices, an aspect that is usually overlooked in the relevant debates.

2. Theoretical perspectives

The multi-faceted and intense mobilisation of actors, settings, practices and places, with little precedence in the Greek context, has attracted broad research interest both in Greece and beyond. As it is to be expected, this "archipelago of social experiences" has been analysed in the context of different theoretical frameworks. In what follows we discuss three such frameworks, linked to the respective concepts: resilience, social innovation, urban commons,

in their relation to urban studies in which our work is embedded. We then introduce three cases of solidarity initiatives and then comment on the relevance of each perspective based on the examples.

a) Resilience

The concept of resilience originates in ecosystems science and has proliferated, since the 1970s, across fields of research and policy arenas, including engineering, international finance and economic policy, corporate risk analysis, psychology, public health, disaster management and national security[7], mainly focusing on how a system can re-bounce to equilibrium after major external shocks (Madni 2009; Vale and Campanella 2005). In spatial terms, it is often related to the capacity of places to adjust to crises and can be viewed as part of the lexicon of the "new austerity" (Shaw 2012; Pike et al 2010). Its recent introduction in urban studies encompasses issues like the effects of economic crises and social misery (Pike et al 2010; Davoudi 2012; Fainstein 2015), while its success may be traced to its intuitive fit with a neoliberal philosophy of "complex adaptive systems", where it has become a source of naturalising metaphors for explanations of the disastrous effects of financial regulation (Walker and Cooper 2011).

It is no surprise therefore that long debates take place as to its exact meaning and use or its transferability and usefulness in social sciences, including urban studies. Despite criticisms, however, there are persistent attempts to rescue the concept, focusing on the pressures of socio-spatial restructurings on everyday life. Here, two versions are introduced: "persistent resilience" at the micro-level of particular places and social groups (Andres & Round 2015); and "everyday resilience" beyond emergencies, where adaptability and adaptations are underlined, rather than a pursuit of past equilibria (Martin 2012; Pike et al 2010)

Despite the attempt to rescue and adjust the concept, however, resilience is still heavily criticized on several grounds. In urban studies, in particular, it is accused of concealing the "bland language" of destruction, creating a "cloud of obfuscation around the question of who is getting what" and pretending that every challenge produces win-win situations, as if there were no structural conflicts between various interests (e.g. capital and labour): "Strategies that aim at producing just outcomes […] require clear statements regarding who benefits, accept

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[7] Since the 1990s, international financial institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank and the Bank for International Settlements "have incorporated strategies of resilience into their logistics of crisis management, financial (de)regulation and development economics" (Walker & Cooper 2011, 144)

that some groups will bear losses, and not usually based on consensus and direct resources towards the most vulnerable as demarcated by their social situation" (Feinstein 2015, 157-158).

b) Social Innovation

Social innovation, a broadening of the scope of innovation beyond science and technology, has become a buzzword in policies dealing with the rationalization of the welfare state and the commodification of sociocultural wellbeing. Definitions in this context are not unique or particularly clear. There seems, however, to be a broad consensus around a set of characteristics which determine the contours of social innovation. These include the satisfaction of unmet needs (sometimes specified as "basic" or as "alienated" needs), change in social relations, empowerment of the people concerned through access to resources and more bottom-up and participative practices, transformation of governance practices (that guide and regulate the allocation of goods and services meant to satisfy those needs), engagement with various stakeholders (Moulaert et al 2013)[8].

The concept of social innovation appeared in European policy and research discourse in 2011, when the then president of the European Commission J.M. Barroso launched the Pilot Initiative "Social Innovation Europe", as a context in which new ways to address unmet social needs and foster social cohesion would be investigated; according to J.M.Barroso, this was to be a "cornerstone of the Europe 2020 Strategy". Launching the Pilot Initiative, has given rise to intensive research activity and networking among academics and civil society organisations within and across member states. By the same token it has contributed to redirect debate to "alternatives" (to counter poverty and exclusion) away from a critique of austerity policies in/by the EU.

The term figures prominently in territorial and management policy programmes as well as in the discourse of civil society organisations aiming to fight poverty and social exclusion. It has also become "a lead term for corporate social responsibility, business ethics and the revisiting of the role of social enterprise and the social economy in socioeconomic development" (Moulaert et al 2013, 1). An important dimension, with particular interest for our discussion

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[8] The contributions to the *Handbook of Social Innovation* (Moulaert et al 2013) share progressive/radical view on social innovation, which distances itself from "caring liberalism" and emphasises the potential for transformation of social relations within and among groups and the aspirations for a different future through practices of citizen participation and the development of different strategies in multiple fields (culture, technology, arts, crafts).

in this paper, has to do with the links of social innovation with territorial/spatial development and the philosophy of the Integrated Area Development approach (IAD). More specifically, many contributors to the debate argue for the importance of space and place in the emergence of socially innovative practices and initiatives, identifying urban neighbourhoods as a privileged spatial scale.

In urban neighbourhoods across EU cities, decline and restructuring have been more intensely felt, while spatial density works for the development of alternatives, usually characterised as social innovation (see among many MacCallum et al 2009). The local scale is reasserted as a site for experimentation, a scale which increases the capacity for action of local actors (particularly deprived/socially excluded groups) and their possibilities to control aims and priorities and develop claims. Examples of local socially innovative practices and policies range from microfinance and popular education initiatives to the provision of services and housing, organisation of work and stakeholder involvement aiming at promoting inclusion in economic, social, cultural, political etc spheres (Rodriguez 2009). In many cases innovation practices developed both within local institutional structures (e.g. local government) and through a palimpsest of bottom-up or bottom-linked initiatives and civil society organisations.

c) Urban commons
What we call in this paper solidarity initiatives have been analysed and theorised by several researchers as *commoning* projects whose emergence (and indeed numerical explosion) is traced to the squares movement (indignados/aganaktismenoi) of 2011 (Kioupkiolis 2014; Dalakoglou and Vradis 2011; Stavridis 2011; Varvarousis and Kallis 2015). In this line of analysis, such disparate and diffused initiatives contributed to bring together a heterogeneous multitude and operate as spaces of negotiation for the production of what Hardt and Negri (2009) call "the common". In addition, all types of initiatives are considered commoning projects, in order to emphasise their grassroots dynamics and distinguish them from top-down solidarity or charity practices. "The reclaiming of the commons often comes at a point of crisis" (Huron 2015, 970). The renewed interest in the urban commons may be explained as a result of the emergence of new forms of enclosure, in particular, but not exclusively, through privatization processes (Kratzwald 2015). The spatialities of enclosure are indeed the underside of commoning as a place-making process that creates alternative geographies at different scales (Sevilla-Buitrago 2015).

Important parameters that define the commons include on the one hand horizontal decision making techniques among their members and on the other the intention to meet basic needs (such as food, health, care, education, employment, reclaiming common resources), pursuing needs-based rather than profit-driven activities (Kioupkiolis 2013). In the context of commons, resources are shared and the community involved defines the terms of sharing and promotes participatory and inclusive relations, which permit ordinary people to deliberate and have their concerns heard (De Angelis 2014). Often, however, this literature pays only scant attention to the complex relations of power based on class, gender, sexuality, place of origin, even political affiliation which may also lead to exclusions. Even dissolution of the commons affects its members unevenly – depending or personal resources – and may produce losers, whereas others may even have short-term individualized gains (Huron 2015).

David Harvey insists upon the dynamic character of *commoning* and understands it as an "unstable and malleable social relation between a particular self-defined social group and those aspects of its actually existing or yet-to-be-created social and/or physical environment deemed crucial to its live and livelihood" (Harvey 2012, 73). From such a perspective, urban commons are also processes of delimitation and exclusion, including the determination of the group of *commoners*. Lefebvre's concept of the city as an *oeuvre* resonates with D. Harvey's considerations of "the social world of the city" as a common creation of individuals and social groups, through their daily activities and struggles (Lefebvre 1996; Harvey 2012). Hardt and Negri (2009) talk about the city as the source of the commons and the receptacle into which it flaws while Kip (2015) suggests that if we consider the city as commons then it should also be reclaimed as such.

Beyond common pool resources or public goods, the commons are conceptualised as socially produced at different scales of action: they "are not just local: they are often constituted by processes at several scales" (Kip et al 2015, 16). This presents additional challenges as collective action in urban commoning needs to work across different scales and boundaries. Activists may realize that a problem cannot be tackled at a local level, but that larger-scale action is needed to make any significant impact (Kip 2015, 52). D. Harvey's suggestion for a "federation of commoners" or the "Right to the City Alliance" in the US are possible answers to addressing issues at different scales. This inevitably adds a level of complexity to coordination attempts and may even destabilize or estrange some of the activities.

In her famous "eight design principles" for the commons, Ostrom (1990) stresses the importance of drawing clear boundaries around the resource, of the existence of clear, but adaptable rules and of institutional arrangements that can defend the latter. Yet citizens may not even be aware of a resource as a common (e.g. the ecosystem, amenities) (Kip 2015). Does it still make sense to talk of it as commons or is it the practice of claiming that makes it such? Here, two interrelated but distinct issues arise: How commons are to be claimed in the present and how they are to be maintained over time. The former may be difficult, but the greater challenge seems to be the latter (Huron 2015). Social reproduction and long-term maintenance of the commons and the social relations that these entail, are something that theory rarely deals with. It rather deals with conquering the commons as a thing rather than a process (Federici 2010; Huron 2015).

With all its drawbacks, recognition (or at least tolerance) by the state or some urban government often helps the long term survival of commoning initiatives (Ostrom 1990; Kratzwald 2015). The role of state institutions can actually change when they actively participate in safekeeping the commons: it can act as a conflict mediator, provide space or financial assistance, it can regulate and monitor (Kratzwald 2015; Kip 2015). Large-scale commons may actually require more formalized and institutionalized regulation and here the state has a central role to play (Kip, 2015, 45). Although by delegating public issues to the state, citizens may lose control over the commons, the tale of the active citizen who takes responsibility for the community is very compatible with the new of the neo-liberal organization of society (Kratzwald 2015, 38).

d) a reading through concrete examples

The three frameworks articulated around resilience, social innovation and urban commons have developed to answer to particular challenges in urban studies, each with its own trajectory and body of work, but also their limitations that become pronounced each time we try to fit a real-life case neatly into one of them. Here, we attempt a re-reading of these frameworks in the light of three examples of solidarity initiatives. The examples are briefly presented in the form of "inserts" which are meant to deepen our engagement with the three theoretical frameworks in their encounter with a particular urban context and a set of practices from below.

Example 1: ***Without intermediaries***
"Without intermediaries" is a movement of self-organization between agricultural producers and consumers. Its goal is to eliminate intermediaries in the distribution of agricultural products, in order to avoid speculation and

price increases. It originated in 2012 when voluntary organizations got in touch with potato producers in northern Greece and placed special orders for their members. The movement grew from there, spreading all over the country and including a large number of producers, cooperatives, associations and voluntary organizations. Moving beyond its main goal – offering lower prices to consumers – "without intermediaries" became a proposal of how to reorganize agricultural distribution. It is an 'adaptive' reaction to the crisis and to growing poverty, but also a 'leap forward' towards a new system[9], which now operates regularly in many neighbourhoods, bringing together urban residents with producers from all over the country.

Example 2: *Hellinikon Social Medical Clinic and Social Pharmacy (MKIE)* (www.mkiellinikou.org)

In September 2011 a group of 15 doctors practicing in the area of Hellinikon, in the SE of the metropolitan area - where the former airport of Athens used to be - proposed to set up a Social Medical Clinic for people who have lost access to health care and other forms of social assistance. The municipality of Hellinikon, which had at the time a leftist mayor and a very active social service department, agreed to support the initiative and offered the premises for it. A social pharmacy was added shortly afterwards and later a dental clinic with 16 volunteer dentists. Until now, the whole initiative operates from a small building complex in the area of the former airport, which has been repaired and upgraded by volunteers.

The services of MKIE are organised in shifts of 2-4 hours, permitting it to operate full time six days a week. More than 200 doctors from all medical specialties are now part of a network of volunteers, each of whom offer for free 2-4 hours once or twice per week. They see, usually in the premises of MKIE, patients who are uninsured or have lapsed out of the health insurance system, unemployed people, low-income pensioners – and combinations of these. They are linked with other social medical clinics across Greater Athens and Greece and develop agreements with public and private hospitals to which they refer patients who need medical tests or need to be hospitalised. The MKIE accepts only donations in kind (not money), which provision the pharmacy as well, and organises campaigns to collect medicines, baby milk and other materials, as well as internet appeals in Greece and abroad which are met with wide response. The initiative is managed by the assembly which meets regularly and by an administrative secretariat which facilitates the day-to-day work (keeps appointments with the doctors and dentists, delivers medicines, etc). All participants are volunteers, i.e. they are not paid for the time and effort they contribute, and consider the MKIE as a "structure of need" which "will continue to operate only as long as society needs us", as K.P., one of the volunteers, told us.

Example 3: *Social-Cultural Center of Vyronas "Lampidona"* (http://politistikokentrovirona.blogspot.gr)

"Lampidona", in the municipality of Vyronas, on the eastern part of the metropolitan area of Athens, started in 2011 by a group of activists who occupied an unused municipal park and organised discussions and cultural activities, first in the open air and later also in the abandoned municipal kiosk located in the park. The municipality attempted first to evict them and later to privatise the facilities. However, as NK says "people embraced the movement and local left parties (except the Communist Party) and anarchists were supportive". Local people protested and demanded to "let Lampidona live"; finally the municipal authorities abandoned the

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[9] See more in this BBC documentary "Greeks ditch middleman to embrace 'potato revolution'" from 15 March 2012: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17369989

idea of closing it down and completely ignored its activities. The park and the kiosk were saved and since then upgraded through personal, volunteer labour.

According to its activists (a core group of about 10 people and a regular assembly of about 25), Lampidona started in order "to host the creativity, the desires and the needs of local society. Of the people whom local and central state policies push to the margins". They collaborate with other solidarity initiatives in Vironas (social pharmacy, solidarity network supporting 600 families, the no intermediaries market "Citizens of Vyronas") and see this, in the words of N.K. as a "prefigurative experiment, […] trying to build anti-capitalism". They distance themselves from philanthropy and fought to keep the place open, although they are well aware that "a common is not of everybody". Lampidona is a meeting place, open to debates and activities that matter to the people in the neighbourhood. Such activities include after school activities for children, workshops for creative writing, philosophy, history of science, teaching assistance to high school students, teaching languages, Latin dance, drawing, and much more, plus a summer music festival in the park. Since they receive no support or all these activities or for the maintenance of the place (open and closed space), as A.M. says, "we sustain ourselves by selling beer and coffee at vey low prices and re-investing the money into equipment that makes the organisation of events free". The aim is to "keep moving and exist also in this material space".

Lampidona shares many features with similar initiatives in other neighbourhoods, both in terms of its political/ideological background and in terms of its aim to function as an "open, truly public space or domain" for meeting and debate. Talking to the activists, it is clear that they are highly politicised and see Lampidona as a commoning initiative. However, they also organise collective cooking and eating every Wednesday and Saturday, where around 60 people eat; N.K. characterised these people as "super poor" and the "communal eating" as soup kitchen, since the participants do not engage in any of the activities of Lampidona.

As we have already underlined, solidarity initiatives cannot be classified in neat and stable categories; they are changing over time, as commitments and availability of an exclusively volunteer mode of participation modify their intensity and content. Those which organise around the provision of food, like "without intermediaries" but also soup kitchens in many urban neighbourhoods, can be seen through the lens of resilience (since they try to cope with mundane pressures of everyday life), or responses and adaptations to external shocks, in this case the crisis. However, taking into consideration the particular ways in which both food and distribution are organised, one may identify elements of social innovation (e.g. in terms of meeting a basic need or actively seeking to change social relations).

Social clinics and pharmacies like MKIE satisfy a very basic need (primary health services), since many poor and unemployed people have not access to the public health system any more and cannot pay for the services in the thriving private sector. They could be thought of as another example of resilience. However, far more than covering a major gap caused by

austerity policies, activists in this area also promote different practices and attitudes about the provision of health services and different relations between care givers and care receivers, according to a commonly decided code of conduct. As GV, one of the activists from MKIE, has underlined in interviews and public discussions, "we [involved in the social clinic] try to cater for immediate needs but also to 'imagine' what a future Public Health System should be like; because our aim is to move to a time when Social Clinics will no longer be necessary". In this sense they illustrate a case of social innovation in all its constitutive parameters.

Finally, many neighbourhood assemblies (or "solidarity spaces") like Lampidona promote self-organisation and the constitution of a "common space" as a means of coming together and developing alternative socialities and ways of being together in their neighbourhood and beyond. The participants/activists take responsibility for the (often occupied) spaces, remove these spaces from competing uses and pressures and aim to bring together "strangers" along the lines of the "commons". The lines of classification, though, are never clear: many "neighbourhood assemblies" also collect and distribute food and provide services (e.g. in education or health). In this capacity they may also form part of a resilience-based analytical framework.

The initiatives we have presented, along with the complex picture that comes out of Table 1, are indicative of the different types of initiatives from below which have emerged as ways to cope with, but also resist, the acute crisis and austerity policies. From this perspective, one cannot avoid discerning a certain degree of cynicism in the concept of resilience. The aspect of adaptability associated with it, although useful in order to look at how societies cope with the crisis, it is prone to conceal resistance and shift the debate from causes to effects, even if critical uses of the concept are mobilised (see for example Pike et al 2010). Social innovation literature, on the other hand, emphasises the role of "civil society", which includes more institutionalised forms of citizen activation around unmet needs, for example through formally funded groups and NGOs, and initiatives towards bottom-up or bottom-linked forms of governance, which engage local and supra-local institutions, along with local action and activism. These preoccupations distinguish the solidarity initiatives that we discuss in this paper, which are based on volunteer (unpaid) labour, grassroots organising and a stronger or weaker "aversion" for institutions and formal politics. Finally, many solidarity initiatives in Athens, particularly neighbourhood assemblies, identify with urban commons and see their practices as commoning. They are inspired more by the work of Hardt and Negri and the

debates of the alterglobal movement, than by the work of scholars who stress the importance of a strong institutional framework for the defence, function and sustainability of urban commons (Ostrom 1990; Harvey 2012).

Even though resemblances can be identified with the vast variety of examples discussed along the lines of the theoretical frameworks we have outlined in this section, solidarity initiatives fit uncomfortably within any one of them alone. In this sense, readings seem to be inspired more by political preoccupations than by the coherence and interpretative value of any one theoretical framework when it intersects with the particular urban context.

3. **Reconfiguring public space and urban citizenship**

Drawing from the discussion in the previous section of the paper, in this concluding part we propose a reading of solidarity initiatives articulated around reconfigurations of public space and new forms of urban citizenship. This is meant to underline the necessity to consider two interrelated processes: on the one hand the grassroots dynamics expressed in the solidarity initiatives we are studying, along with their space-forming function; on the other hand the engagement with the institutional context and the questions of governance and sustainability. In this reading, elements of the three analytical frameworks we have discussed may appear but we do not endorse any one of them in its entirety. Thinking in terms of public space brings to the foreground of our enquiry the production of newly elaborated attachments and belonging among groups and individuals who have been deprived of "their place in the world" (Arendt 1998) through the workings of austerity.

Beyond the "heroic" moments of overtly political actions, daily routines of solidarity produce new interactions between people, create new spaces of emotional or material support, induce practices of exchange and inevitably conflict (see also Kalandides and Vaiou 2012). As many people become involved and politicised in often inconspicuous ways, the potential arises for a re-configuration of public space that may turn into the common space of a new public sphere, as Harvey (2012) argues (for an extended discussion on the constitution of the public sphere and its relationship to public space, see Vaiou & Kalandides 2009). Citizens deprived of their social rights and material means get together and reclaim what has been taken from them. Collective appropriations against actions of privatisation and enclosure, challenging the lines between private and communal/public satisfaction of basic needs (like food), deploying alternative ways of governance in the production and delivery of complex services (like

health care), creating spaces of deliberation and empowerment (like neighbourhood assemblies) are some of the ways in which solidarity initiatives expand and reconfigure urban space in Athens.

Solidarity initiatives involve a large number of people in spaces of interaction, exchange and mutual assistance, in an attempt to overcome multiple exclusions: from the labour market, basic services, public goods, housing and public spaces, through practices based on participation, cooperation, mutuality and negotiation, engaging everybody involved. Even initiatives that at a first glance seem "only" to tackle pressing problems, take a political stance about how living together is to be (re)organised – from the everyday to broader issues of political, cultural or economic restructuring – and raise important questions regarding rights, inclusion and belonging.

People coming together actively work against exclusions in a more or less explicitly political manner, constantly negotiating and producing the spaces of their interaction. In this sense they are both performing or acting out urban citizenship and contributing to shape public space (Kalandides & Vaiou 2012). They expand the space of politics, beyond what is considered as explicitly political actions, to the spaces and practices of the everyday, those mundane and ordinary practices which constitute what Lefebvre (1968) calls "habiter" (inhabitance). In these practices, rights are claimed and pursued which may be constitutive of the meaning and practice of citizenship, at a time when attacks on social rights violently divest citizenship from important constitutive elements. Citizenship works at the scale of everyday life and involves interactions and negotiations at multiple levels as it links with struggles to cope with/resist the crisis and claims to the city.

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Table 1: Solidarity Initiatives in Athens

location in Greater Athens	type of activity	resilience	social innovation	urban commons
Nea Ionia, Keratsini, Elliniko-Argyroupoli, Saronikos, Petroupoli, Ag. Anarghyroi-Kamatero, Halandri, Piraeus, Philothei-Psychico, Elefsina Shipyards, Peristeri-Bournazi, Kifisia, Byronas, Dafni-Ymittos, Zografou, Fyli, Tavros *Municipality of Athens*: Exarcheia, students of Law School, Neos Kosmos, Kolonos, Polygono-Ghyzi, Pagrati, Mets	**food, subsistence** soup kitchens social groceries food bags food packs to school children	X X X X	X X	
Elliniko, Helioupolis, Nea Ionia, Byronas, Piraeus, Aegaleo, Kifisia, Peristeri-Kipoupoli, Ag. Anarghyroi, Nea Smyrni, *Municipality of Athens*: "Anoixti Poli (Open City)", Babel in Kypseli, Pefkakia, 7th municipal district, Patissia "Emphasis" initiative of Greeks from abroad	**health services** social medical clinics social pharmacies doctors' initiatives	X X X	X X	X
Piraeus, Nikaia-Rentis, Byronas, Haidari, Nea Smyrni, Zografou-NTUA students, Petroupoli, Aegaleo, Ag. Dimitrios, Metamorfosi, Marousi *Municipality of Athens:* Academia Platonos, Vrysaki, Neos Kosmos, Treis Gefyres, Local teachers' unions (ELME)	**education** free courses, teaching assistance to school children Greek language for migrants languages, music, athletics	X X X X		X X X X
Ag. Anarghyroi-Kamatero, Moschato, Elliniko, Ag. Dimitrios, Zografou, Piraeus, Haidari, Kaisariani, Artemida-Spata, Nea Erythrea, Kifisia, Dionyssos, Halandri, Ag. Paraskevi, Pallini, Lykovrissi, Holargos-Papagou, Moschato, Galatsi, Perama, Petroupoli, Marousi, Kallithea, Peristeri-Lofos Aximatikon, Byronas, Ilion *Municipality of Athens:* Neos Kosmos, Petralona, Syggrou-Fix, Kypseli, Polygono-Ghyzi, Exarcheia, Syntagma, Kolonos, "European Women's Network"	**exchange networks** "without intermediaries" free exchange bazaars time banks	X	X X X	X X
Haidari, Nikaia, Peristeri, Ag. Paraskevi, Perama, Fiadelphia-Halkidona, Dafni-Ymittos, Keratsini-Drapetsona, Helioupolis, Kallithea, Neo Psychiko-Filothei-Psychiko, Vari-Voula-Vouliagmeni, Petroupoli, Artemida (Loutsa), Kaisariani, Pallini, Peristeri, Elliniko *Municipality of Athens:* "Anoixti Poli (Open City)", Kypseli (Agora &	**solidarity networks and social spaces** neighbourhood assemblies and centres [organising: cultural activities, legal advice, migrant support, elderly and children care, free exchange networks, food distribution & social	X	X	X

Myrmighi), Neos Kosmos, "Steki Metanaston" (Migrant Support Initiative), Kolonos-Sepolia-Academia Platonos, Koukaki-Plaka, Exarcheia-Neapoli, "Empros" collective	groceries, teaching assistance etc]			
Keratsini, Zografou, Elliniko, *Municipality of Athens:* Thissio, Neapoli, Syntagma, Pagrati, Psirri, Koukaki, Academia Platonos, Kato Petralona "Efimerida ton Syntakton" newspaper	**employment collectives** coffee shops and restaurants creative laboratories (photography, design, theatre, music, …) open software & computer programming courier services web radio technicians' collectives translation	X X X X X X	X X	X X
	occupied public spaces neighbourhood parks "botanical garden" (urban agriculture) neighbourhood assembly premises			X X