

Greek society in crisis and in motion: building the material bases for an alternative society from the bottom up

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Abstract

In the last six years, Greece has been hit by a vicious circle of relentless neoliberal restructuring programs. During the years of the crisis, throughout the country urban and rural communities of struggle have been formed, which tend to employ instituent practices and to acquire constitutive characteristics, in order to collectively address unmet social needs / desires and ensure their collective survival. In this context, socially reproductive commons in germ form have emerged with social and solidarity economy initiatives in their peripheries, alternative forms of life in common have been shaped and societies have been set in motion with the potential to establish the material foundations of their collective autonomy. Within this huge gap of social (re)production, the constituent power of social movements emerges in germ form as a resurgent force with the potential to address these needs and desires and, correspondingly, shape life in common. In the neoliberal era, it is this potential of a constituent counter - power that has the capacity to constitute the contending power to the dominant force of the capital - state complex.

Keywords: Greece, social movements, mutual aid, commons, social and solidarity economy, constituent power.

Introduction

Greece is at the forefront of a social war raging throughout the south and, gradually spreading towards the north of Europe. On the one side, capital loots wealth and accumulates social power from vulnerable populations directly by dispossession of small property, public wealth and the commons and less by the traditional means of extracting value through exploitation (Harvey 2014: 65). On the other side, societies, experience the impact of the crisis of capital as a general social crisis, penetrating all facets of social reproduction. Yet, in times of crisis the power of the capitalist market and the bourgeois state over the social body in certain ways subside. The high rates of structural unemployment push a large part of society at the margins of the wage system and the world of commodities. The disintegration of the welfare state leaves behind a desert of unmet social needs and desires. The growing incapacitation of nation states to regulate the economic power of global capital and address its social repercussions adds to the democratic deficit of representative regimes. Within this huge gap of social [re]production, the constituent power of social

movements emerges as a resurgent force with the potential to address these needs and desires and, correspondingly, shape life in common. Having no other alternative, populations displaced by the capitalist crisis self-organise in movements in order to (re)produce their own commons and establish new forms of life that guarantee conditions of dignity (Harvey 2013: 168). In this process, multitudes in motion challenge the state monopoly of law and politics and the power of the capitalist market to provide the conditions of their subsistence by choosing radically democratic ways of self-institution and fair, cooperative and sustainable practices to produce and manage common resources¹.

Accordingly, during these six hellish years, Greek society has responded in similar ways to address the crisis and preserve social reproduction from utterly falling apart. In the beginning, social forces were set in motion as a response to the neoliberal assault, with the aim to provide the material bases for social reproduction by means of solidarity. Yet later on, social movements acquired deeper political characteristics, striving for the formation of institutions that would be both long - lasting and semi-autonomous from the capital / state complex. This paper constitutes an attempt to reconstruct the narrative of the Greek crisis from the perspective of the social movements, i.e. a narrative of collective struggle and emancipation. Its aim is to identify the constituent characteristics of the Greek movements within a society in crisis and reveal the ways through which such movements have confronted the capital-state complex. The paper starts with a short summary of the authors' methodological choices in the course of this research. The second part of the paper narrates the most important events of social mobilisation, which determined the social context of the struggle. Its third part describes and categorises the mutual aid institutions of the movements. The fourth part offers an analysis of commons' movements. The fifth part is dedicated to social and solidarity economy structures, which emerged from the movements. The paper ends with the authors' critical thoughts on the current condition of the Greek social movements and their potential for the way forward.

Methodological choices

In terms of methodology, this paper offers an analysis of Greek social movements from the perspective of critical political economy. The context of analysis is considered to be the reproduction of society broadly defined, i.e. the process through which society reproduces itself through time (Narotsky 1997). Social reproduction is assumed to be a twofold process. It relates on the one hand to the circulation and accumulation of social values and, on the other hand, to the production, distribution and consumption of resources (De Angelis 2007: 176). Society is reproduced by contending modes of social reproduction,

¹ Indicatively see Sitrin (2006), Zibechi (2012), Graeber (2013), Douzinas (2013), Azzellini & Sitrin (2014).

the capitalist being the dominant and the commons-based being an alternative mode. Capital and the state are mutually dependent and interrelated in complex ways, forming a unity in diversity of social power separated from society (Karatani 2014).

Notwithstanding the dominance of capital, the commons are held to be the great other of our collective social being (Caffentzis 2013: 253). The commons are social practices of both pooling resources in common and, in addition, reproducing the communal relations around these productive practices. They constitute alternative spheres of social reproduction and form a contradictory relation to commodity markets, lingering between contention and co-optation (Broumas 2017). Due to the structural power of capital, the dominance of the commodity market value system and the dominance of money as the universal equivalence of social values, practices of commoning are incapacitated from expanding, whenever tense productive activity is involved, which is incapable of decentralised allocation to multiple commoners. The social and solidarity economy may thus ideally be compounded with the commons in a conjoint organisation of non-capitalist production, whereby the commons will constitute the core and the social and solidarity economy structures will expand its periphery to the detriment of the capitalist mode of social reproduction.

Antagonistic social movements are considered to acquire constitutive characteristics, whenever they expand to socially reproductive practices by forming commons and social and solidarity economy structures, i.e. practices which have the capacity to meet individual and/or collective needs and desires. These characteristics take the form of commons and social and solidarity economy structures. The more collective needs and desires are met through such practices and the less social groups are dependent to the capitalist mode of social reproduction and the dominant value system of commodity markets, grass-roots movements acquire constitutive characteristics, which may lead to the building up from below of dual power, a constituent power capable of directly contending the power of capital (Zibechi 2010: 7; Ciccariello – Mahier 2013: 239-40).

The core claim of this paper is that the social movements of the past six years in Greece have spasmodically exhibited such elements in germ form and yet have by far failed to consolidate into wider networks of power circulation, let alone accumulate into such a constituent power. The particular forms of constituent movements are manifested, on the one hand, in peer-to-peer networks of mutual aid coping with a specific basic social need and, on the other hand, commons-based social structures and social and solidarity economy initiatives.

Years in turmoil: the rise of constituent power in Greece

The narrative of the Greek crisis is a narrative of both overwhelming defeat and massive social upheaval, a story of both despair and rebellion. Six years have passed, since that morning of April 2010, when George Papandreou, the former

prime minister of Greece, announced from Kastelorizo that the country would request the financial aid of the Eurozone member – states as a measure of last resort to guide the Greek economy and society back to safe waters². During these six years of relentless neoliberal restructuring unemployment has risen by 273,7%³, precarious jobs now constitute 27% of the labour market, wages have declined by 38%, pensions by 45%, and overdue mortgages have increased by 400% (Solidarity For All 2015). In addition, average monthly expenses of Greek households have been reduced by 31.2% (Elidromitis 2014), leading to electricity cuts of more than 237.806 households due to unpaid bills and 8 out of 10 blocks of flats in the country without heating⁴. Finally, overtaxation has crashed 2.45 million taxpayers into indebtedness towards tax authorities and resulted in a steep rise of bank account confiscations by the state, from 18.000 in 2013 to 50.000 in the first two months of 2014⁵. As a result, poverty in the country has risen up to 35,7%, material deprivation of basic goods has almost doubled since 2008⁶ and child poverty rate has reached up to 28.8% (Caritas 2016: 74). In overall, the bail-out programme has effectively promoted: (i) the removal of any obstacles to the exploitation of labour by capital, (ii) the disintegration of the already feeble welfare structures of the Greek state, and finally, (iii) the privatisation of public institutions, the enclosure of the country's commons and the population's use value resources through expropriation.

The effects of the policies imposed on Greek society deeply changed everyday lives and penetrated most social strata. After the initial shock citizens were able to regroup, stand on their feet and constitute a multitudinous collective subject antagonistic to the political forces that backed – up the neoliberal agenda. Yet, the rise of social counter - power within the crisis did not appear in a socio – historic vacuum, rather it has its roots in the social struggles of the recent past. In the 2000s the widespread corruption in the dominant system of power along with the implementation of neoliberal policies led to a gradual disaffection mainly between young people regarding systemic parties and institutionalized trade unions. This period gave birth to an undercurrent of relatively

² The Prime Minister's announcement is available at: <http://archive.papandreou.gr/> [accessed on April 1st, 2017]. Kastelorizo is a small Greek island far east at the borders with Turkey. It was selected as the place of the announcement for propagandist reasons to symbolize the supposed unity of the nation in the difficult times ahead and raise nationalist sentiments among the population. In the recent national elections of 25.01.2015 George Papandreou was not even elected as member of parliament.

³ In November 2014, the total number of unemployed was 1.242.219 people compared with 3.551.148 in employment, with the worst rates of unemployment among young people [50% in late 2014]. According to the statistics of the General Workers Confederation, the unemployment in the country has acquired structural characteristics, since seven out of ten unemployed already stay jobless for more than one year (<http://news.in.gr/economy/article/?aid=1231353662>).

⁴ <http://news.in.gr/economy/article/?aid=1231278488>

⁵ <http://news.in.gr/economy/article/?aid=1231309435>

⁶ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/6035076/3-04112014-BP-EN.pdf/>.

autonomous, informal organisations in the civil society and to a multitude of autonomous social movements, which scratched the surface of artificial social stability and challenged the grand narrative of neoliberal hegemony.

Just a spark was missing to set fire at the already compromised social contract. On Saturday, the 6th of December, a few minutes after 21:00, at the traditionally leftist neighborhood of Exarchia in Athens, a police officer on patrol shot and killed Alexandros Grigoropoulos, a teenager at the age of 15. In the more than thirty days of the revolt that followed protesters hit the streets in unprecedented numbers with mottos such as “Fuck May '68, Fight Now” and constituted a powerful and polymorphous social movement, characterized by its creative negation of the existing social relations and structures and its inclination towards aims for absolute social liberation (Astrinaki 2009; Douzinas 2010; Stavrides 2010; Vradis & Dalakoglou 2011). After the first month of the revolt militants left the city centers and decentralized / re-territorialized the processes of autonomous movements at the neighborhood level, a sphere more directly related to the lives of their participants and the communities they aimed to transform (Azzellini & Sitrin 2014: 12). As it was then said, the spirit of leftist Exarcheia spread throughout the country. The next months after December 2008 autonomous social centers were established in many neighborhoods of Athens and Salonica, Greece's major cities, and even in smaller cities. In the years to come, these centers became the organizational cells of the movements on the urban terrain. Featuring political and cultural events, collective kitchens, bars and cafes, grocery stores, child care structures, seminars, lessons for immigrants, political assemblies and communities of struggle within them, autonomous social centers opened the movements to society and, in dialectical exchange, enriched and socialized the processes of the movements. It was militants from within such communities who established the very first solidarity economy initiatives.

After the country fell prey to the hands of the troika in April 2010 the major popular act of resistance against the bailout program was the Greek squares movement that spawned during the summer of 2011 out of the Arab uprisings and, especially, the Spanish indignados (Giovanopoulos & Mitropoulos 2011, Leontidou 2012, Kallianos 2013, Sotirakopoulos & Sotiropoulos 2013). The movement was initiated in mid-May by a calling under the motto “we woke up”, which circulated through the internet and became viral. On May the 25th, 2011, the squares of most Greek cities were flooded by citizens and the Athens Syntagma square, which is strategically situated in front of the Parliament, was occupied by tents. Until May the 31st, the occupations spread and became permanent. As specific rules and norms of direct democratic deliberation were crafted by participants, the Syntagma square popular assembly became the coordinatory heart of the movement and its direct democratic assembly emerged at the political forefront. Between the 1st and the 15th of June the Syntagma assembly started acquiring constituent characteristics. The assembly issued its main resolution under the motto “Direct Democracy Now” in juxtaposition to the less concrete and ambitious “Democracia Real Ya” of the Spanish

“indignados”. The resolution called for people to “take their lives in their own hands” and formulate from the bottom up a polity of direct democracy for Greek society. Between the 15th and the 30th of June the squares movement spread in the rural areas and direct democratic assemblies were formed even in small villages of the country. Following the Syntagma assembly's call to the citizens of Athens to organise a blockade of the parliament, in order to avert the approval of a major neoliberal restructuring bill, the police executed a plan to clean out the protesters from the square, in which massive confrontations between tens of thousands of protesters and special police forces took place. Whilst the vote a vote for government change was lost in the Parliament and the bill was passed, Syntagma square was temporarily cleaned in a bloody orgy of police violence⁷. In the next weeks, assemblies for the re-orientation and political character of the movement were held, but failed to regroup and solidify in consistent structures. The squares movement miraculously succeeded in constituting a multitudinous post – political subject of genuine social power, which directly confronted the neoliberal establishment (Douzinas 2013)⁸, yet it was these inherent contradictions of multiplicity that caused its collapse. Hence, after July it gradually declined and subsided.

The squares movement left behind an important legacy of structures operating through direct democracy (workers' cooperatives, local assemblies, social centers, solidarity networks, movements in defense of the commons, endeavors in solidarity economy). Yet, its failure to produce tangible alternatives to the crisis led the oppressed strata of Greek society again bestowed their hopes in representative politics. SYRIZA, a coalition of the left coming out of a fifteen - year collaboration between divergent political groups within the fragmented Greek left, which started at the times of the alter-globalization movement, managed to represent these social dynamics. In the 2012 elections it climbed from 4% to 27% and in the January 2015 elections took the majority vote and formed a coalition government. In conclusion, the rise of SYRIZA in power took place in parallel to a significant decline of social mobilization.

Years of resistance, mutual aid and networks of inspiration

Walter Benjamin has written that “[t]he tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the state of emergency in which we live is not the exception but the rule [...] it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency” (Benjamin 2003: 392). Although it begun as an emergency response of communities and social movements to address the repercussions of extreme poverty caused from the

⁷ Police violence was so excessive that even Amnesty International issued an urge to the Government to abstain from such practices (www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/greece-urged-not-use-excessive-force-during-protests-2011-06-16).

⁸ By using the term “post-political”, we pinpoint the ambiguous character of the squares movement, which lingers between the rejection of representative institutions and its failure to provide substantive alternatives, hence remaining within the post – political context.

neoliberal restructuring policies, the grassroots social solidarity movement is today one of the most important developments and forms of resistance and popular self-organisation that has emerged within the six years of the crisis. The more distant roots of this movement can be traced back to the anti-globalisation movement, the defense of public spaces by local communities, the growing culture of self-organised social centres and the ‘no pay’ popular campaigns against road tolls, public transport costs and extremely high prices in basic goods.

The rise of the mutual aid movement was triggered by the manifold struggles of Greek society against the Troika and the bailout programs, especially the occupation of the squares in the summer of 2011. This genuinely grassroots movement played a pivotal role in popularising a culture of self-organisation, people’s assemblies and direct democracy as a tool for decision making processes. After the 2011 Greek occupy movement subsided, many groups of local activists kick-started mutual aid structures all over the country, organising resistance around the basic needs of local communities. As a result, in the beginning of 2012 many mutual aid groups had already been formed. Their practice included reconnecting electricity provision to poor households, the “without middlemen” distribution of agricultural produce, the establishment of solidarity healthcare clinics and solidarity tutoring programs and other activities of mutual aid adherent to local needs. Gradually, the mutual aid movement became a vehicle, not merely for survival and human dignity, but also for the organization of political struggles against neoliberal policies. Moreover, through the establishment of alternative social relations of mutual aid and cooperation between individuals, by fostering participation and face-to-face democracy and by practicing self-management in various areas of social and economic life, the mutual aid movement has managed to become one of the most important, innovative, and hopeful outcomes of popular mobilisation and resistance.

The structures of the mutual aid movement are organised in the form open assemblies with horizontal decision-making processes. They function as spaces for democratic participation and communal self-organisation, with the purpose to break the barriers between the organisers and those that receive solidarity. Due to its characteristics, the mutual aid movement has emerged as a powerful social experiment in the ruins of the crisis. It outlines a political culture, which creates the conditions to address social needs through the establishment of socially reproductive commons. The movement is widely perceived by its participants as a means for collective survival, which goes hand in hand with the wider fight for political change. Without the latter, i.e. the changes needed for the eradication of social inequalities and exclusion, the paradigm of grassroots social organisation runs the danger of merely becoming an alternative within a framework of generalised poverty.

Since January 2015, with the leftist Syriza party in the coalition government, the challenges faced by the movement have been enormous and the mutual aid networks and structures are in the process of redefining their role in the new

conditions. An essential point is that many mutual aid structures never had the intention to replace the welfare system but exactly the opposite. Through their activities they succeeded in putting pressure to the state to take action and this principle is still pursued with Syriza in government. A second point, which has recently been drawn to attention, is the general consensus within the mutual aid movement not to stop but persevere and deepen its activities. The pressure from unmet basic needs of the impoverished strata not only perseveres, but is also on the rise. In addition, alternative mentalities and political practices cultivated within the movement are seen by wider social groups as an exodus from the social and political deadlock, lately reinforced by the retreat of Syriza to austerity policies.

So, within the first year in the new political scene the mutual aid movement expressed an assertive attitude towards decision-makers, in order to exert control over elected officials. At the same time, the movement endeavored to formulate general proposals for its institutional recognition, since the current legal framework has been proven very hostile for mutual aid networks. On the other hand, the Syriza coalition government has not expressed any serious intentions to exploit the knowledge and experience stemming from the movement, so as to implement it in solid public policies. In this respect, the mutual aid movement has played a very active role during the week that the referendum took place. Hundreds of initiatives from all over Greece created their own “NO” campaign against a compromise of the country with its external sovereign debtors, which would strengthen, as is now the case, the grip of neoliberal policies over Greek society⁹.

Social clinics and pharmacies

Cuts in public expenditure have strongly affected the quality of, and access to, health services in Greece. According to the OECD, the ‘per capita expenditure’ for healthcare between 2009 and 2011 has been reduced by 11.1 %. Furthermore, according to the ILO World Social Protection Report 2014/15, public spending in health between 2007–2011 has dropped by 3.7%. Accordingly, expenditures for medicine reimbursement dropped by 56%, from 5.1 billion euros in 2009 to 2.2 billion in 2012, a development that led to an increase of up to 70% in patients’ economic burdening for medicines. Yet, the most acute problem at present is the exclusion of more than 3.3 million people¹⁰ from the public health care system. According to the president of EOPPY (National Organisation of Health Care Services), 3.068.000 people have dropped off the social security register, due to their inability to keep up with their monthly contributions to the system or because they lost their jobs, closed down their companies, or became

⁹ <http://www.efsyn.gr/arthro/ena-vrontero-ohi-apo-domes-allileggyis>

¹⁰ <http://news247.gr/eidiseis/koinonia/ygeia/anasfalistoi-panw-apo-tria-ekatommuria-ellhnes.2420059.html>; <http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=387049>

unemployed for more than a year (Solidarity For All 2015: 11; see also ILO 2015, Eliodromitis 2014).

The first social solidarity clinic was created with the aim to provide health services to undocumented immigrants and refugees. Starting from only three (3) clinics in September 2012 (in Athens, Thessaloniki and Rethimnon, Crete), there are today 45 clinics functioning all over Greece. There is not any single model for the governance of solidarity clinics, since each project is unique in itself, and the same goes for all the solidarity structures. Nevertheless, all clinics subscribe to the “Charter of Common Principles of the Solidarity Clinics”¹¹, which was adopted in their nationwide meeting in November 2013 and led to a nationwide Cooperation of Solidarity Clinics and Pharmacies. In the wider area of Athens, a Coordination of Solidarity Clinics and Pharmacies of Attica has also been established since June 2013, which operates on the basis of face-to-face biweekly assemblies.

In their Charter the solidarity health centres clearly claim that they are open to everyone living in Greece, they do not aim to substitute the public health services that the state has decided to ditch, and they fight for the reversal of the people’s exclusion from public health services and for an end to the neoliberal health policies. In practice, they support their objectives both by providing medication to the official public health care system and by organising protests and actions in collaboration with health workers’ unions, in hospitals, neighborhoods and state institutions, demanding health care for all. At the same time, the solidarity clinics have created face to face assemblies open to wider communities, through which they constantly make great effort to mobilise patients, to make information campaigns about medication and health services as commons. The clinics are hosting cultural and social-political events and establish synergies and mutual aid bonds with other local/peripheral social movements.

The solidarity clinics have elaborated proposals for unhindered access to public health services to all people from the very first steps of their establishment. Therefore, they are expected to take action in this direction during the tenure of the new coalition government. Furthermore, they participate to the public debate with their own statements¹², attend meetings with the Ministry and freely express their points of agreement while keep on raising issues that have not been dealt with by the state. As a result, solidarity health clinics have definitely become pillars of the wider social movements with distinct and autonomous political functions and aims vis a vis the state and the incumbent political parties.

¹¹ See Charter of Common Principles of the Solidarity Clinics, available at: <http://www.solidarity4all.gr/> [accessed on April 1st, 2017].

¹² See proposal of Solidarity Clinics and pharmacies on the consultation for the citizens without health insurance, available at: <http://www.opengov.gr/yyka/?p=1201#comments> [accessed on April 1st, 2017].

Solidarity education initiatives / solidarity tutorials

Growing economic inequality has also affected the ability of many families to provide adequate schooling to their children¹³. Based on the initiative of unionized and unemployed teachers, associations of pupils' parents and volunteering university students, the solidarity movement has been capable of offering free solidarity tutorials in many schools and mutual aid centres. Most of these initiatives, which have reached the number of 30 educational programs throughout the country, are managed by general assemblies of mixed membership by teachers, parents and pupils¹⁴. Their stated aim is not to act as substitute to the ailing public education system, but to confront the inequalities that such a system reproduces because of its rapid dissolution under the pressure of the memoranda policies¹⁵.

Food solidarity structures

Just a few years ago, nobody could have imagined that a fifth of the country's population would be unable to meet its needs for nutrition. Food solidarity is the most prominent activity within the mutual aid movement and the one which features the most diverse actions and forms of organisation. Examples include food solidarity structures, "without middlemen" networks, solidarity kitchens, cooperative social groceries and communal farms.

Mutual aid structures that support families with food started in the middle of 2012, as the problem of poverty became more visible. Their main field of activity has been the collection of food and its distribution to those in need. The key aim of this practice is the involvement not only of those able to donate, but mainly of those unable to meet their basic needs of subsistence. The participatory aspect of the food solidarity structures is equally important in the collective struggle for dignity. By mobilising those who approach the movement for assistance, such structures struggle to transform the latter into agents of mutual aid and moral support, thereby addressing the issue of isolation and individualization, as well as the depression and despair, which is linked to them. The weekly collection of donations in food, either from the people outside supermarkets, or from local shoppers (groceries, bakery, butchers etc.) and local farmers' markets, is the

¹³ It is very common in Greece for pupils to follow evening private lessons supplementary to the school program. This pathology comes as a consequence of the emphasis of the Greek public education system on constant examination and evaluation.

¹⁴ See for instance Assembly of teachers, parents, pupils and activists/volunteers of the Solidarity tutorials, Citizens Movement Mesopotamia, available at: <http://www.mesopotamia.gr/δικοτυο-εκυαιδευτικησ-αλληλεγγυησ-λο/> [accessed on April 1st, 2017].

¹⁵ See Mesopotamia, available at: <http://www.mesopotamia.gr/el/bank-school/to-allhlegguo-sxoleio/> [accessed on April 1st, 2017].

main source of supply for the food solidarity structures and, additionally, the main way of spreading the practice of mutual aid into local communities. Alongside food solidarity distributed in bi-weekly parcels, 20 solidarity kitchens are also operating on a daily or weekly basis. Half of the 20 solidarity kitchens cook and provide 9000 portions of food on a weekly basis, with the help of 130 volunteers, by obtaining their food supplies through donations and self-funding. The food solidarity structures constitute the backbone of many other activities of mutual aid, such as clothes' collection, solidarity tutorials, public political events, cultural activities, legal support etc. In March 2014, 103 of these groups held their first nationwide meeting in Athens in an effort to enhance their cooperation and share their experiences and know-how¹⁶.

“Without middlemen” distribution networks

In February 2012, mutual aid groups in the cities collaborated with farmers in order to distribute their produce outside the official market circuits (Psaropoulos 2012). Collecting pre-orders of products from urban residents and connecting them directly with producers, the “without middlemen” initiatives have organised alternative distribution networks, enabling both the farmers in their endeavours to achieve a fairer income than the price given by merchants and large supermarket chains and the consumers to pay lower prices than those found in commercial stores. The initial aim of the movement was to provide basic and quality food at lower cost in a period of recession and to provide alternative outlets for local products.

As the “without middlemen” paradigm spread, with many groups and also certain local authorities adopting the practice¹⁷, the movement has raised important issues related to localisation of food production, food sovereignty, social management of food distribution and quality control. Moreover, through their participation in the “without middlemen” movement, the idea of collaboration and establishment of cooperatives among farmers has also been re-introduced in a new light.

The success of the movement has also been confirmed by the repression against the “without middlemen” actions, which have in many instances been conducted by municipal authorities connected with the pro-Troika parties on behalf of powerful business interests. One third of the local structures has faced troubles with the authorities. Most important, in April 2014 an act was passed in Parliament¹⁸, aiming to restrict the official open markets in favour of the big food distribution chains and the supermarkets, which in effect outlaws the

¹⁶ See the first meeting of food solidarity initiatives, available at: <http://tvxs.gr/news/kalane/%C2%ABmazi-tha-toys-fame%C2%BB-i-proti-synantisi-trofis-stin-athina> [accessed on April 1st, 2017].

¹⁷ <http://www.localit.gr/archives/88253>

¹⁸ <https://www.thepressproject.gr/article/61161/Ekteloun-to-kinima-Xoris-Mesazontes>

“without middlemen” actions. Despite these assaults, the movement still carries on and tries to coordinate and organise its resistance.

Since their sustainability is strongly connected to their legitimacy under the law, the rise of Syriza in power came at a tipping point for the “without middlemen” initiatives. Alike to other parts of the grass-roots movement, such initiatives also struggle for coordination and networking among themselves in order to face common issues in a collective manner. The movement has thus accumulated forces in certain focal points of its activities, such as the delineation of common criteria for socially controlled quality check of produce, sharing information among producers and consumers via common web platforms, informative campaigns towards consumers, the establishment of consumer cooperatives, the need of a new agricultural cooperative movement and a proposal for a new law that will include “without middlemen” activities. All these characteristics show that the “without middlemen” movement is here to stay.

Workers’ mutual aid campaigns

One of the prominent vulnerabilities of the trade union movement in Greece has been the lack of mutual aid structures for its members, especially when they are dismissed from work. In this context, the joining of forces during the year 2014 between the mutual aid movement and unions, which have been engaged in long struggles and strikes, is very promising for the future. The establishment of mutual aid structures within workspaces became a necessary means so as to build social support during workers’ struggles and confront the hardships of wage reductions, austerity and forced redundancies. Such cases include “Artemis”¹⁹, the mutual aid structure of the Athens University staff – established after a three months long strike against layoffs and work-suspension -, the solidarity of ERT (Greece’s public broadcaster shut down by the government) workers - who occupied and self-managed the majority of ERT’s local radio and TV studios for almost two years, the solidarity structures of the photojournalists’ union etc. Yet, the most important mutual aid movement has been built around the symbolically important and brave struggle of the 595 female cleaners sacked by the Ministry of Finance²⁰. Mutual aid structures have become integral part of their support basis. Through the “Solidarity for All” team, the cleaners were connected with solidarity clinics for their needs, developed fundraising and media campaigns, whereas more than 40 food solidarity structures cooked for their (and for the teachers in job-suspension) camp outside the entrance of the Ministry of Finance in central Athens.

¹⁹ <http://artemis-da.blogspot.gr/>

²⁰ More information on the cleaners’ struggle can be found at the relevant blog of the collective: <https://595katharistries.wordpress.com/> [accessed on April 1st, 2017].

Housing, debt, legal support initiatives

High unemployment and severe austerity programs have rendered impossible for an increasing number of the Greek households to keep up with debt liabilities. According to Central Bank of Greece statistics, the number of people with overdue debt payments soared in May 2013 up to 320.000. Despite the fact that only one third of such bad debt is related to mortgages, the recent lift of the suspension of public auctions may lead to the foreclosure of up to 180.000 houses, with 80% of those being the primary residence of their owners. Furthermore, the issue of private debt has been significantly exacerbated by the fact that freelancers, small shop-keepers and family-businesses cannot afford their tax and social security fees, with thousands of them having their bank savings, incomes, private belongings and houses confiscated and/or foreclosed by the state.

To counter such dire conditions of looting people's belongings, the mutual aid movement struggled to build a network of resistance named "foreclosures-STOP", in order to protect the right to housing from tax plundering and private banks. Many dozens of public meetings have been held, and more than 40 mutual aid structures have participated in the movement against foreclosure and debt, by providing information and legal support for debt settlements or by organising direct action against house foreclosures. Due to the aforementioned changes in the legal framework in 2014²¹, house foreclosures has climbed in recent months and the practice of actively stopping them by mutual aid groups is increasing. In this respect, the mutual aid movement has managed to stop foreclosures in many neighborhoods of Athens as well as in half a dozen of other cities throughout Greece.

For the mutual aid movement, protecting the peoples' houses is fundamental in the efforts of restricting the "accumulation by dispossession" process of the banks, as well as the tax-plundering policies aiming only for the repayment of the bailouts. More importantly, the protection of houses and livelihoods is fundamental in resisting the tearing apart of the social fabric, especially in a close-knit society like the Greek one, where the home lies at the centre of the organisation of social life. One of the most important demands is the full protection of the main housing of all without any house-value criteria as the minimum first step that a progressive government should do and for sure to examine the protection of the possession of the people who are no income the last years or their living conditions have dramatically changed their ability to pay back loans and taxes.

²¹ The protection of the main residence house has been abolished since January 2014 (<http://www.kathimerini.gr/796056/article/oikonomia/ellhnikh-oikonomia/apeley8erwnontai-oi-pleisthriasmoi--ths-prwths-katoikias-apo-1hs-ianoyarioy>).

Since January 2015 Syriza's government has proceeded to 9 months suspension of foreclosures for the main housing possession²², in order to gain some time to enact a more permanent regulatory framework for the issue. Simultaneously, the main banks of Greece promised a “moratorium” on foreclosures, in order for a mutually agreed solution to be formulated. Yet, the suspension on foreclosures has been lifted, since it has been among the prerequisites imposed by the third restructuring program. Hence, the imposition of foreclosures has been facilitated by recent legislation²³. In this context, it is more than obvious that the movements against evictions will continue their social and political intervention until family housing is fully protected in the country.

Commons' movements

Greece is at the front line of a global social war on the one hand to commodify and on the other hand to protect and multiply the commons. In opposition to the neoliberal restructuring policies, Greek social movements have devised strategies for the commonification of crucial public services, both in order to preserve social reproduction from falling apart and as a means to avert their violent privatization and promote social change. In many cases where social struggles reached high levels of radicalization and consciousness, these practices of commonification have been articulated as an alternative not only to privatisation but also to state management, engaging user – citizens both in the self - production and the self – governance of ex state public services (Fattori 2013: 265).

Movements for the commonification of public services

Waste management is indisputably crucial for the sustainable metabolization of human societies with nature. In Greece the management of waste by state / market joint ventures has been widely ineffective, extremely expensive and ecologically disastrous, leading to million Euros of fines imposed by the European Union. In the beginning of 2011 individuals and collectives within the movements joined forces to elaborate specific proposals for waste management with socialised characteristics. Through horizontal grass-roots processes the PROSYNAT initiative was established with the aim to struggle for change in dominant policies and to commonify waste management²⁴. In the years to come

²² <http://www.kathimerini.gr/802092/article/oikonomia/ellhnikh-oikonomia/trimhnh-anastolh-twn-pleisthriasmwn-1hs-katoikias-xwris-eisodhmatika-krithria>

²³ <http://www.solidarity4all.gr/el/news/οχι-στους-πλειστηριασμούς>

²⁴ As mentioned in its website, the Initiative for Public Discourse on Waste Management (PROSYNAT) is a citizens' collective which functions with direct democratic and anti-hierarchical processes and aims for the coordination and joint action of citizens and collectives on waste management. For more information visit the PROSYNAT website available at: <http://prosynat.blogspot.gr/> [accessed on April 1st, 2017].

PROSYNAT organised hundreds of open events throughout the country on alternative ecological policies for waste management and constructed an affiliated network of localized initiatives. In April 2012 PROSYNAT issued an elaborated proposal for a decentralized, resource - effective and ecological waste management at the local / municipal level and with the engagement of citizens as an immediately applicable way to transcend the dead – end created by the privatization of waste management in the country (PROSYNAT 2012). Social mobilization on the basis of this proposal initially led to wide citizens' discontent against dominant policies on waste management and then to their delay and gradual overturn. Local citizens' cooperatives and networks managing waste from the grass-roots started activities in at least four areas of the country with 21 more under way²⁵. The logic of giving emphasis to household waste management and neighborhood composting, which was proposed by PROSYNAT as the first phase of waste management, gained ground. Finally, after the May 2014 municipal elections, when the radical left SYRIZA candidate won the Athens and wider Attica Prefecture, and, of course, after the January 2015 national elections, when SYRIZA gained power, PROSYNAT proposals have emerged at the core of the new state policies for waste management.

Water is allegedly the most important common good for human societies, since it is necessary for the existence of life itself. Neoliberal restructuring policies during the Greek crisis always had as their major component the rapid privatization of state – run services for ridiculously low prices in order to open new markets to capital and the logic of profit. Along these lines, in 2011 the Greek Government announced its intention to privatize the Public Water Corporation of Salonica [PWCS], the second largest city of Greece, part and parcel with public water corporations of other cities and, of course, Athens. Immediately after the announcement the most vibrant elements of the city's movements formed an anti-privatization alliance to fight back, called the “136 Movement”, which also formed liaisons with the PWCS workers' union. As the fight matured and gained in popularity, participants realized that an agenda restricted to resistance would not avert the neoliberal assault and decided to formulate a grassroots proposal for the commonification of the water services of Salonica. According to the proposal, each municipal district would establish a non – profit water cooperative of end users of the service and all the cooperatives would form a second – level non – profit cooperative, which would then participate in the privatization process, purchase the offered 51% of the shares of the PWCS and then govern the institution through direct citizen / worker participation and on a non – profit basis²⁶. In 2013 and while the

²⁵ These are: (i) the “ANAKLYKONO STIN PIGI” social cooperative in the city of Patras (<https://anakyklwnw.wordpress.com/>), (ii) the MOIKONOS social cooperative in the island of Mykonos (<https://moikonos.wordpress.com/>), (iii) the Kalloni – Kelia social cooperative in the island of Tinos (<http://kalloni-tinos.gr/>), and (iv) the Re-Think neighborhood compost network in the city of Kalamata (<http://www.rethink-project.gr/>) [all accessed on April 1st, 2017].

²⁶ For more information on the commonification proposal of the 136 Movement check the relevant article under the title “The Citizens' Bid to Control Thessaloniki's Water”, available at:

privatization process was pushed forward, the first six water cooperatives to be established formed the second – level “Citizens’ Union for Water” cooperative, attracted financial aid from social responsibility investors and registered a formal public offer for purchasing the 51% of the PWCS. When the public offer was rejected on vague procedural grounds by TAIPED, the Greek agency for the privatization of the assets of the country, the water movement of Salonica organized a massive informal referendum, which took place on May 16th, 2014, in 181 electoral centres throughout the city and with a turnout of 218.002 citizens, 98% of which voted down the privatization of the PWCS. As a result and due to such widespread social dissent, the ND-PASOK pro-austerity government was forced to freeze the privatization process before stepping down after the January 2015 elections.

Despite growing citizens’ repulsion, television is still the most popular mass medium in Greece and the main tool for the manipulation of public opinion by the establishment. In this context, during the years of neoliberal austerity the public radio and television broadcaster preserved a marginal independence compared to private television broadcasters in terms of the imposed narrative of the Greek crisis and part of its personnel was able to justify this stance before governmental pressure on grounds of journalist freedom and deontology. On the night of June 11th, 2013, the Government disrupted the broadcasting of ERT without prior consultation or even notice and issued within the next days an emergency decree for its abolishment²⁷. Notwithstanding one whole month of massive social mobilizations against the closure, ERT employees along with activists and citizens started immediately again broadcasting from most radio and tv channels of the public broadcaster, engaging into direct action acts to occupy the latter’s premises and infrastructure and taking decisions through direct democratic assemblies. The self – managed ERT became a pole of the country’s anti-austerity struggle, at its best reaching millions of citizens with its radio/tv broadcasting program, which became more and more radicalized with the introduction of reports and opinions directly from social struggles. Up until the re-establishment of ERT by the anti-austerity SYRIZA - ANEL coalition government on April 29th, 2015, that is for almost two years, the main radio/tv channels of country’s public broadcaster never stopped producing and transmitting their programs to the wider public under conditions of worker self – management and with the participation of society.

<http://www.136.gr/article/citizens-bid-control-thessalonikis-water> [accessed on April 1st, 2017].

²⁷ The main aims of the Government were to (a) achieve a monolithic representation of reality by all tv channels in the country and (b) ensure that the private broadcasters’ conglomerate would be the sole bidder and achieve a ridiculously low price in the tv spectrum frequencies auction in January 2014, as finally was the case.

Socially reproductive commons movements

Historically, capitalism has expanded through the enclosure of the commons and the destruction of socially embedded relationships that rendered their collective management and (re)production possible (Linebaugh & Rediker 2000). Today, neoliberal policies promote the restructuring of existing social settings through processes of accumulation by dispossession and through acceleration, primarily by privatizing common goods, commodifying new spheres of life and imposing unsustainable natural degradation. Nevertheless, throughout the globe these processes are countered from bottom – up social processes of commoning, re-appropriation and sharing of social resources beyond the state / market dichotomy. Emergent commons movements re-invent the public in the sense of the common, of what we all share. Instigating forces of commoning avoid the classic dichotomy between the public and the private by instituting communal duties of stewardship and by allocating individual or collective usufructuary rights. Hence, even in eras of neoliberal domination, social movements defend common goods by (re)constructing communities for the governance of the commons, often in relative autonomy to the state.

Such communities have gradually been emerging in Greece, even before the crisis, but their development has been fragile and dependent on the ebbs and flows of state repression. Social processes of commoning can be found much more in affective relations, public space, alternative media and technology than in agricultural or artisanal communities. In the context of agriculture, alternatives are experimented throughout the country by eco-communities, which started to multiply, when groups of young people fled from the cities in response to the crisis and struggled to reconstruct their lives in the countryside²⁸. Much more important in terms of social impact are the eco-festivals organized by the bio-farming communities throughout the country with a central annual eco-festival to gather all communities at the national level²⁹. Yet, at the moment the most crucial agricultural initiatives of commoning take place through the horizontal networks for the exchange of traditional Greek seeds, which hold the rich bio-diversity of the country's edible plants alive

²⁸ Eco – communities are especially difficult to monitor and their exact number cannot be estimated, but they can be found in many natural areas of Greece, where land occupation is tolerated. Indicative websites of Greek eco-communities are available at:

<http://en.freeandreal.org/>, <https://paliomylos.wordpress.com/>,
<https://www.facebook.com/agnandi.vegoritida>, <https://www.facebook.com/pirametavouna>,
<http://www.stagones.org/>, <http://skalaecovillage.com/>, <http://www.organizationearth.org/>,
<http://aipeia-gi2.webnode.gr/>. See also Enallaktikos.gr, 72 eco-communities blossom throughout Greece, available at : http://www.enallaktikos.gr/ar811el_72-oikokoinotites-anthizoyn-se-oli-tin-ellada-tis-vivis-syrgkani.html [accessed on April 1st, 2017].

²⁹ Eco-festivals are self-organized communal feasts, where bio-farming communities establish direct communal relations with consumers of their products on the basis of ecology and political engagement. The most important local festival is the pan-thessalic eco-festival, which takes place in Volos. The last national eco-festival of 2014 took place at Megali Panagia, a village in Halkidiki which is the centre of the struggle against the vast gold mining activity in the area.

against the ever – expanding usage of proprietary seeds. With the largest being Peliti, a horizontal network with local assemblies featuring thousands of participants, both citizens and farmers, and the second largest being Aegilops, a synergy between bio-farmers, which also runs a seed bank, these networks have built communal and ecological consciousness around agriculture at the grassroots level and are behind all struggles against GMOs in the country³⁰. Although Greece had a strong tradition of agricultural cooperatives³¹, the embrace of the cooperativist movement during the 80's by the “socialist” government of PASOK introduced strong elements of partitocracy, clientelism and state dependence, which ruined the cooperativist tradition deep in social consciousness (Kioupkiolis & Karyotis 2015). Initiatives such as the aforementioned slowly reconstruct the ruins of agricultural cooperativism in the country on healthier foundations, producing new generations of farmers and rejuvenating the 5000 to 7000 agricultural cooperatives in the country (PASEGES 2013) with the introduction of new social values and practices.

Affective relations, counter – cultures and public spaces have been the terrains, where Greek social movements have been accumulating their counter – power for years now. The waves of squats, social centers and public space occupations ignited by the December 2008 revolt and the squares movement have left a legacy of alternative social reproduction in the urban terrain that materializes and territorializes the social struggles and sets societies in motion, when confrontation with the establishment arises on all fronts. Autonomous movements are organized around more than 200 social centers in neighborhoods of all the big and medium cities of the country³². These extensive modes of commoning are the main nodes through which social counter – power is horizontally circulated and co-ordinated / accumulated. Furthermore, inside most of these networked nodes intensive ecosystems of social and cultural commoning take place, since these nodes have become the focal point for various communities, such as community grocery stores, communal kindergartens, collective kitchens, cultural cafes, housing projects, artistic collectives, educational structures, community radios, alternative media, technology collectives, and, of course, political discourse and deliberation³³. In addition, these hub-bubs constantly spill over their values and practices to the

³⁰ More information about these networks is available at: <http://www.peliti.gr/> and <http://www.aegilops.gr/> [accessed on April 1st, 2017].

³¹ From the times of the Ottoman occupation to the 1950's agricultural production in many parts of the country was organized according to “syntrophies”, a custom of mutual aid between farmers, whereas commons associations in stock-raising (“tselingata”, “koinata”) had existed for centuries. One of the world's first agricultural cooperatives was founded in 1780 at Ampelakia of Larissa, Greece, on the production of cotton.

³² http://www.enallaktikos.gr/kg15el_antallaktika-diktya_t65.html .

³³ The categorization of commons movements as intensive and extensive has been described by Massimo De Angelis in his talk at the 3rd Commonsfest in Athens on May 15th, 2015 [in file with author].

neighborhoods where they are located, reclaiming public space through the reproduction of alternative social relations based on equality, mutual aid, collaboration and political mobilization.

Even before the commonification of the public broadcaster ERT an ecosystem of alternative and community media struggled to inflict ruptures on the dominant narrative of mainstream media on the Greek crisis. In 2012, after the bankruptcy of “Eleftherotypia”, a historic and widely circulated center – left newspaper, a group of fired journalists and media workers established the cooperative newspaper “Efimerida ton Syntakton”, in order to provide independent and antagonistic information to the public. The newspaper of the journalists, as its title actually means, has gradually earned its position among the ten most popular printed newspapers in the country but is by far the newspaper within the “big 10” with the strongest liaisons with the social struggles. In the market of printed magazines, the most successful alternative media is the bi-weekly pro – movements “UnFollow” magazine, which is widely known for its investigative journalism against Greek oligarchs and, accordingly, for the mafia – style threats against it due to its investigative and radical content. In the field of electronic media, the alternative news portal “The Press Project” has accumulated the attention of wider audiences to its far left critical analyses. In addition, the radio station “Sto Kokkino”, owned by SYRIZA, yet having an all - embracing leftist and pro-movement attitude, has managed to transmit its program almost at a national level and has climbed among the five most popular news radio stations in the country. These alternative media, accompanied by a constellation of community media tools of the grassroots, such as community radio stations³⁴, web-tv portals (e.g. www.omnia-tv.com), cooperative e-portals (e.g. <http://www.alterthess.gr/>), micro-blogging sites (e.g. www.dromografos.org), e-radios (e.g. www.radiobubble.gr) and independent electronic networks (e.g. www.athens.indymedia.org), and critically reproduced by wider social media spheres of internet users, have been capable of formulating an insurgent public sphere, which has popularized critical opinions and has openly challenged mainstream media perspectives on the crisis. Finally, media activists from these collectives have been able to crowd - source financial support by the general public for at least five different documentaries, which became widely popular critical chronicles of the Greek crisis and were also publicly displayed in several other countries³⁵.

Even before the crisis Greece's highly educated and technology – savvy youth had been organized in communities, which [re]produced various intellectual commons. The Athens Wireless Metropolitan Network (AWMN), one of the

³⁴ Autonomous movements have a long tradition of experimenting with community radios, having established some of the first independent radio stations in the countries back in the 80s, when the radio spectrum was liberalized. Today more than seven autonomous community radios operate in different parts of the country under conditions of state repression.

³⁵ For instance, the crowd-sourced documentary “Debtocracy” was viewed by half a million people in the first five days of its release.

largest community wireless networks in the world, which dates back from these days, today comprises 1.235 backbone nodes and counts more than 12.222 client computers and 830 free software online applications, spreading even outside the borders of the city of Athens with the most southern point being Epidaurus and the most northern point being the town of Nea Artaki on the island of Evoia (100 km and 85 km correspondingly from the city centre). Twenty one other community wireless networks operate in various parts of the country with the most promising being Sarantaporo.gr, a community network in the rural area of mount Olympus, which connects fifteen small villages together, providing fast internet access for free to their residents, to local businesses, schools and health clinics. In addition, the hacking communities along with civil society have formed five hackerspaces and one fab-lab in major Greek cities. The hackerspaces are the "Hackerspace" in Athens, the "Tech Ministry" in Thessaloniki, the "P-space" in Patras, the "To Labaki" in Herakleion, and the "p2p lab" in Ioannina. These techno-social centers act as local common pools of knowledge sharing and collaborative innovation, produce specific projects under copyleft licenses to cover social needs and raise technological literacy and awareness especially of young people. Yet, after the crisis intellectual commons communities have converged with each other and with the wider social movements and have acquired evident political characteristics. Hence, participants from within these collectivities have raised wider social awareness on issues related to digital rights, surveillance, bilateral free trade agreements, such as ACTA, and commons – based peer production and have supported social movements with the necessary infrastructure³⁶. Furthermore, this merging process has produced interesting meeting points between agricultural, artisanal, social and intellectual commons communities and movements, such as CommonsFest, an annual grass-roots festival for the protection and expansion of common goods³⁷. Finally, activists from the communities have independently produced a documentary with the story of intellectual commons in Greece³⁸.

³⁶ Indicatively, these include the interventions of Digital Liberation Network on digital rights, the activities of the Greek team of the P2P Foundation on commons – based peer production (<http://p2pfoundation.net/Greece>), the work of the Underground Free University on the provision of PCs and peripherals to many social centers (www.ufu.gr), the seminars of Skytales on use of cryptography by activists (www.skytal.es), the sessions of Hackademy for investigative and technology – savvy journalists (www.hackademy.gr) and the provision of autonomous web hosting, blogging and email server infrastructure and services for political activity by the Espiv collective (<https://espiv.net/>).

³⁷ The 2015 CommonsFest, held in Athens on May 15-17, gathered the most vibrant activists, communities and cooperatives of the country and featured international speakers, such as Richard Stallman, Massimo De Angelis and Pat Conaty..

³⁸ The documentary is entitled as “Knowledge as a Common Good, communities of Production and Sharing in Greece”. It is available under a creative commons license at: <http://common-knowledge.eu/2014/11/15/knowledge-as-a-common-good-communities-of-production-and-sharing-in-greece-full-documentary/> [accessed on April 1st, 2017].

Social and solidarity economy

Alongside solidarity structures, a constellation of other relevant initiatives makes up the whole picture of the social and solidarity economy. Free-share bazaars, local alternative currencies and time-banks have been established as forms of direct moneyless exchange of goods and services. Approximately 190 of these initiatives throughout the country dedicate their activities on the aim to meet the needs of the people through collective processes of sharing and bartering³⁹.

The debate on the social and solidarity economy has been open in Greece for some years now, but its form and social effect have been significantly influenced by the crisis and the neoliberal restructuring policies. Rising levels of unemployment and the inability of a large portion of the highly qualified workforce to find its place in the deregulated labour market, as well as the questioning of the dominant mode of production, have created the social conditions for the development of cooperative enterprises. Until September 2015, according to the statistics of the Ministry of Labor, 600 new workers' or consumers' cooperatives have been established.

The number of the new cooperative enterprises is increasing in all sectors of economic life, in such volumes that allow us to talk about a tendency that puts forward new forms of organisation of work and production. The majority of these projects is located at the sectors of catering, culture and arts, environmental services, healthcare, media and food processing. It is worth noting that the debate for alternative and fair trade, along with the “without middlemen” movement, have significantly contributed to the development of consumer cooperatives, which, beyond connecting producers with consumers, highlight important issues about food production and distribution policies, about genetically modified products, food price policies, the quality and origin of food products and its social and economic footprint.

These cooperatives have employed practices which contest the dominant modes of organisation of everyday life. They follow democratic and collective decision making processes through assemblies, they implement an equal-wage policy and they are autonomous and self-managed by their members, while they include in their scope of activities services for the benefit of their membership and society at large⁴⁰. The workers' cooperatives aim to connect with the solidarity structures and the movements in their proximity. They strive to become not only part of a protective net for a society in hardship but also a way out for the young people facing unemployment. In addition, workers' collectives, as shown by the struggle in the recuperated factory of Vio.Me

³⁹ Solidarity For All, Social and Solidarity Economy Structures in Operation, available at: [http://www.solidarity4all.gr/el/structures?term_node_tid_depth=All&term_node_tid_depth_1\]=158](http://www.solidarity4all.gr/el/structures?term_node_tid_depth=All&term_node_tid_depth_1]=158) [accessed on April 1st, 2017].

⁴⁰ See Networking of Workers' Coops / Main Principles, available at: <http://kolektives.org> [accessed on April 1st, 2017].

(<http://www.viome.org/>). in Thessaloniki, can be a feasible way to re-initiate production in workplaces under workers' control, which have been abandoned, closed or gone bankrupt by their bosses. Vio.Me in Thessaloniki, the first factory that is self-managed by its workers' assembly, is at the frontline of the struggle to build an alternative model of production in Greece. Moreover, it is a tangible example for a way out of the crisis, economic downsizing and unemployment, which also develops forms of collective, democratic management of economic structures.

During the years of the crisis several focal points have been formed where initiatives of the social and solidarity economy join. Worth mentioning is the Festival for the Solidarity and Cooperative Economy (<http://www.festival4sce.org/>), set up just after the “squares movement” on 2011, which is a meeting point for members of cooperatives, grass-roots solidarity structures and various other citizen initiatives. Another initiative is the “Solidarity for All” organisation (<http://www.solidarity4all.gr/>), formed in early Autumn, 2012. The latter has been the result of the growing grassroots social solidarity movement and of SYRIZA’s decision to support this movement by creating a solidarity fund. Yet, Solidarity for All does not coincide with the solidarity fund. It aims to facilitate the development of grassroots solidarity, to enhance the culture of self-organization in the various fields of social mobilization, to create collective tools and spaces for coordination, to share know-how between solidarity structures, to increase the visibility of the solidarity movement and to develop international solidarity campaigns for the Greek people. In a decentralized and collective manner, it provides logistical and administrative support to the local solidarity structures, while it participates in coordinating attempts on an equal basis simply as one more solidarity structure. Finally, it is worth mentioning that in May 9-10, 2015, a nationwide meeting of solidarity structures took place⁴¹. In the meeting participants decided to pursue regional or sectorial meetings and actions, as the next steps for networking, organising and spreading the solidarity movement.

The way forward

The Greek society is currently undergoing a period of rapid change and re-orientation, in which already existing social structures enter into a stage of reform and re-adjustment to the new environment and new structures emerge. The severe economic crisis has brought about a corresponding crisis of social reproduction, during which large social groups have been forced to find new ways of meeting their collective needs and desires through sharing, mutual aid and collaboration. This social tendency has resulted in the emergence of various commons in the fields of sustenance, housing, health, education, art, technology, mass media, communications and social innovation. In this context,

⁴¹ <http://www.solidarity4all.gr/el/news/1st-nationwide-solidarity-structure%E2%80%99s-meeting>.

socially reproductive commons with social and solidarity economy initiatives in their peripheries have shown their potential of establishing the material foundations of collective and wider social autonomy. In the neoliberal era, it is this potential of a constituent counter - power that has the capacity to constitute the contending power to the capital - state complex. In this light, the Greek crisis is not only a story of pain, poverty and misery. It can also be reconstructed into a narrative of courage, hope, social struggle and progressive change; a narrative of the commons.

Yet, it remains to be seen whether these initiatives are ready to push for further economic and social transformations, or whether their dynamism is going to subside because of the rise of SYRIZA in power or under the unbearable conditions of the economic crisis. The consequences of austerity policies on the majority of the population have, on the one hand, triggered the rise of alternatives but have, on the other hand, weakened the productive powers of the country to such an extent that it will take more than a decade to reconstruct. This negative impact is on its own an important factor that may limit the potentials of emerging movements to grow and expand in several aspects of every-day life. “Progressive” dialectics between the SYRIZA coalition government and the movements have been limited. During the first period of SYRIZA in power, the new coalition government focused its attention on the tough negotiations with the EU institutions and the IMF and, therefore, had little space to put its political priorities into practice. Yet, after its capitulation, the re-elected SYRIZA-ANEL coalition has moved towards the opposite direction of implement austerity measures, in order to avoid a Grexit. At present, as Syriza's plan to establish policies on the opposite direction of austerity have failed, the expectations and the hopes of large parts of society from the Left are being seriously tried.

For grass-roots militants in Greece it is today more than ever obvious that time / space is needed to be gained from the disciplinary power of capital and the iron fist of the neoliberal state in order to amass sufficient social power for radical and society - wide transformations. Equally transparent is the fact that the leftist government of SYRIZA with its declared intentions to facilitate social change has to do a lot more than win the elections and survive the onslaught of the European neoliberal elite, at least to the extent that it aims to build hegemonies invulnerable to neoliberal co-optation and viable in the mid and long - term. We do not live in revolutionary times of dual power formations⁴², or do we? The acceleration of capital circulation / accumulation and the ecological dead - end do not leave us with any alternatives but to fight back and to fight now. In this sense, it is imperative for progressive governments to relate to autonomous social movements in specific ways, so as to give time / space and unleash the potential of the latter for social emancipation. Is a contemporary

⁴² Dual power describes the revolutionary moment in history when an insurgent popular power transforms social relations from below, gains socially reproductive characteristics and rises to contend the bourgeois state apparatus.

dual power between autonomous movements and leftist governments possible in the heart of Europe as a socio-historic formation amidst the crisis and a contemporary revolutionary strategy to move beyond the world of capital? As a well-respected revolutionary has rightly stated, “if we do not do the impossible, we shall be faced with the unthinkable” (Bookchin 2005: 107).

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