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### «Smart Cities» of the debt crisis: grassroots creativity in Mediterranean Europe

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«SMART CITIES» OF THE DEBT CRISIS:  
GRASSROOTS CREATIVITY  
IN MEDITERRANEAN EUROPE\*\*

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ABSTRACT

*This paper challenges mainstream, neoliberal conceptualizations of the «Smart City» and the Incubator Hypothesis, by inserting grassroots creativity and solidarity into their logic. It is argued that the debt crisis in Southern Europe paves the way for a grassroots version of the Smart City, a city with hybrid public and common spaces, where the virtual and the material mingle, where grassroots creativity combines technology and knowledge, as it is largely based on massive ICT use and a highly educated young population. Typologies are constructed for several types of diverse collectivities, economies and productive initiatives. Top-down strategies of quasi-Orientalist stigmatization and suppression of every mobilization, alternative political discourse, imagination and creativity are sharply criticized as responsible for the crisis itself. Policy-oriented questions are posed and advocacy planning is explored in order to empower grassroots creativity in the context of digital societies.*

*Keywords: Social movements, digital societies, social networks, urban piazzas, solidarity economies, Southern Europe, Athens, Greece.*

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*If we learned political leadership and coalition building from the Russian Revolution, and popular initiative from the French Revolution, the Arab Revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt demonstrated the power of networks.*

(Allagui and Kuebler 2011, p. 1435, quoted by Castells 2012, p. 56)

### INITIAL REFLECTIONS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The Mediterranean city has returned to the forefront of interest with massive upheavals during the 2010s. Solidarities emerge at the grassroots level, and simultaneous mobilizations across countries tend to become the rule. The massive uprisings against autocracies in North Africa during the ‘Arab Spring’ in 2010-2011 created a domino effect comparable with that on the European Mediterranean shores, where anti-austerity mobilizations of the *Indignados* shook the cities of Spain and then Greece in 2011. Mobilizations for local issues rapidly became trans-local emancipatory movements. Dissimilar as they are, Mediterranean mobilizations of the 2010s have three basic poles of resemblance: they all oppose facets of autocracy, even if some appear as posing only economic demands at first sight; they are all urban; and they all spread by digital means and social media.

The «Arab Spring» has challenged autocracy directly at the political level, while Southern European populations have been facing the autocracy of ‘the markets’ during the financial and debt crisis in the Eurozone, which has quickly become a social, cultural and political crisis, a crisis of EU hegemony and a divisive crisis. We have reached the point of the reconstruction of a North/ South divide *within* EU limits, within the Eurozone, or rather a core/ periphery divide, extended up to Ireland on the Northwest (Afouxenidis, 2012; Leontidou, 2012b, 2015). This periphery was disrespectfully named PIIGS (Portugal-Ireland-Italy-Greece-Spain). Dominant classes of the North and the EU core, especially Germany, direct their crypto-colonial discourses (Herzfeld, 2002) against the South. They not only dictate ways of conduct and development in rigid neoliberal rules to countries seized by the debt crisis; they also stigmatize the whole European periphery in a quasi-Orientalist discourse<sup>1</sup> as a ‘burden’ of laziness

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1. A version of the concept by Said (1978) can be used for stereotypes and disrespectful discourses on the EU South in our days (Leontidou, 2014, 2015).

and corruption. Greece suffers from the worst stigmatization, to the point of malicious and ironic comments on the dress codes of its Prime Minister and MPs, throughout 2015. These discourses bring interwar memories, when the Mezzogiorno was accused as a ‘ball and chain’ for the North (Gramsci, 1971, p. 71) and when fascism was rising in Europe and whole ethnic groups were stigmatized.

Gramsci’s constructivism is very fruitful for the study of the South at present (Leontidou, 2012b, 2015). The EU periphery is burdened with responsibilities for the collapse of the euro, is accused of causing the Eurozone crisis, at the same time as it is haunted by austerity and accumulation by dispossession by the banks of the North and ‘the markets’ more generally. Credit rating agencies like Moody’s, Fitch, Standard and Poor’s have made the downgrading of whole countries a self-fulfilling prophecy. The North/ South divide, which EU unification processes had the ambition of closing, becomes deeper with time, even at the political level, as first evident in the EU parliamentary election results of May 2014, with the rise of Northern Eurosceptics and the extreme Right contrasting with the rise of the democratic Left in the South, which finally came to power in Greece (*Syriza*, January 2015 elections) and rose in Spain (*Podemos*). Before the Greek elections, when this paper was conceived, many of the author’s reflections seemed futile in the midst of autocracy and rigid neoliberal austerity policies. Since 2015, however, the paper benefits from hindsight and there is hope flickering, that our reflections on urban policy may be realistic, irrespective of austerity memoranda and in spite of them.

Urbanism forms the core of the 2010s mobilizations in Southern Europe, as stressed by many scholars. For some, the crisis affects primarily urban areas (Castells, 2012) and stimulates demands for the ‘right to the city’ (LeFebvre, 1968; Leontidou, 2010; Brenner et al., 2012; Harvey, 2012). For others, it has originated in urbanization and the real estate sector (Harvey 2012), which is so for the USA, but not universal for the Mediterranean. Whatever the underlying dynamics, the explanations and the discourse, massive popular presence in city streets and piazzas have underlined the pivotal role of urbanism in the crisis. The core significance of the urban dimension in Mediterranean anti-austerity movements certainly turns our attention to cities, which are the focus of this paper.

Another pole of utmost importance, which will be explored here, is the wide dissemination of Information and Communication Technologies (henceforth ICT). In fact, it has been established that the domino effect of Mediterranean movements has been basically facilitated by digital com-

munication. Despite the fact that ICT is not as widely used in the South as in the North,<sup>2</sup> we will argue that it transforms urban public spaces into hybrid areas and spaces of flows, opening up new prospects for the communication and solidarity among broad social strata. Urban populations communicate by internet and mobile phone networks and increasingly engage in social networking. ICT do not ‘determine’ social behavior, but then again they “are not simply tools, but organizational forms, cultural expressions and specific platforms for political autonomy” (Castells, 2012, p. 103). They create new fusions and spatialities, which have a profound impact on urban life patterns and development.

In this paper we will explore prospects, rather than engaging again with the overexposed dystopia of the crisis. There is already a lot of material on the destruction of urban enterprises and livelihoods during the 2010s. We will demonstrate, however, that as the crisis falls on digital cities, it also stimulates creative niches at the grassroots level. Technological dissemination, digital penetration and interactive social media have not only facilitated resistance to political and economic autocracies, but have also supported new cultural forms of grassroots creativity. We will argue that this paves the way for a Mediterranean version of the Smart City, based on knowledge and new technology used in alternative niches of subsistence and solidarity economies, new productive initiatives and creative ventures.

There is an ongoing critique against mainstream conceptualizations of the Smart City, which are based on new regionalism theories, technological determinism and the neoliberal logic (Kourliouros and Panagopoulos, 2013). At the moment of the crisis, an alternative is not only worth exploring systematically, but also worth pursuing in advocacy planning, because of the opportunities offered for a way out of the crisis and into the development of a new and better society, where social exclusion, unemployment and the brain drain may be minimized. Our conceptual apparatus emerges from Mediterranean Europe and evidence is derived especially from participant observation<sup>3</sup> and the Internet. Typologies are constructed

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2. Though there is some fetishization of ICT in some cases, researchers are also aware that in certain countries or regions of the EU people are not well connected, and the South is especially disadvantaged in this respect (ESPON SIESTA 2013). Increasingly, however, mobile phones, i-pads and tablets draw large crowds into cyberspaces.

3. The author has been a marginal participant/ observer in the ‘movement of the piazzas’ in 2011, the ERT mobilizations in 2013, the CommonsFest in 2015, and other mobilizations and events in Athens.

for a multitude of development strategies emerging during the crisis based on findings from Greece, which is constantly on the international spotlight.

### DIGITAL SPATIALITIES AND HYBRID URBAN PIAZZAS

It used to be sufficient in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to place urban social movements in material spaces of the city, until the digital city emerged in the virtual space of ICT, social media and e-networking (Craglia et al., 2004). The rapid transformation of digital societies has been a wonder for older generations, who were living adult lives without even a computer, not to mention a mobile phone or a laptop or tablet, until the mid-1990s. Wireless technology and digital communication have become interactive and penetrate every household in the wake of the most democratic industrial revolution ever, where technology is in everyone's hands.

This has resulted in an evolving continuum of interaction between virtual and material spaces (Meek, 2012), which has extended from the space of places to the space of flows (Castells, 2012, p. 61) and has merged into hybrid spaces and spatialities. The debt crisis in Europe in the 2010s took place in such a hybrid realm. Massive uprisings by the Southern grassroots against the austerity measures and the democratic deficit in the EU were largely facilitated by ICT innovations. Activists, but also more broadly educated young people, especially those hit by unemployment, have been mobilizing online and assembling offline (Harlow, 2011) and online, too, via Skype and social media (Leontidou, 2012a). Counter-hegemonic uses of the Internet spread. This growing importance of ICT, digital penetration, wireless communication, social media and interactive technologies in economic, political and socio-cultural development is increasingly reflected in current research on their societal role.

The wide and massive dissemination of the digital 'revolution' started with cell phones and laptops, continued with i-phones and tablets, and has been revitalized with social media and Web 2.0 applications,<sup>4</sup> opening the way for digital interaction among individuals, collectivities and cities (Craglia et al., 2004; Meek, 2012; Gonzalez and Carril, 2013). ICT and social network sites are integrated into everyday life and practice for millions of people and organizations around the globe. New research on their impact on constitutional democracy and political participation already shows that they transform the rules and methods of political engagement (Afouxenidis,

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4. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, MySpace, etc.

2014). Whether a promise for a more democratic future (Castells, 2012), or a process which acts towards the concentration of power into the hands of the few (Hindman 2008), digital communication is indeed Janus-faced, but it can no longer be ignored (Afouxenidis, 2014).

The grassroots was inserted into the discussion on digital societies and vice versa at the heyday of the transnational alter-globalization movements during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>5</sup> as the Internet was turning to a counter-hegemonic tool of communication among broad collectivities and people, who assembled to protest in many parts of the globe. There was a setback caused by September 11 2001 and also by the death of the activist Carlo Giuliani in Genoa the same year. After 2006, however, the excitement was revived, with alter-globalization demonstrations and other sorts of uprisings (Della Porta et al., 2009). Those in the Paris *banlieu*, which originated locally but spread from Paris to all French towns by online activism, occupied centre stage in 2006 and stirred interest and solidarity at the global level (Leontidou, 2006, 2010; Routledge, 2010).

Interactive technologies then exploded to change ways of mobilization and commitment. This trend became massive in the 2010s around the Mediterranean area and in the Occupy movements in the Anglo-American world (Badiou, 2012; Castells, 2012; Harvey, 2012; Leontidou, 2012a). The sudden realization of the strengths of digital networking came with the 'Arab Spring'. The domino effect of the Sidi Bouzid uprising in December 2010 toward small towns and then the capital of Tunisia also ignited social movements up to Egypt, especially Cairo and its reknown Tahrir Square (Dabashi, 2012; Filiu, 2011). The mobilized grassroots had entered massively into the scene of digital communication, forming 'networks of outrage and hope' which helped overcome fear (Castells, 2012, pp. 80-81).

The connection between free communication on Facebook, You Tube and Twitter and the occupation of urban space created a hybrid public space of freedom that became a major feature of the Tunisian rebellion, foreshadowing the movements to come in other countries. Convoys of solidarity were formed by hundreds of cars converging in the capital. On January 22, 2011, the Convoy of Liberty ..., beginning in Sidi Bouzid and Menzel Bouzaiane, reached the Kasbah in the Tunis Medina... (Castells 2012, p. 23).

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5. Among the several analyses of that important period, see Smith et al., 1997; Hamel et al., 2000; Tilly, 2004; Della Porta, et al., 2006, 2009; Leontidou, 2010; Castells, 2012.

The North African mobilizations were followed by the ‘Movement of the Piazzas’ in the northern Mediterranean shores. The domino effect reached from Spain to Greece from mid-May 2011.<sup>6</sup> Two years later, mobilizations were ignited against the building-up of Gezi park in Istanbul, which shook many cities of Turkey from late May 2013 (Eraydin et al., 2014; Oktem Unsal, 2015), and, after a week, protest against censorship in Greece after the silencing of the Hellenic TV, ERT, in Athens, spread to become an international issue (Leontidou, 2014). In all these movements the Internet, and especially Web 2.0 applications, grew to be a major counter-hegemonic tool, but also a means of communication widening spatial boundaries and ‘commoning’ the public realm. Cosmopolitan solidarities were forged. Society, cultures, and technology itself were transformed with online activism but also with the interaction between computers, smart phones, and “other traditional communication channels like fax machines, ham radio and dial-up modems [which] helped to overcome the blocking of the Internet” (Castells, 2012, p. 63). In Egypt, SMSs would be retrieved by phone and converted to fax messages for wider dissemination (Castells, 2012, p. 64). In Europe, Spanish and Greek popular assemblies communicated by Skype (Leontidou, 2012a).

Hybrid spatialities, online and offline at the same time, have been offering a sense of belonging, which disperses initial fears of assembling.<sup>7</sup> Occupations, social centres and squats in abandoned buildings or unused spaces as hubs of alternative cultures continue from the past, but come to radiate to global communities and interact through ICT. Digital communication has sustained or even sparked mobilizations and solidarities over long distances and has facilitated the crystallization of new forms of transnational collectivities and cosmopolitan civil societies (Leontidou, 2010, 2015; Kousis, 2014). Research is emerging which systematizes the massive use of new communication technology at the grassroots level, in order to renew collective action theory and put ICT studies centre stage.

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6. The *Indignados* movement was also called ‘15 Mayo’ in Spain and named the Greek one as *Aganaktismeni*. Among the voluminous bibliography, see Giovanopoulos et al., 2011; Castells, 2012; Leontidou, 2012a, 2014; Douzinas, 2013; Kousis, 2014, and many others.

7. Castells (2012, pp. 80-81) attributes the overcoming of fear to being together in the squares and also in the Internet, with positive emotions of outrage and hope. During the ‘Arab spring’, even phobias of surveillance subsided (Dabashi, 2012; Filiu, 2011), when Mubarak’s decision to cut off people from the Internet in Egypt intensified the already massive mobilization in Tahrir Square in 2011, instead of curtailing it. In Turkey, Erdogan did not manage to enforce his decision to cut first Tweeter, then YouTube, after mobilizations in Taksim Square.



Urban theory has to be renewed, too. Cities are transformed with the widespread use of ICT (Craglia et al., 2004). In fact, the ontology<sup>8</sup> has shifted, in that e-networking is now taken for granted. The urban public realm of the new millennium clearly differs from that of the past. Publics, as we know them today, emerged with the invention of the printing press in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The ‘public’ then existed as a ‘purely spiritual collectivity, as a dissemination of physically separated individuals whose cohesion is entirely mental’ (Tarde 1898 cited in Laclau, 2005, pp. 44-5). Physical presence was not a precondition for a public realm, as it is not today, either. Now, with digital interaction rising next to printed sources, the cell phone, the Internet, Web 2.0 applications and social media bridge the private and the public and turn ‘mental cohesion’ into communicative action and interaction rather than one-way communication. This very important passage from hierarchies to networks results in democratization, hybridity, and the emergence of ‘the commons’ next to the public realm.

The shrinkage of the centralized and hierarchical public realm of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially during the debt crisis, reveals a new shared space, managed by the grassroots rather than the state, and hence, ‘common’ rather than public (De Angelis, 2010). It also brings to light new configurations in the context of the virtualization and decentralization of actions and struggles (Amin, 2009). New hybrid spaces are highlighted by the fusion of the material and the virtual within them (Leontidou, 2012a): spaces of flows, where the online and the offline merge into hybrid configurations. The public becomes common and acquires tangible cohesion, instant communication capacity, vitality and indeed reality as a hybrid realm. Common urban spaces are local and global, material and virtual at the same time, where politics, society, economy are discussed – on the web or in person – and alternative strategies or innovations crystallize. These are also trans-local spaces, because digital speed combats the friction of distance.

The material and the virtual eventually merge in the Mediterranean city in ways different from the North. Southern urban development has been spontaneous for a very long period of informality and self-organization (Leontidou, 1990). Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Mediterranean movements for the ‘right to the city’ mostly involved spontaneous urbanization: squatter settlements on peripheral land and popular illegal suburbs (Leontidou, 1990, 2010). These have been often as massive as in Latin America, where squatting now coincides with social movements acting as

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8. Ontology as a theory of being – social, cultural, political.

‘critical urban planning’ agents (Souza, 2006). Grassroots movements and creative initiatives to reconquer urban space, public land, parks and piazzas threatened by redevelopment are still stirring in the global South, but squatting on the urban periphery as a grassroots activity is almost extinct in South European cities since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, due to government coercion and ‘legalizations’ (Leontidou, 1990). Popular spontaneity has been transferred from the realm of struggles for shelter to anti-austerity mobilization (Leontidou, 2012a, 2014, 2015). New Mediterranean ‘leaderless movements’ have brought spontaneity closer to Gramsci’s definition. The idiosyncrasy of these movements is not that they lack organization, as critics of the concept of spontaneity claim. Spontaneity is rather defined as lack of hierarchies and an antithesis to conscious leadership (Gramsci, 1971, p. 196), not lack of organization (Leontidou, 2012a).

Mediterranean public spaces have never been regulated by zoning through the action of planners and the state, as their Northern counterparts. Southern cities have been always mixed, because of spontaneous activity and flexible work arrangements in the informal economy and housing (Leontidou, 1990; Gialis and Leontidou, 2014). Now this mixed land use is enhanced with hybridity, reproduced with the flowing fusion of material and virtual public spaces. Mobilizations extend from the online collection of signatures or calls for demonstrations, to offline active politics on the streets and piazzas. Virtual communication will always finally extend towards the physical, since material presence forges trust among activists in risky collective actions (Filiu, 2011; Castells, 2012). Besides the juxtaposition of purely material urban piazzas and purely virtual shared spaces of the Internet for communication and online mobilization, there are fusions emerging in internet cafés and wi-fi stations, in kiosks and tents during mobilizations, in Skype screens of teleconferencing and telecommunication among piazzas. These reproduce hybridity by extending their materiality towards further geographical boundaries, virtually.

In other words, digital spatialities obliterate the material/ virtual dualism and give the preponderance to in-between spaces: the two poles interact, giving birth to a third space of flows, a fusion of the material and the virtual, in fact a hybrid space. Individuals and/or groups engaged in digital activism do not remain online: they take to the streets and piazzas; and movements generated entirely online may then be moving offline (Bakardjieva et al., 2012; Harlow, 2011). In fact, while the distinction offline/online may have some methodological validity, the two ‘realities’ tend to merge and should be examined in conjunction rather than in opposition (Harlow,

2011; Meek, 2012; Afouxenidis, 2014). People reclaiming the streets and piazzas carry their digital devices there and remain constantly online, sustaining the fusion of the virtual and the material in public spaces. Inversely, the capacity of cell phones and e-networking for instantaneous mobilization of people to materially gather in streets and piazzas creates uprisings in the most unlikely places. These spontaneous relatively impromptu social gatherings in urban spaces, which are organized using social media, have a name since the 1990s: flash mobs (Meek, 2012, p. 1432). The hybrid public spaces emerging from this fusion constitute a previously inexistent public realm of trans-locality, where the interaction and constant interplay between material and virtual networks broadens the hybrid public spaces of communication, interaction and solidarity far beyond the local, flowing from the space of places towards the global.

The piazzas of Mediterranean European cities have seen many such trans-local spatialities in mobilizations during the 2010s. The occupations of Syntagma in Athens and Puerta del Sol in Madrid, following the 'Arab Spring' and coinciding with the Occupy movements in the Anglo-American world, were embedded in a continuum between virtual and material spaces. All these movements assembled with the exchange of messages in social media, had their ICT headquarters in tents, and were in constant interaction with remote spaces abroad (Leontidou, 2012a; Kousis, 2014). In Southern Europe, a screen was the material and virtual linkage between Syntagma, Athens, and Puerta del Sol, Madrid, in June 2011, where popular assemblies convened together by Skype, discussed several alternative strategies and practiced direct democracy, as in the ancient Greek *agora*, and more democratically, too, with the active participation of women (Leontidou, 2012a).

Digitalization was perhaps at its most vibrant during the summer of 2013 in Athens, when the Greek conservative government suddenly closed down ERT, the Hellenic TV, in a move of unprecedented censorship in modern Europe. All broadcasts of ERT stopped and TV screens went black in 11 June 2013 throughout Greece and abroad, too, radio stations were silenced, and journalists were sacked. However, the dismissed journalists did not abandon the premises and kept broadcasting through websites supporting their cause.<sup>9</sup> Crowds of protesters in the ERT courtyard came to watch the ERT web broadcasts on the large screen and attend concerts,

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9. Like the international one of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), at <http://www3.ebu.ch/cms/en/sites/ebu/contents/news/2013/06/monitor-ert-online.html> (last accessed in August 2013).

discussions and other events of solidarity by the international community. The ERT mobilizations signaled the most direct coexistence of the material and the virtual in the common space of the ERT courtyard, radiating to the broader cityscape and to the world by Internet. This had important wider repercussions, especially the sudden growth of digital literacy (Leontidou, 2014), because of the thrust of increasing numbers of people for Internet access to watch ERT online. Viewer numbers shot to high levels in Greece after the ERT TV ‘black screen’, when the older generation, too, went online to watch the forbidden channels. The operation went on after the events, with cooperative media: ERT Open kept broadcasting on the Internet<sup>10</sup> in the space of the ‘commons’.

Expressions of solidarity to Southern anti-austerity mobilizations from activists, intellectuals and artists abroad dissolve isolation and fear of the dystopias propagated by ruling elites of the EU, bankers and bureaucrats, and empower grassroots collectivities to resist neoliberal hegemony in Southern Europe. This undercurrent of empowering initiatives would be difficult to emerge without ICT. Interactive technology also offers opportunities for the survival of niches creativity at the aftermath of massive mobilizations. However, these alternative initiatives remain vulnerable, because they have not been valorized or protected. The constant interplay between creativity and repression, among theoretical dualisms, contrasts, utopias, and cross-fertilizations in contemporary Mediterranean cities is summed up in Table 1. The top lines include some antithetical or even clashing opposites in constant tension and contradiction; the middle (shaded) lines include apparent antitheses which, however, can be deconstructed; and the bottom lines include bipolarities and couplets in juxtaposition, interaction and cross-fertilization.

Vulnerability and empowerment, destruction and creation, austerity of the crisis and initiatives against it, interplay in a Janus-faced reality and can be deconstructed: destroy in order to create, or ‘creative destruction’, as Schumpeter (1939) suggested in a different context (Kourliouros, 2011, pp. 21, 148, 275-6). Grassroots creativity emerging from contentious politics can be conducive to social cohesion. Solidarity and interaction during upheavals melts antitheses and fosters harmony.

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10. Broadcasts continued at [www.ertopen.com](http://www.ertopen.com) (last accessed in May 2014), even after the establishment of NERIT by the conservative government on 4.5.2015 at 6 pm. This lasted for two years. On 11 June 2015, under the *Syriza* government, ERT reopened on the exact two-year anniversary of the ‘black screen’. Journalists, musicians, reporters were re-established in their jobs.

TABLE 1  
*Antitheses and Interactions*

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| Northern Europe  | distinguished from (unequal exchange, quasi-Orientalist and crypto-colonial discourse) | Southern Europe  |
| Neoliberal hegemony and top-down policy – autocracies  | distinguished from   | Grassroots solidarity and survival strategies – direct democracy   |
| Organization, planning, zoning in the city   | distinguished from   | Spontaneity, informality, porosity, mixed land use in the city   |
| Dystopia   | distinguished from   | Eutopia  |
| Destruction, violence, uricide   | is the other face of   | Grassroots creativity (creative destruction)   |
| Web concentrating power in the hands of the few and Internet as a tool against privacy and surveillance system | is the other face of   | Web as a promise for a more democratic future and Internet as a counter-hegemonic tool of instantaneous communication and international solidarity |
| Vulnerability  | is the other face of   | Empowerment  |
| The public   | mingles with   | The ‘commons’  |
| Material public spaces, the piazzas, internet cafés, free wi-fi bars   | Interplay or mingle with   | Virtual public spaces through broadband e-networking, wi-fi stations   |
| Offline  | mingles with   | Online   |
| Material grassroots alternative initiatives  | mingle with  | Digital grassroots alternative initiatives   |
| Spatial differentiation or heterogeneity, diversity, difference among cities                                   | interacts with   | Spatial harmonization of initiatives, interaction across space via ICT and social networks, and hence, coordination and homogeneity                |
| Mediterranean City theory  | cross-fertilized with  | Smart City theory  |
| Structure  | interacts with   | Agency   |

*Source: Constructed by the author.*

From a theoretical standpoint, the above discussion takes one step further the standard dilemma of Geography between spatial differentiation vs. homogeneity. Urban diversity, i.e. different forms and intensities of creativity by a multitude of actors and collectivities, coexists with the harmonization of alternative initiatives across space via ICT. In Southern European and other Mediterranean cities, harmonization follows communica-

tion through social networks, wherein collectivities now interconnected by e-networking in different cities and parts of the world take advantage of digital technology to expand their public realm, to open up the ‘commons’, to cross-fertilize their ideas, and coordinate their alternative strategies in communication and harmony with similar collectivities at a long distance. Grassroots creativity builds up towards the crystallization of alternative urbanism. Digital societies facilitate the encounter between diverse cities through ICT and thus tend to harmonize spatially differentiated uprisings, social mobilizations, and their aftermath.

### SMART CITIES vs THE URBAN MELTDOWN

Let us now formalize the above discussion in the context of urban theory. ICT penetration in Mediterranean public spaces in combination with the debt crisis throws new light to the contradiction between urban blight and regeneration. We explore the latter here by recalling the concept of Smart City, which becomes, unexpectedly, an offspring of the crisis in the EU South and will be analyzed in this paper as a means to counteract the crisis. But let us first understand the impact of the crisis on the city. The urban meltdown is a combination of urban decline and urbicide, the destruction of the city during clashes between the police and activists. The meltdown is remarkable and, among Greek cities of impoverishment and blight, Athens has been in the global spotlight for several years, with striking spectacles of urbicide during upheavals, especially since December 2008. Riots broke out when the police killed a 15-year-old schoolboy, Alexis Grigoropoulos (Vradis and Dalakoglou, 2011; Giovanopoulos and Mitropoulos, 2011; Douzinas, 2013). The city was then in flames in 2008 with recurrent urbicide again later, especially in 2011 and 2013.

As for urban decline, Athens is sometimes compared with Third World cities, but it does not even have their dynamism, as shown on Table 2.

TABLE 2  
*Counter-urbanization in Athens, 1981-2011*

| Urban sector   | 1981      | 1991      | 2001      | 2011      |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Attica         | 3,369,425 | 3,523,408 | 3,761,810 | 3,812,330 |
| Greater Athens | 3,038,245 | 3,072,922 | 3,187,734 | 3,122,540 |
| Central Athens | 885,737   | 772,072   | 745,514   | 655,780   |

*Source: Adapted by the author from Statistical Service of Greece (ELSTAT) general census data.*

Greater Athens entered the EU in 1981 with 3,038,245 inhabitants, a population slightly increasing until the wake of the new millennium, but shrinking below the level of natural increase according to provisional data of the 2011 census. Some urban sprawl to the periphery made the broader Attica region a more dynamic area, especially in the 1990s, held to the top by middle-class households leaving the inner city, as well as entrepreneurs with contracts for infrastructure provision and real estate developers (Couch et al., 2007). By contrast, a literal collapse has hit the inner city. Huge dimensions of depopulation are found by a glance at the last row of Table 2: the central Athens municipality entered the EU with 885,737 people in 1981, but gradually and then suddenly – during the crisis – lost much of its population and remained with 655,780 inhabitants, according to the 2011 census.

The decline is the effect of several parallel processes: (a) the move of the bourgeoisie and middle classes to the suburbs (more pronounced in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Leontidou 2011a); (b) de-industrialization, or rather de-commercialization and the departure of small entrepreneurs who used to combine work and residence in the inner city; (c) the migration of the young, a brain drain (Lambrianides and Vogiatzis, 2013); (d) homelessness of the *nouveau* poor (Kaika, 2012), some of whom often used to be proper middle classes but have lost their jobs and their belongings and have been evicted from their homes, but also (e) the hidden population of migrants, who feared to face the interviewers during the 2011 census.<sup>11</sup> Still, no matter how many clandestine migrants evaded the census, it is a fact that Athens not only is no longer the fast-growing city as it was in the twentieth century, but is undergoing a counter-urbanization phase unprecedented in Mediterranean urban histories.

Almost all of the shrinkage of the Greek population these years originates in Athens. The whole urban economy has collapsed, with shop closures, bankruptcies, a depressed housing market, a shrinking estate sector, at the same time as there is over-taxation of property, as well as evictions, in order to satisfy Eurozone lenders. The urban meltdown is visible in the urban landscape, with closed-down shops on every street and corner outnumbering the open ones, empty houses marked by a multitude of signs ‘To Let’ or ‘For Sale’ on every street, and vandalized property. But the

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11. Migrants frightened from police ‘clearances’ (‘skoupa’ operations) in 2011 kept hiding from interviewers. Despite this major flaw of the census, however, the fact of a major population loss hitting the central Athens municipality remains.

worst sight is the desperate faces of the homeless, the beggars, the vagabonds every step of the way, roaming the city streets in the 2010s. A cultural crisis is lurking, a crisis in civil society (Leontidou, 2015), with the rise of the extreme Right and urban criminality in certain nuclei of a city which used to be one of the safest ones in the world. Destitution is most evident around Omonia and Victoria Squares and in some parks, the largest of which is Pedion Areos, where recent migrants and refugees from the Middle East assemble. Urban blight haunts the whole EU South, as shown in economic indicators for Spain and Italy, too (Gialis and Leontidou, 2014), as well as Portugal (Gonzalez and Carril, 2013; ESPON-SIESTA, 2013), but Greece is worse off. The global financial crisis is transforming Mediterranean eutopias of sunshine, culture and *joie de vivre* into bleak dystopias (Leontidou, 2014).

Top-down policy considers bringing urban regeneration by ‘shop front works’ (*erga vitrinas*), decorative interventions to boost land and property values and satisfy urban tourism, like the pedestrianization and the decoration of central arteries (e.g. Panepistimiou St in Athens<sup>12</sup>), the renovation of certain areas, the gentrification of others to the benefit of entrepreneurs, as in Istanbul (Lovering and Türkmen, 2011; Eraydin and Tasan-Kok, 2014; Oktem Unsal, 2015), and major works along the seafront. Our reflection in this paper is that, besides its unjust effects in the social composition of the affected urban areas, this consumption-oriented approach is inappropriate for the South, which requires mainly the creation of value by productive activities to overcome the crisis.

Niches of grassroots creativity combined with wide ICT dissemination points to other, innovative, ways of counteracting the dystopia. We will support their importance by linking up with past concepts of Smart Cities, Creative cities, technopoles and cyberspaces.<sup>13</sup> These were inspired by neoliberal assumptions, which only incorporated knowledge and tech-

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12. For an extended critique, see the inspired satirical work by visual artists of Arbit City Group against the Panepistimiou project: <http://arbitcitygroup.com/> (last accessed in May 2015). See also Leontidou, 2011b.

13. Literature stressed Industrial Districts in the 1980s (technological parks etc., Kourliouros, 1998), Learning Regions in the 1990s (regional innovation systems etc, Storper 1992), Science Parks and technopoles all along (Kourliouros and Panagopoulos, 2013) – especially along corridors of ‘smart growth’ in the UK (Massey et al., 1992), or EU developmental corridors, consisting of high GDP percentages and people employed in ICT by region (ESPON-SIESTA, 2013). In the case of cities, literature now leans less to Smart Cities and more to Creative Cities, which is a different concept (Florida, 2002; Pratt, 2011).



nological sophistication at the elite level, before ICT use was popularized. Now digital technologies saturate the quotidian and the public realm, and they increasingly fall to the hands of digitally literate, highly educated (hence, intelligent), highly skilled young people and their creative collectivities, belonging to the knowledge economy. These people often feed the Mediterranean ‘brain drain’, by migrating abroad and excelling in foreign lands.<sup>14</sup> If they do not, they may roam in unemployment, which hits overwhelming percentages of young people;<sup>15</sup> they may engage in activism; and they may also become exactly the main ‘human capital’ for the configuration of the Smart City.

Smart City is basically a nomothetic<sup>16</sup> and proactive concept, which places technology and knowledge as the important factors against urban blight (Campbell, 2012). In mainstream bibliography, the concept has a strong technological component, including communication technologies, data management technologies and digital applications; it also has a human component with higher education and skills leading to innovation and knowledge-based regional development (Kourliouros and Panagopoulos, 2013). If we employ it to cities of the current debt crisis, its emphasis on technology and knowledge can be retained. The hybrid urban public spaces of the Mediterranean during the crisis constitute the basic core of the Smart City, which is composed by innovative articulations of diverse components.

The concept of the Smart City in its present form appears largely inappropriate for Mediterranean cities and the crisis-hit Southern Europe, because it prioritizes competitiveness and economic growth rather than informality, ‘commoning’, spontaneity and development, and addresses dominant groups and power elites, neglecting the grassroots and relegating them to austerity, destroying their life prospects in the years of the debt crisis. We propose here to revisit theories of the Smart City with the theoretical ambition of disembedding them from the neoliberal logic of capitalist accumulation, entrepreneurial city, urban competition and gentrification.

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14. The outflow of the last 20 years of globalization (Lambrianides, 2011, 2013) was exacerbated with the debt crisis (Lambrianides and Vogiatzis, 2013).

15. In Greece by November 2013 unemployment had hit a high of 28% of the labour force, and youth unemployment (15-24 years old) an abhorrent 61.4% (ELSTAT estimates in February 2014; cf. Gialis and Leontidou, 2014).

16. In the sense used in Human Geography, nomothetic science seeks general laws, tends to projections, and constitutes the antithesis to ideographic notions of possibilist Geography (Leontidou, 2011a).

Smart City theory does not have to espouse the neoliberal logic, in which it has been embedded for so long and in such an exclusive manner. With ICT dissemination, common spaces of broader solidarities are emerging. The massive entrance of the e-networked grassroots can release the concept of the Smart City from the neoliberal logic, while retaining many of its technological and human/ knowledge components.

Smart City theory has been constantly reformulated in the last decades, with layers added to its definition in different periods of time corresponding to different theoretical approaches and policies.<sup>17</sup> The concept must be distinguished from Florida's (2002) Creative City, because the latter prioritizes culture and the affluent classes rather than technology, environment and the knowledge economy. Although knowledge interacts with all of these elements in both concepts, some are prioritized more strongly in each one of them. By going deeper into this transformation, we can actually deconstruct top-down policy as reflected in the multitude of documents produced,<sup>18</sup> and come to explore innovative or radical grassroots actions and alternative initiatives outside the realm of conventional policies. This is a popular, grassroots, Smart City that we are seeking here.

The wide diffusion of wireless technology and e-networking lies at the core of mainstream theories of the Smart City, and it is one short step ahead, to link it up with the e-networked grassroots, which is quite dynamic, or even cosmopolitan. The theory can be re-invigorated if we rearrange its components, keeping knowledge, innovation and the role of ICT at the core of the Smart City theory, but emphasizing the grassroots on the one hand, and trans-locality on the other, with a cross-fertilization with Mediterranean city theory.

Such a breakthrough is happening in the Creative City debate, with a critique of Florida (2002) and the departure from entrepreneurialism (Evans, 2009; Grodach, 2013; Peck, 2005; Pratt, 2011), and even a turn towards the grassroots with the adoption of the concept of the 'creative underclass' (Gornostaeva and Campbell, 2012; Morgan and Ren, 2012).

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17. In the new millennium, Digital Cities (Craglia et al., 2004), Intelligent Cities (Komninos, 2008; Deakin et al., 2012), and more recently Regional Smart Specialization (EC S3 2013) and smart growth (ESPON-SIESTA, 2013) have been added.

18. At the turn of the 21st century, the EU saw the proliferation of several documents on 'Smart Growth', the flagship initiatives 'A Digital Agenda for Europe', 'Innovation union', 'Youth on the Move', and 'an Agenda for New Skills and Jobs', which highlight basic dimensions and relevant policy guidelines toward 'Smart Growth' (CEC, 2001, 2002; Gonzalez and Carril, 2013; ESPON-SIESTA, 2013).

By contrast, the concept of the Smart City has not been problematized or deconstructed adequately, and the neoliberal logic is still taken for granted. Only recently have Schaffers et al. (2012) argued that the Smart City is composed by three components (socio-economic, knowledge/ institutional, and technological), but have also suggested another definition, considering how people are empowered, through using technology, for contributing to urban change and realizing their ambitions. This departs slightly from earlier mainstream definitions of creativity and policy 'from above', wherein the grassroots is considered as rather passive and inert, and its alternative initiatives are ignored, to the expense of social cohesion, development and innovation. Further departures have recently appeared outside mainstream academic journals: Biduneau-Wang and Galharret (2011) incorporate alternative currencies into the Smart City debate, and Ratti and Townsend (2011) argue that central planning fails in understanding peoples' needs, because it ignores the creative potential of the grassroots and goals of social cohesion, quality of life and direct democracy.

The incorporation of the grassroots into the discussion of the Smart City is urgent in the case of the Mediterranean, not only because of its pivotal role in the present crisis, but also because popular strata have had a long historic role in urban restructuring in Southern Europe (Leontidou 1990). In Greece, elites tended to live in secluded quarters or to reside abroad and be much less important for domestic urban and local issues than in the North.<sup>19</sup> By contrast, workers, informal labourers and home workers have often figured as the most crucial social classes in Mediterranean urban histories through their spontaneous action (Leontidou, 1990, 2012a). In the crisis, this spontaneous action involves digital creativity enclaves. These constitute the third alternative, between the dark prospect of unemployment/ homelessness/ *nouveau* poor/ destitution on the one hand, and displacement on the other: the brain drain, which emerges with the young skilled population as its core (Lambrianides, 2013). It is worth exploring ways to enhance this trend and strategies of reversal of the urban meltdown. As the previously unchallenged hegemony of neoliberalism is contested during the crisis, we can venture to emphasize the grassroots dimension and its post-materialist values superseding consumerism (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Grodach, 2013; De Angelis, 2010).

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19. Foreign elites were more active since the time of the Bavarians, who reigned and built Athens in the 19th century, and the refugee settlement in the interwar period, which was realized by the League of Nations (Leontidou, 1990).

During the recent debt crisis young people, often unemployed or underemployed, tend to form an educated grassroots with online participation, which produces interactive alternative initiatives, informal activities, solidarity endeavors, diverse economies, the ‘commons’, and spontaneous social mobilization for the allocation of resources ‘from below’ (as on Table 3 in the next section). Their inventiveness should not be considered as mere survival: it is gradually acknowledged that several niches of creativity have emerged in the wasteland of the Eurozone crisis, quite vulnerable but also empowered by autonomy, knowledge, and the use of technology. Popular e-networking thus becomes a means to open innovation, hence, a key factor for social cohesion and social justice in the city (Mitchell, 2003; Leontidou, 2006, 2010). By inserting the notion of grassroots creativity as a component of Smart City theory, we disentangle the latter from the grip of neoliberalism and, in a way, we democratize the debate.

#### TOWARDS A TYPOLOGY OF ALTERNATIVE CREATIVE GRASSROOTS INITIATIVES

Transformations towards a Mediterranean grassroots Smart City emerge out of creative initiatives, actions, strategies and interactions supported by ICT. It is especially interesting that many of these have been emerging in the aftermath of major mobilizations. We can therefore speculate, that the anti-austerity movement and, indirectly, austerity or the crisis itself, seem to create qualitative transformations of the city such as the emergence of creative niches, which can potentially overthrow the crisis! These are not widespread or massive phenomena, but they are linked to networked collectivities which communicate, often globally, via ICT use. We can already present a relevant typology based on our empirical study of evidence from South European urban experiences through participant observation and the Internet. Current research has been discovering diverse economies and the ‘commons’, but does not differentiate these on the basis of the technological component, which is not universal in the above, but is of interest to our approach here. The three spatial scales of the following exploratory two-dimensional typology also reflect degrees of ‘digitalization’ and flow: mainly offline & local; hybrid & national; mainly online & international. Its seven parallel axes depict types of creative alternative initiatives, as follows:

1. Alternative **political mobilizations** in public spaces engage people outside the traditional political system (Afouxenidis, 2014). During the

crisis, social rather than political movements predominate,<sup>20</sup> which address the economic crisis, oppose austerity policies and the democratic deficit, and actively undermine the current hegemony of neoliberalism. As several citizens are involved in e-networking and Web 2.0 applications rather than becoming members of political parties, the diffusion of ICT raises urgent antithetical arguments: is political participation decreasing and political apathy increasing with the use of ICT and/ or the concentration of power via ICT? Or is political participation merely changing, taking new forms (Putnam, 2000; Dahlgren, 2009; Afouxenidis, 2012)? We tend to the second alternative. In popular assemblies during the ‘movement of the piazzas’ in Spain and Greece in 2011, the grassroots supported the political philosophy of direct democracy rather than representative democracy. They have debated ways of interacting, discussing and voting independently from political parties. Collectivities, networks of activists and unattached citizens in Athens have revived the ancient *agora* in Syntagma Square; but contrary to classical antiquity, women were included, as already pointed out (Leontidou, 2012a, 2014). Digital communication among cities of the world broadened the spaces of interaction, creating innovations in political participation and political utopias, emergent during the Movement of the piazzas. They started locally and became international, like the Occupy movement, which is now global.

**2. Alternative/ diverse economies and ‘commoning’** have been documented by voluminous bibliography (Gibson-Graham, 2008, 2010; De Angelis, 2010; Stavrides, 2014; Gritzas and Kavoulakos, 2015): grassroots networks of solidarity initiatives and survival ventures support new definitions of the ‘commons’ and the so-called social and solidarity economy.<sup>21</sup> They promote alternative initiatives of exchange without intermediaries. Transactions in kind rather than money, bartering, alternative currencies (e.g. the much-discussed bitcoin) and costing units of time play a major

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20. Social movements as defined by Castells (2012) do not aim at power, but at alternative societies and cultures.

21. Besides a growing bibliography, the Internet is full of examples: see the film of 2014 on Greek knowledge ‘commons’ in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8iCZgZEYm0w&feature=youtu.be> (accessed in March 2014). There are exchange bazaars, alternative currencies, time banks, exchange without intermediaries, markets of food distribution, urban vegetable gardens, seed exchange banks, collective kitchens, social groceries, solidarity hospitals and pharmacies and education establishments, productive ventures, migrants assistance, antiracist organizations and festivals, squats, collective use of cars, vacation exchange networks, and other initiatives which fall to our other categories, too, besides 2.

role in these solidarity economies (North, 2007; Amin, 2009). Cooperatives of organic production and consumption, social groceries, community-supported and collective agricultural production are based in peri-urban areas and the countryside, but they always affect cities and are mostly networked digitally. All these constitute survival efforts, but also creative initiatives of ‘commoning’ and alternative institution building, as well as innovation. They lead to the creation of a cooperative social/ economic/ cultural life, alternative to the dominant one which is recently deformed by neoliberalism, austerity and the crisis. Solidarity networks taking up welfare services include health care, which is provided in a multitude of local bases by *Medécins sans Frontières* and the *Doctors of the World*. Cooperative media, like *ERT Open* since 2013 and the earlier *Efimerida ton Syntakton* in Greece, can be added on to this category.

**3. Productive innovation networks** can be used as start-up ventures in the Smart City as theorized here, with a core of grassroots creativity. Software production in independent networks of ‘commoning’ and around universities has been mushrooming in Greece, especially after 2008 and then after 2011,<sup>22</sup> when the Athens uprisings brought together young people interested in ICT and sharing values about direct democracy and digital freedom in a “commons-based restructuring of production”.<sup>23</sup> These networks support the free circulation of knowledge and work toward the creation of indigenous innovation in software to upgrade the place of the country, which is now a periphery consuming innovations produced abroad. Indeed they innovate in open software production and its implementation, such as 3-D printing,<sup>24</sup> communications and networking for the public. Another branch of productive innovation is oriented towards open energy production for citizens to share in the ‘commons’. Networks of citizens ex-

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22. The Digital Liberation Network (DLN) was established in 2008, after the Athens riots, and hackerspace.gr appeared in 2011, directly in the aftermath of anti-austerity movements.

23. Title by Vasilis Kostakis to his presentation of P2P Lab in the CommonsFest in Athens, 17.05.2015; see also the argument by other members of labs, in the 51st minute of the film on Greek knowledge ‘commons’ in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8iCZgZEYm0w&feature=youtu.be> (accessed in March 2014). They call themselves ‘children of 2008’ and expand on their activities in producing software in networks of ‘commoning’. See <https://dln.gr> (accessed in September 2014). Among important production networks we can also mention Hum[Erus], <http://humerusrobot.wordpress.com>, to labaki hackerspace, <http://wiki.tolabaki.gr> (all accessed in September 2014) and others in the above film.

24. P2P lab, Ioannina, <http://p2plab.gr> (accessed in September 2014) have developed open technologies of 3-D printing of objects for the blind. Talin university rather than Greek ones was interested in their work.

periment on technological self-sufficiency and sustainable development.<sup>25</sup> Productive innovation networks are basically isolated from ‘the markets’: they produce use values for sharing, and their members do not usually earn their living through them. They criticize finance capitalism. The option of linking up with alternative economies is still open and full of suggestions.

4. Networks of intervention in local development and the ‘**right to the city**’ are the most numerous and well-documented throughout Southern Europe.<sup>26</sup> Collectivities have long ago opposed urban renewal and mega-events, have occupied and enlivened urban public spaces and have formed or inspired neighbourhood development groups since a very long time.<sup>27</sup> The ‘right to the city’ today retains its emphasis on struggles for housing and against evictions, is often assisted by ICT, and emphasizes the urban ‘commons’ (De Angelis, 2010; Stavrides, 2014). Counter-eviction mobilizations predominate in Spain and Italy, whereas in Greece there are mobilizations for reclaiming public space as common space. Such mobilizations are most impressive in Turkey (Lovering and Türkmen, 2011), with the 2013 mobilization for Gezi Park as the top example (Oktem Unsal, 2015). Hundreds of occupations of vacant plots and empty property, squats, social centres, and other means of reconquering urban spaces<sup>28</sup> may turn into incubators of innovation – though activists are systematically undermined and assaulted by dominant classes as ‘delinquents’, or even ‘terrorists’.

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25. Networks for open energy production include the project Aktina including Energize, City Index Lab (<http://www.cityindexlab.com>, accessed in September 2014), on technological self-sufficiency there is spithari waking life (<http://www.spithari.org>, accessed in September 2014); for an inclusive presentation of several productive innovation networks see the above film (Footnotes 21, 23).

26. Evidence abounds - all of the following were retrieved in mid-March 2013. Rome: <http://baruda.net/tag/blocchi-precari-metropolitani> and <http://www.radiondadurto.org/2013/01/19/diritto-alla-casa-riprendiamo> - Florence: <http://lottaperlacasafirenze.noblogs.org> - Madrid: <http://eurovegasno.blogspot.gr> and <http://afectadosporlahipotecamadrid.net> - Barcelona: <http://defensemportvell.wordpress.com> - Lisbon: - <http://plataformagueto.wordpress.com/2012/01/13/plataforma-gueto> and [http://www.portaldahabitacao.pt/pt/ibc/lagarteiro/aconteceu\\_ibc\\_lagart](http://www.portaldahabitacao.pt/pt/ibc/lagarteiro/aconteceu_ibc_lagart) and <http://www.habita.info>.

27. See Lefebvre, 1968; Leontidou, 1990, 2010; Mitchell, 2003; Horta, 2004; Harvey, 2012. Besides Europe and the USA, in Mediterranean and Latin American squatter settlements social movements have innovated as ‘critical urban planning’ agents (Souza 2006).

28. Mayer, 2009; Leontidou, 2010, 2012; Brenner et al., 2012; Harvey, 2012. It is worth referring here to the Snea Viscosa social centre, a major occupation on the outskirts of Rome, which supports alternative activities and ‘commoning’ and also provides shelter to people. Toward the same suburban location there are also squatter buildings, such as those in Corviale.

5. Linked with the above and addressing the cultural dimension of the 'right to the city', it is worth investigating **alternative cultural empowerment**.<sup>29</sup> Artistic political creativity has been popularized by the Internet as innovative graphic design, blogs, You Tube uploads and images (Castells, 2012, p. 107). Moreover, the staging of open-air cultural events, festivals, popular museums and libraries, alternative exhibitions, performative arts, music, graffiti, recreation initiatives, innovative and radical art strategies involve the grassroots in more demanding creative forms (Klanten and Hübner, 2010; Millington, 2011; Tsilimpounidi, 2012). Mainstream bibliography has addressed the role of artists in the Creative City during the process of gentrification (Zukin, 1982, cf critique by Morgan and Ren, 2012; Gornostaeva and Campbell, 2012), but here we have no 'gentry'. We have situationist approaches to art (Barnard, 2004) in reconquered niches of the city, and re-used derelict industrial spaces, where alternative cultural empowerment emerges, often in hybrid forms of material and virtual spaces. Innovative interventions and experimentation in the city involve diverse innovations, as well as the reinterpretation of tradition, in ways that the pioneers of performative arts used to do (Konomis, 2015). These are not always exactly public art, but most frequently rather belong to the 'commons'.

**6. Diasporic** initiatives involve digital exchange and interaction with the 'homeland' by South Europeans settled in cities around the globe. Those departing from Greece, in mounting numbers, inevitably leave a brain drain behind (Lambrianides and Vogiatzis, 2013). As if offering an antidote to this loss, the Diasporic communities become active in the virtual common space in solidarity to the 'homeland'. Satellite TV keeps them informed and they sustain their links with the place of origin more than ever in the period of globalization and the crisis. Solidarity activities of these communities are now coming centre stage with methods of virtual mobilization via Web 2.0 applications and e-networking, such as the collection of signatures to stop the assault of privatization and to promote various humanitarian causes, as well as material mobilizations, such as marches and picketing initiatives or fundraising. Inversely, the involve-

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29. As evidence, all of the following were retrieved in mid-March 2013. Milano: <http://www.temporioso.org> - Palermo: <http://www.palermoreport.it/cultura-a-palermo/i-cantieri-che-vogliamo> - Florence: - Madrid: <http://www.traficantes.net>. During the same period in Greece there were: <http://atenistas.org/> - <http://blog.orientasgegonon.gr> - <http://synallois.org/> - <http://oikodiktyo.espivblogs.net/> - <http://www.proskalo.net> (includes an open university) and other cultural, ecological and educational collectivities.



TABLE 3  
*A two-dimensional typology with examples from Greece*

| Alternative Creative Initiatives:                | Mainly offline and Local (and Urban)  | Hybrid and Trans-local, National  | Mainly online and International (and Global)  |
|--|---|---|---|
| 1. Alternative political mobilizations           | Social centres, squats, stekia, <sup>30</sup> occupied villas, neighbourhood assemblies   | Popular assemblies in urban piazzas of Greece – Syntagma of Athens, central piazzas of provincial towns                                   | Movement of the piazzas, interaction between Athens and Madrid by Skype, networking with the Occupy Movement  |
| 2. Alternative/diverse economies and ‘commoning’ | Cooperatives of consumption, social groceries, <sup>31</sup> open markets, <sup>32</sup> collective kitchens, urban and peri-urban gardens, self-managed medical centres. | Alternative currency, exchange of goods without intermediaries (Peliti seeds, ‘potato movement’)  | NGOs only found (e.g. Médecins sans Frontières)   |
| 3. Productive innovation networks                | Technological self-sufficiency and sustainable development innovations, e.g. Spithari   | Production of software, 3-D printing, robotics, or open energy by ‘commoning’ networks, <sup>33</sup> e.g. DLN, P2P lab hackerspace.gr    | Production of software by international networks, e.g. Fablab around 85 University labs <sup>34</sup>   |
| 4. The ‘right to the city’                       | Defense of public spaces, Exarcheia, occupation of Navarino Park in Athens, former airport in Elliniko. <sup>35</sup>   | Occupations of several Greek town piazzas simultaneously, collectivities such as Imagine the City.  | European network of urban movements (Alter-globalization fora in Athens 2006 and other occasions), but some of them are NGOs                                  |
| 5. Alternative cultural empowerment              | Street Theatre, Street art scene: Athens Plaython, <sup>36</sup> ArbitCity Group, Bleeps.gr, Athens Culture Networks, open-air events                                     | Athens Art Network, <sup>37</sup> Frown- performance, Art Resistance, Art Bank, Rock and hip hop groups including Killah P. <sup>38</sup> | Blogs, uploads of art and music, events in Athens piazzas by Théâtre du Soleil (from Paris); Tiger Lillies (from London); international day of Street Theatre |
| 6. Diasporic initiatives                         |   |   | Online cosmopolitan activism  |
| 7. Global e-networks                             |   |   | Global NGOs <sup>39</sup>   |

*Source: Compiled by the author from participant observation and Internet sites mentioned above in the footnotes, with additional examples given by the colleagues in the first footnote of this article.*

30. We can find them mapped on the Internet by area, e.g. for the central Athens self-managed social spaces and squats the map is on [http://www.enallaktikos.gr/kg15el\\_antallaktika-diktya\\_t65\\_k9186.html](http://www.enallaktikos.gr/kg15el_antallaktika-diktya_t65_k9186.html) (accessed in February 2014).

ment of diasporas in homeland politics can be conservative. And their information can be controlled, as it was during the summer of 2013, when the Greek government shut down ERT and their satellite TV went black.

**7. Global e-networks'** legacy was created during alter-globalization movements, when the cities of the world were filled by *flâneur* activists connected via ICT and regularly assembling in various cities of the world (Leontidou 2006). Such international or global or cosmopolitan collectivities with an impact from the local up to the global scale include diasporic ones, environmental, human rights and alter-globalization networks concerned with global but also local sustainable development, social justice and the environment, and major NGOs exemplified by Greenpeace, Avaaz, Médecins sans Frontiers, and many other global collectivities. Since most of these are actually NGOs rather than spontaneous movements, however, as are most of the global networks we can refer to here, including them would mean that we change the subject (Souza, 2013; Leontidou, 2015).

The above axes of creativity must be urgently considered as alternative initiatives or development strategies worth incorporating into the logic of the Smart City. Some are particular to the South, while others embrace several regions. They do not appear with the same frequency, intensity, content and form across Mediterranean spaces and localities. It is fascinat-

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31. Evidence abounds for Greece, including 3175 exchange and solidarity networks by locality and region, which can be found in [http://www.enallaktikos.gr/kg15el\\_diktya-allileggyis.html](http://www.enallaktikos.gr/kg15el_diktya-allileggyis.html) (accessed in February 2014).

32. E.g. open market without intermediaries at the Piraeus port, 2014.

33. See footnotes 20-22 above and the inclusive film <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8iCZgZEYm0w&feature=youtu.be> (accessed in March 2014).

34. Fablab (Fablabathens.gr, accessed in September 2014) is based in the National Technical University (NTUA) as part of a network of 85 labs around the world coordinated by MIT to develop digital production in microfactories, networks, homes.

35. For self-managed agricultural fields in Elliniko and proposals for a metropolitan park in the area, see <http://parkoellinikou.blogspot.gr> (accessed in March 2013). Occupations in other towns include the occupied Viome factory in Thessaloniki, the Castle & barracks as common space in Keratea, etc.

36. See <http://athensplaython.org> (accessed in September 2014).

37. See [www.athensartnetwork.gr](http://www.athensartnetwork.gr) (accessed in September 2014) for a nation-wide and internationally connected initiative since 2012, which has been established in 2012 to organize and encourage alternative cultural institutions like Garden Festival, Little Paris, Meditertopolis, etc.

38. The hip hop musician Pavlos Fyssas, murdered by *Chrysi Avgi* party thugs. For Frown-performance see [www.frownetails.com](http://www.frownetails.com) (accessed in September 2014).

39. Greenpeace (<http://www.greenpeace.org/>), Avaaz (<http://www.avaaz.org/>), Médecins sans Frontiers (<http://www.msf.org/>) (accessed in February 2014).

ing to understand and interpret the unequal development of creativity, not only in different urban and regional settings, where it is embedded, but also in different international, Diaspora and global communities. A series of typologies can be created, similar with the following one, illustrated with examples from Greece:

The initiatives shown on the above tentative table are networked each one for itself, but, among them, they are rather fragmented and dispersed. The CommonsFest, organized yearly first in Heracleio and now in Athens (15-17.05.2015), has opened up the interaction among some of the initiatives on Axis 2 and 3; but we can reflect on the strength of change in socioeconomic regimes if such initiatives came to collaborate. Brand new combinations would give the Smart City a totally new meaning! The table also opens broader theoretical questions of local/ global interplay and the continuum between virtuality and materiality in cultural, economic and political intervention. Another challenging aspect of the typology is the possibility of further subdivision on the basis of the innovative dimension of virtual/ material / hybrid spaces and intermediate trans-local spatial scales. But this would require further research, more empirical cases, and a more advanced platform. The above table is a first attempt to systematize initiatives in the context of hybridity and the harmonization of diverse spaces under way in Smart Cities of the crisis.

#### SUPPRESSION OR INCUBATION?

It has been argued in this paper that the components, and mainly the actors, of urban initiatives, are changing during the debt crisis, especially in the Mediterranean. The parallel movement of the crisis – accompanied by unemployment and the brain drain – and ICT dissemination and penetration, creates contradictions but also gives rise to initiatives which highlight popular spontaneity at its best. People who are e-networked, educated and inventive venture to change their everyday lives and local economies by associating in common and diverse collectivities without leaders or hierarchies and by opening up digitally to global networks and cosmopolitan cultures. In an ever more complex and indeed hybrid public realm, a space of flows (Castells, 2012), people at long distances interact frequently: activists, collectivities, popular assemblies, and cities of Spain, Greece, Turkey, Egypt and beyond interact in virtual sectors and spaces. Cities open up to the twofold ensemble of virtual and material, a fusion which leads to urban transformation.

The introduction of the digitally literate grassroots enhances creativity to combat the debt crisis and tends toward strengthening Mediterranean ‘weak’ civil societies (Leontidou, 2010, 2015). This creativity has inspired us to include the grassroots into the Smart City concept. The examples given above and other such alternative initiatives are still fragmented and spontaneous, in Gramsci’s (1971, p. 196) sense; but they are on the rise.

The power elites keep suppressing them, continuing a long history of recuperation or cooptation of discourses, suppression of uprisings for the ‘right to the city’ in material public spaces and piazzas, often by violent means. Sometimes this does not even keep up appearances. In Greece coercion (rather than hegemony) has been exercised to subsume grassroots alternative initiatives into the dominant cultures and values (Leontidou, 1990, 2010). There has been unprecedented police brutality since 2008, during the ‘clearance’ of Syntagma in July 2011, extended till 2013. Early that year, squats and social centres were attacked and evacuated and their inhabitants were even branded ‘terrorists’. In late 2013 the attack against ERT journalists signalled unscrupulous censorship and attempts to control virtual spaces. In this way popular creativity is constantly stifled in a cruel, insensitive and autocratic environment. Austerity policy has been implemented with the use of force – assaults, cooptation, recuperation, state and EU coercion, quasi-Orientalism and constant stigmatization by power elites. This type of neoliberal top-down ‘policy’ has been largely responsible for unemployment, unregulated migration and the brain drain, as well as uricide; it has been undermining the decent survival and the dignity of the popular strata, let alone grassroots creativity. In the early 2010s offensives became too loud.

In such a climate, constructive grassroots alternative initiatives may be transformed to destructive ones. Inversely and ironically, however, this climate has indirectly boosted creativity in Greece, and eventually gave birth to constructive strategies counteracting assaults, suppression, recuperation, and the resulting urban blight. In other words, austerity indirectly gave rise to popular creativity in the aftermath of anti-austerity movements. Initiatives like those shown on Table 3 are all very recent: they have followed oscillations of popular mobilization, and can be now considered as alternative strategies of urban revival in a digital society.

Social movements require resilience in order to end up in such alternative initiatives, and their aftermath of creative action has to be supported, if development is sought. How can vulnerable emergent innovative actions, and collectivities creating them, be protected from top-down coercion, and

assisted to overcome their fragmentation and enhance their positive role in social cohesion and innovation, hence, development? One line of protection comes from cosmopolitan solidarity brought about by social networks: the local level expands to the trans-local by ICT and Web 2.0, obtaining strength and effectiveness by attracting attention and support by other collectivities and interacting with them. Solidarity networks then counteract violence, desperation, immiseration, and also emigration. Another line of protection comes from the democratization of knowledge, partly with dissemination and partly with research, which will seek, evaluate, compare and contrast diverse constructive strategies of solidarity, alternative networks of initiative and creativity.

Networks of solidarity and knowledge are invaluable, but they are not enough. Vulnerability is actually caused by top-down policy, national and EU. At best, policy stresses 'shopfront' works to regenerate cities, instead of embeddedness and synergies necessary for the protection and interconnection of creative niches (Leontidou, 2015). At worst, top-down policy has been exhausted in coercion to enforce the austerity memoranda of the 2010s. It is being increasingly realized by affected people, that austerity is actually a strategy for cheap labour reproduction rather than a necessity. Assaults tend to obliterate alternative initiatives at the very period when cities need them most, in order to recover from the crisis. Wide e-networking at the international scale opens up options at the grassroots level, but this must expand and become a central objective of top-down policy, too. EU elites and bureaucrats must now abandon the quasi-Orientalist discourses, must revise their objectives and strategies for domination, and must reconsider hegemony rather than coercion (Gramsci, 1971). Insistence on austerity will multiply dystopias and reproduce poverty and the crisis in general.

The only emergent hope of the dispossessed South is its youth, even if many of them finally opt for emigration. Policy makers have yet to engage with the youth of Europe toward Smart Cities, rather than branding them as delinquents in the quasi-Orientalist discourse of the North. Positive policy would certainly counteract the 'brain drain', from which the South is suffering during the crisis. The very people who, having spent a long period in higher education, are prone to migrate abroad after roaming in unemployment or becoming destructive, could be turned into valuable human capital to spark a developing knowledge economy, if properly supported.

The viability of development during the crisis, hopefully within Mediterranean Smart Cities, largely depends on the resilience and/ or sustain-

ability of grassroots movements and alternative initiatives. Phrased more formally, it is one step ahead to propose the theoretical modification of the Smart City, disentangling it from neoliberalism and connecting it with the creative grassroots. One step further establishes the Smart City as a proactive and nomotheric concept. In this, our proposal is to pursue its revival during the crisis in connection with the grassroots, in the context of advocacy planning. This would be a utopian reflection before January 2015, when the Left came to power in Greece. Now, however, policy supporting the knowledge base of cities, their youth and its grassroots initiatives with their technological sophistication, figures as quite feasible, though there is still the inertia of memoranda, but also of bureaucracies stifling the development of innovative action.

Formalizing further, if creativity is sought in the city, then the incubator hypothesis (Davelaar and Nijcamp, 1988) must be mobilized for the empowerment and the interconnection of more vulnerable popular alternative initiatives. This is yet another concept based on neoliberal assumptions, which, after being put to doubt in the past by institutional economics, can be turned around now, for the protection of creative niches in Mediterranean cities. It is worthwhile, or even essential, to practice advocacy planning in order to safeguard and support them in an area which suffers from fragmentation, impoverishment, dispossession, but also demoralization and a propensity to destroy.

Conservative governments and EU elites adopt neoliberalism, insist in austerity, and try to impose it through offensives, counteracting grassroots creativity and *joie de vivre* (Leontidou, 2014). Such policies do not solve any problems at all: social cohesion is wounded, niches of creativity are destroyed, civil societies are severed, aggressiveness and uricide are provoked, bringing down the alternative creativity options in their way, and destroying prospects for the Smart City. Top-down offensives do not only destroy labourers, collectivities, or 'uncompetitive' localities, as the power elites think; they also destroy cities, regions, and the whole cause of European integration more widely. In this connection, other policy agents and collectivities must be discovered, who can in time advocate and support the grassroots Smart City and creative initiatives towards development, smart growth, participatory democracy and emancipatory politics more widely. The present paper hopes to constitute a stepping stone in that direction.

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