

**Resisting Austerity:  
The Spatial Politics of Solidarity and Struggle in Athens, Greece**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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## **Abstract**

Recent protests occurring in cities around the world have articulated opposition to the ongoing crisis of neoliberal globalization and its outcomes in diverse geographical contexts. From the Spanish ‘Indignados’ to the occupation of Syntagma square in Athens, Greece and the US Occupy movement, emerging forms of contentious politics have reignited critical debates on cities and social movements. However, the underlying processes through which these emerge and develop, as well as their possibilities and limitations in articulating challenges to the latest phase of neoliberal restructuring and austerity, remain nascent. This thesis addresses these underdeveloped analytical foci on emergent contentious politics in austerity-driven contexts through the case of Athens, Greece. Situated within broad debates on cities and the geographies of social movements, it draws on qualitative data gathered during fieldwork and critical engagement in struggles in Athens to examine the processes that enable contentious practices to materialize and expand across space.

In particular, I suggest that austerity politics and their outcomes on the city’s population have triggered grassroots responses that contest austerity and produce practical alternatives to address precipitating social reproduction needs. These are articulated through resistance and solidarity practices, which are grounded in local contexts, i.e. neighbourhoods across Athens, and become mutually constituted to broader alternatives and counter-austerity politics that unfold spatially across the city and beyond. In accounting for these, I develop the ideas of ‘struggle communities’ and ‘urban solidarity spaces’ that demonstrate: firstly, the process of the emergence and development of resistance and solidarity practices at the neighbourhood level and their relational links outwards; and, secondly, the process of the expansion of these across city space, nationally and through links to European anti-austerity movements, i.e. networking and cooperation tactics among local initiatives, the formation of a social/ solidarity economy and broader strategies of social empowerment and change.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Introducing the ‘Greek Crisis’ and Grassroots Responses

On February 12, 2012 and amidst generalized public controversy, the second ‘memorandum’, i.e. loaning agreement, along with a series of austerity measures were being debated in the Greek Parliament in Athens city center. Outside the Parliament building, on surrounding streets and at the Syntagma square, thousands of protestors had gathered to express their opposition to this new round of austerity measures and structural adjustment programme designed by the ‘Troika<sup>1</sup>’ and brought in for voting by the Greek government. On the next day, and as protests were escalating in Athens city center, the new austerity package was approved by the majority of Greek parliament members. This act of support towards the ‘national unity’, recently formed at the time, coalition government<sup>2</sup> led by Lucas Papademos<sup>3</sup> sparked public discontent and anger that challenged the democratic legitimacy of this government and the subsequent legislative act. Concerning these, Kouvelakis (2011: 27) argued that “the EU’s role in all this deserves specific comment. Even the remnants of national sovereignty and democracy that had still existed in Greece, already largely formal, are now a thing of the past... the shadowy manoeuvres leading to the formation of the ‘national unity’ government: all this constitutes a bloodless coup, the first whose planning and execution have been guided by the EU. It scarcely seems necessary to point out the current government’s utter lack of democratic legitimacy”.

At the same time, protestors outside the Parliament building were being faced with widespread repressive tactics, which sparked violent confrontations with the police and riots that were later diffused across city center areas, leading to arrests and injuries of several activists. As intense riots were spreading in Athens city center on that evening, the mayor of Athens at the time George Kaminis, in

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<sup>1</sup> The ‘Troika’ is a trilateral committee comprised of the European Commission (EC), the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

<sup>2</sup> The coalition Greek government of 2011 comprised of the Socialists (Pasok), the right-wing (New Democracy) and the ultra-right-wing populist (Laos) parties.

<sup>3</sup> Lucas Papademos is an ex-chief of the National bank of Greece and ex- Vice President of the European Central bank. In 2011, he was directly appointed as a Prime Minister of Greece by the European Union leadership and the Troika.

urging for police intervention in order to disperse protestors, stated on a Greek television channel<sup>4</sup> that “the city of Athens is once again used as leverage for destabilizing the whole country”. As this statement referred to recent waves of mass mobilizations occurring since 2008, it also revealed the strategic role of the city of Athens within the emergence and development of contentious politics opposing the outcomes of austerity politics imposed in Greece, as a response to the ongoing Eurozone or ‘sovereign debt’ crisis. In particular, since the onset of the crisis in 2008 and as major parts of public spending were re-distributed towards the ‘bailing-out’ of banking institutions in Greece, fiscal austerity imposed on large parts of the population triggered widespread public anger, which was expressed through mass protests. Subsequently, triggered by the murder of a teenager by a police officer, the riots that erupted in the city center neighbourhood of Exarcheia in December 2008 spread across Athens and other cities in Greece. In the process, this spatial dispersal of contestation acquired the characteristics of mass responses to the first outcomes of the crisis, i.e. rising unemployment and precarious labour, reductions in wages and public spending, privatization of public services, disciplinary tactics etc. In this sense, these protests signified a new round of urban-based struggles that brought forward issues of ‘urban democracy and justice’ (Leontidou 2010) and problematized in this way the role of the city of Athens in the context of austerity. A motto on a wall in Athens written during the riots captured the above transformations introduced during the crisis: “money for the banks, bullets for the people” (see Figure 1.1).

These intense mass protests were followed by another round of mobilizations opposing the voting of the first ‘package’ of austerity measures and structural adjustment in the spring of 2011. Alongside other mass protests occurring at the time around the world, e.g. Spain, Tunisia, Egypt, thousands of protestors gathered in front of the Parliament and occupied Syntagma square for more than two months. These mobilizations not only managed to further politicize the crisis and highlight the failing representation through elected officials, evident in the demands posed during the occupation for ‘real democracy’, but they also introduced practices of ‘direct democracy’ in decision-making and collective action (Kaika and Karaliotas 2014). In the post-Syntagma period, several local assemblies and

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<sup>4</sup> Skai television news 12/2/12

initiatives emerged across neighbourhoods in Athens and, in dealing with the outcomes of austerity and rising social reproduction issues, employed these practices of collective organizing among the grassroots.

In this thesis I pose the key argument that the city of Athens holds a central role in emerging grassroots responses to the crisis and broader mobilizations that challenge austerity politics. In order to further unpack these, in the following section 1.2 I set out the context of the global financial crisis within Europe and how it impacted on Greece and based on these discussions I outline the main research aims and objectives this thesis addresses in regard to civil society responses to the crisis, as well as specific research questions, relating these to theoretical debates on cities and social movements (see section 1.3).



Figure.1.1. "Money for the banks, bullets for the youth, our time has come" motto, Coordination of Occupations, Athens 2008, source: [www.streetpoems.gr](http://www.streetpoems.gr)

## 1.2. Politicizing the Crisis: From Austerity to Resistance and Solidarity

The recent developments in the global economy since the onset of the financial crisis in 2008 and the ways in which it unfolded worldwide, leading in several cases to steep recession in the actual economies of countries, have triggered renewed skepticism around the 'modus operandi' of neoliberal globalization. Surprisingly, even amongst the proponents of neoliberal globalization, there have

been expressions of doubt concerning the so-called 'self-regulation ability' of market expansion processes occurring globally. In this respect, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) discussed the 2008 global crisis as the 'first crisis of globalization': "the crisis revealed serious fissures in the globalizing economy-including a failure of international governance and regulation to keep up with a world changed utterly. As livelihoods collapsed, public trust wavered and people cried out for new, more secure management of their economies... The financial crisis revealed failures of governance, most notably in financial regulation, and within banks and financial institutions... Everyone knows the answer to that now, as taxpayers in many OECD countries will be paying the price for this recklessness and lack of vigilance for years to come" (OECD: unpaginated).

However, even though this discussion acknowledges the major impacts of market de-regulation and financialization of economies on peoples' livelihoods, it seems to prioritize the restoration of the legitimacy and function of neoliberalism, calling for 'business as usual' under a new ethos of 'good' and 'responsible' governance: "for the sake of keeping the trust of voters, governments also need to be able to reassure citizens that their affairs are in safe hands. They know that trust and good governance are essential for our economies to move forward. Failure to restore them could fuel a crisis even more serious than the one we've just been through" (OECD, undated). Further, in the most revealing way, this warning highlights the key role of governance institutions and 'rolling-out' state interventions in maintaining the neoliberal hegemony and managing a political crisis underway. Accordingly, this discussion deliberately fails to bring forward that crises have been endemic within the development of capitalism and have often served strategically as means for re-establishing the conditions of capital accumulation and economic growth, in favour of the ruling elites (see Brenner and Theodore 2002, Peck and Tickell 2002, Harvey 2005, Routledge and Cumbers 2009).

As Harvey (2005) stressed, crucial within the processes of crisis creation and management, has been the role of supranational institutions, such as the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). More recently, as the global crisis impacted on the Eurozone and more severely on weaker member-states' economies, such as Greece, Portugal and Ireland etc., the European Union

(EU) has assumed a similar role in intervening to secure the bailing out of European banks and global financial interests. This was achieved through the enforcement of austerity, as a latest round of neoliberal restructuring and extreme economy in response to the financial crisis (Peck 2012). Hence, in 2010 the European Commission (EC), along with the European Central Bank (ECB) and the IMF formed a trilateral committee, i.e. the 'Troika', which became responsible for providing loans and designing structural reforms for the above countries, whose sovereign debt had escalated since the 2008 global recession.

In Greece in particular, the Socialist government of George Papandreou at the time started implementing a severe austerity 'package', in accordance to the EU- policy agenda. The first round of austerity measures included major reductions in wages and pensions of public sectors employees, drastic budget cuts in public spending and services, e.g. education, health, provision, subsidies etc., tax increases and the launch of large-scale privatization of public services and assets, e.g. railways, national electricity infrastructure, telecommunications etc. As these austerity measures were conditional for the first loaning agreement signed between the Greek government and the Troika, they soon served as means to transform the financial crisis into a social and state one (see Peck 2012), and impose fiscal austerity on the national budget. In discussing the role of the EU in bailing-out the banks and the subsequent impact on Greece, Milne (2011) argued in an article in 'The Guardian': "It makes no sense. Unless it's understood that it's not the Greek economy that's being rescued, but European and US banks exposed to Greek debt. To protect the rentiers and prevent their own failures from seizing up the European credit system, Greece has undergone the deepest ever fiscal squeeze in a developed state..." Since 2010, austerity measures have been 'prescribed' as solutions to the Eurozone crisis in other countries as well, e.g. Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Italy and the UK. At the same time, as austerity impacted on the livelihoods of people across Europe, e.g. rising unemployment, homelessness, increase of individual debt, housing evictions and confiscations etc., the 'real' economies show no signs of actual recovery<sup>5</sup>. Rather, what is evident is a deepening transformation of policy-

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<sup>5</sup> For example Eurostat reported rising unemployment trends for Greece, Spain and Portugal, reaching to 27,3%, 26, 1% and 16,5% in 2013 respectively (source: Eurostat online).

making towards market-oriented solutions that benefit specific economic interests and financial institutions, responsible for triggering the economic crash in the first place.

Therefore, as also noted by Milne (2011) in the article above, the economic crisis has brought forward a deepening crisis of democracy within Europe<sup>6</sup> which extends to the underlying neoliberal ideology that has shaped EU policy over the past few decades, i.e. deregulation, privatization and the privileging of corporate elites. As mentioned earlier (section 1.1), in Greece for example and in fear of a possible referendum vote against the second loaning agreement, a coalition government was appointed in 2011 so as to deliver the voting of austerity measures and ensure the implementation of the agenda decided by EU leaders and the Troika. Hence, since a non-elected government was held responsible for decision-making, the failure of democratic representation of the people's interests became evident and was expressed through mass protests that unfolded in the streets of Athens. As Hardt and Negri (2011: unpaginated) pointed out in a commentary in 'Foreign Affairs', alongside other mass mobilizations and occupations of public spaces that occurred during that period in cities around the world, such as in Spain and the US, protestors in Athens directed their anger against a failing political system that undoubtedly served the interests of economic elites: "a more significant failure of representation, though, must be attributed to the politicians and political parties charged with representing the people's interests but in fact more clearly represent the banks and creditors... it seems that politics has become subservient to economic and financial interests".

At the same time, while responses to the crisis and austerity politics have acquired different characteristics across geographical contexts, another commonality among grievances expressed through mass mobilizations across European countries has been several demands raised around social and economic justice. In the occupation of Syntagma square in Athens city center in particular, protestors claimed 'real democracy', which became a motto central to the manifestation of anger against the failing political system. After the first few days

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<sup>6</sup> For example, alongside the Papademos government in Greece, another government was also appointed directly by the EU leadership in Italy in November 2011; this cabinet was led by Mario Monti.



of rallies, in the popular assembly that was formed at the lower part of the occupied square this demand on ‘real democracy’ was transformed to a practice of ‘direct democracy’. In this sense, the popular assembly served as a laboratory for building on a ‘democratic bottom-up politics’ (see Kaika and Karaliotas 2014), where issues of social and economic justice were raised and negotiated. Concerning these, the Greek government was held responsible for falling short in representing the people’s interests in the face of the crisis. Hence, criticism was directed towards the active role the Greek government had assumed in implementing austerity politics, in opening up spaces for private foreign and national capital to seize public services and assets and in managing and containing oppositional responses.

In the period following the occupation of Syntagma square and mass protests, the strategic role of the Greek state within the implementation of structural reform and austerity became more obvious. As austerity impacted on large parts of the population, most evident in the city of Athens, the failure of the Greek state to secure the social reproduction of working and middle-class social groups led to growing precarity, poverty, unemployment and homelessness. At the same time, oppositional responses and resistance practices were faced with extensive repressive tactics against activists and the manipulation of xenophobic practices and discourses of the ultra-right Golden Dawn. This form of ‘fiscal revanchism’ (Peck 2012) imposed through national austerity on the city of Athens, through further cuts in public spending, services, infrastructure and new individual taxes, triggered subsequent rounds of mobilizations and resistance practices. For these to emerge, crucial was the diffusion of a culture of bottom-up politics across Athenian neighbourhoods in the post-Syntagma period. Hence, local groups and initiatives formed across the city ‘picked up the thread’ of resisting austerity through collective organizing in public and occupied spaces, addressing pragmatic social reproduction needs of the unemployed, immigrants and impoverished groups and articulating alternatives to austerity, e.g. cooperativism, social/ solidarity economy etc. Finally, as struggle and solidarity practices unfold in the city of Athens, they resonate with Peck’s (2012) argument on the key role of cities within the emergence of counter-austerity politics.

### **1.3. Situating my Research: Research Aims, Objectives and Questions**

In setting out the key research aims and objectives of this project, the focus lies on making new sense of contemporary contentious politics emerging and unfolding in cities in contexts of crisis and austerity. In particular, contemporary social movements and mass mobilizations occurring in cities worldwide since the onset of the global crisis in 2008, e.g. recent rounds of protests in Greece, the ‘Indignados’ movement in Spain, the Occupy movement in the US etc., can be understood as attempts to pose challenges to the crisis of neoliberalism and subsequent austerity politics manifested in diverse geographical contexts. As these have acquired a renewed interest among critical scholars concerning cities and social movements, the processes in which they emerge and develop, as well as the possibilities and constraints they are faced with in pursuing effective challenges to the new phase of neoliberal austerity, still remain relatively nascent. Therefore, in contributing to these through the case study of Athens, Greece, my main research aim is to investigate the spatial politics and the underlying processes of the mutual constitution of grassroots responses to the crisis and broader mass mobilizations that articulate challenges to austerity neoliberalism.

Accordingly, key research objectives and ways into addressing the above involve the positioning of my research within the vast theoretical debates on cities and social movements, as well as addressing the Greek context in relation to these. In doing so, firstly, I draw on literature that discussed neoliberalization processes unfolding in various urban contexts during the past decades and subsequent transformations in urban politics and urban conflict (e.g. Harvey 1989, 2005; Peck and Tickell 2002, Peck 2003, Nicholls 2006). In this regard, as the neoliberal project developed unevenly across geographical contexts, cities in particular acquired a crucial role within these processes, serving as ‘key laboratories’ for experimenting with the re-distribution of resources from welfare to market expansion and entrepreneurial growth policies, as well as disciplinary and co-optation means that managed and controlled urban populations. Also, these control mechanisms led to the subsequent fragmentation of ‘urban social movements’ of the past (Castells 1977, 1983; Mayer 2000) that posed collective demands around the reproductive function of urban space. More recently, the devolution of financial burdens and responsibilities from central states to local authorities and individuals through ‘growth’ politics has been further enhanced through severe austerity

employed in national and urban policy, as a means to deal with escalating budget deficits and national economies' debts (see Peck 2012).

Secondly, as this literature pertains to western European and US contexts, the case of Athens and Greece reveals some key differences. Contrary to the well-developed centralized welfare states of the European north, the tradition of weak welfare, informal economies and fast spontaneous urbanization in the European South and Greece in particular (see Leontidou 1990, 2010) produced a rapid shift to neoliberal development during the 1990's, in line with the Eurozone convergence criteria (see Kouvelakis 2011). Hence, urban development in Athens, especially in the period prior to the Olympic Games of 2004, followed a fast transition to policies designed around privatized infrastructures, consumption activities and cultural heritage entrepreneurialism. In the aftermath of the Olympics and as austerity politics were introduced in 2008, acquiring the form of structural adjustment since 2010, the outcomes of these are becoming evident in the city of Athens, which concentrates more than one third of the country's population, e.g. major budget reductions in public spending, services and infrastructure, rising unemployment, homelessness etc.

Thirdly, as the outcomes of national austerity politics are manifested in the everyday lives of the city's populations, contestation of austerity politics has been expressed through several mass protests and mobilizations, as discussed above. These struggles that challenge austerity politics in Athens are discussed as part of the particular historical context of social movements, political identities and activist cultures developed in Athens and Greece over the past decades, i.e. student and working-class movements, urban and environmental local struggles, anti/counter-globalization mobilizations etc. In this sense, contemporary urban struggles unfolding *in* the city of Athens are not necessarily restricted *to* urban space, rather I suggest that they can be understood as mutually constitutive of broader movements, e.g. anti-neoliberal, anti-capitalist, social and economic justice, working-class and labour rights struggles etc. (see Nicholls 2009, Leontidou 2010, Routledge 2010).

Fourth, looking into social movement theoretical accounts that sought to interpret the emergence of collective action through organizational means (e.g. McCarthy and Zald 1977), political structures (e.g. McAdam 1996) and the formation of collective identities (e.g. Touraine 1981), this literature failed to address the role of geography within broader social processes and contestation (see

Miller 2000). Hence, drawing on geographical studies of social movements (e.g. Routledge 1993, 1997; Miller 2000, Routledge and Cumbers 2009), the goal is to acknowledge the crucial role of space within the emergence and development of contestation and produce context-sensitive accounts of the ‘spatialities of contentious politics’ (see Leitner et al. 2008) grounded in places and the various practices and strategies movement actors pursue across geographical space.

Drawing on the above, the specific research questions that this thesis raises are the following:

- What is the role of ‘place’, i.e. neighbourhood, local, community etc. in the constitution of resistance and solidarity practices?

This involves not only the physical ‘terrain’ upon which contestation occurs, but also the meanings, symbols, and activist identities attributed to places, as well as the distinct ‘spatialities of resistance’ (see Routledge 1993, 1997) that reveal how resistance practices grounded in places use, subvert and open spaces of contestation, as well as their possibilities and limitations these are faced with.

- What are the material and discursive means activists employ so as to pursue cooperation tactics in, across and beyond urban space?

This involves the building on proximate reciprocal bonds and solidarity practices among local initiatives, groups and struggles, which not only contributes to the formation of common aspirations and narratives, in discursive terms, but also to a ‘politics of necessity’ (Chatterton 2005) in dealing with pragmatic social reproduction needs and severe austerity.

- What forms and organizational means are employed in order to establish communication and connections among struggles?

These refer to the relational tools employed in order to initiate contacts and networking among activist groups, e.g. key ‘moments’ of mass actions, festivals and events, contact points and key spaces in the city, coordinative actions and campaigns, key individuals, particular mechanisms for interaction and communication such as digital media etc. (see Routledge and Cumbers 2009).

- What are the operational logics of cooperation and networking among activist groups?

This aims to contribute to understandings of bottom-up horizontal organizing among the grassroots, as well as bring forward and problematize uneven power relations within these.

- How do cooperation tactics contribute to broader strategies of social change and what are their possibilities and limitations?

These involve the relationship between small tactics as well as broad strategies of ‘social empowerment and change’ (see Wright 2010) and how they negotiate, contest and challenge the role of state power and structures.

Subsequently, the above questions aim to unpack the underlying processes of the emergence and development of contentious politics in Athens in the context of the crisis and austerity. To this end, I analyze the city center neighbourhood of Exarcheia, which has historically acted as a geographical node of contentious politics and, at the same time, as an ‘incubator’ of activist cultures for Athens and Greece. As such, Exarcheia is chosen as an instrumental entry point within activist geographies and key political cultures. Based on original empirical material gathered during fieldwork conducted in Athens, this thesis contributes to new insights into contemporary urban politics in contexts of crisis and ongoing responses to austerity in two ways: firstly, through the notion of ‘struggle communities’ (see Chapter 6) I show how the spatial grounding of struggle and solidarity practices at the neighbourhood level contribute to the processual constitution of alternatives to austerity. Regarding these, the building of proximate reciprocal bonds and place-based solidarities through ongoing face-to-face interactions among activists and groups contributes to the mobilization and circulation of social and material relations, knowledge, resources and means of reproduction and survival. Secondly, through the concept of ‘urban solidarity spaces’ (see Chapter 7) I suggest that place-based solidarities, not only contest dominant narratives and practices of charity, closely linked to austerity politics and the decline in social welfare, but also actively engage in survival tactics that address social reproduction needs and produce broader alternatives to austerity. Concerning the latter, cooperation tactics pursued among solidarity structures and initiatives intersect and overlap with the formation of a social/ solidarity economy and broader strategies of social empowerment and change that expand across the city of Athens and beyond.

In developing the idea of ‘urban solidarity spaces’, I draw on Routledge and Cumbers (2009) who interpret the spatialities of grassroots globalization networks through the concept of ‘convergence spaces’. In particular, ‘convergence spaces’ involve the distant links and communication channels, as well as the proximate interactions among place-based movements. As these networking processes unfold spatially, key mechanisms that enable this politically extensive action relate to the building of ‘mutual solidarities’ among different movements; particular ‘moments’ such as key events, conferences, activist caravans etc.; and key individuals termed ‘imagineers’ that are responsible for distributing the narratives, goals, strategies and imaginaries across the network’s reach (see Routledge and Cumbers 2009). As I will show through the case of Athens, Greece, ‘urban solidarity spaces’ pertain to an inverted account of the spatial politics of convergence spaces in two ways: first, cooperation and networking ‘from below’ among local groups in Athens through ongoing interactions suggests a bottom-up process of exchange and communication, rather than particular moments of interactions as in convergence spaces. Second, the bottom-up diffusion of information and distribution of activist imaginaries, narratives and goals across horizontal formations among groups (e.g. coordination campaigns and joint actions) inverts the scalar imaginary of convergence spaces and the processes of ‘grassrooting’ activists narratives and goals that are facilitated by key activists. Finally, as these interpretations are developed in close relation to the empirical material, they provide for renewed understandings of the crucial role of cities within the emergence and development of ‘counter-austerity politics’ (Peck 2012) in contexts of the ongoing global crisis.

#### **1.4. Outlining the Thesis Contents**

In addressing the issues raised above, the thesis is organized into 8 chapters. In Chapter 2, the discussion broadly focuses on neoliberalization processes and subsequent transformations occurring over the past few decades in cities, drawing on various contexts and debates so as to set out the political economy background of the current crisis and the subsequent effects on urban space. What is maintained through this discussion is, firstly, that crises have been integral to the development of the neoliberal project, secondly, the crucial role of cities for the development of neoliberal competitive urban growth policies, as well as governing techniques of

urban populations and thirdly, the key role of urban space for the emergence of contentious politics, as well as the impact of urban governance on ‘urban social movements’ (Castells 1977, 1983). Concerning the latter, the main argument raised is that, moving beyond accounts that stressed the reproductive function of the city as the main driving force behind urban struggles, recent movements emerging in cities worldwide, e.g. Greece, Spain and US Occupy, employ relational means in order to develop and expand beyond the material limits of the city (see Nicholls 2009, Routledge 2010).

Subsequently, in attempting to bring forward the relational qualities that render cities important for the development of contentious politics, Chapter 3 focuses on the crucial role of geography in social movements. As various social movement accounts interpreted collective action through traditional means of resource mobilization, i.e. organizations, interest groups etc. (see Kriesi 1996), political opportunity structures (see McAdam 1996) and collective identities (see Touraine 1981), they nevertheless remained ‘aspatial’ (Miller 2000) in failing to acknowledge the geographies that constitute and are constituted through articulations of contestation. To this end, I investigate the role of place, scale and networks, as indicative dimensions of broader complex socio-spatial processes and contentious practices. In this regard, drawing on geographical accounts of social movements (see Routledge 1993, 1997; Miller 2000, Routledge and Cumbers 2009), I suggest that a re-thinking of the spatialities of contentious politics provides for nuanced, context-sensitive insights into the actual processes and practices of struggles, grounded in places and articulated across space. Drawing on these debates, I introduce two key empirically- grounded concepts, namely ‘struggle communities and ‘urban solidarity spaces’, for interpreting contentious politics (developed in detail in Chapters 6 and 7).

Chapter 4 discusses, firstly, broad methodological issues, or ‘principles of reasoning’ (Cloke et al. 2004) that relate to my research, secondly, the rationale and actual methods employed during fieldwork in Athens, Greece and, thirdly, reflexive remarks around my positionality, ethics and critical engagement with activist others in the field. In particular, firstly, I draw on relevant theory in order to set out my methodological framework, from feminist and radical/ critical geographical debates that argued that the ‘personal is political’ (see Haraway 1991), to scholar-activist research that employed ethnography as means to effect social change (see

Kobayashi 1994), and ‘activist geographies’ (Routledge 2009) that emerged in-between spaces of academic research and engagement in political activity. Secondly, I discuss the rationale for choosing Exarcheia as an instrumental entry point within the activist geographies of Athens and Greece and the benefits for employing multiple methods in the field, e.g. interviews, participant observation, field notes etc. Thirdly, I critically reflect on the research process in the field, issues raised in relation to my engagement and collaboration with activists in Athens, my positionality and ethical considerations.

Chapter 5 introduces the historical- geographical context of this research, firstly, focusing on the crisis and austerity politics in Athens and Greece and, secondly, on social movements unfolding in Athens over the past decade. In particular, through discussing key ‘turning points’ within the continuities of contentious politics and mass mobilizations, i.e. Olympic games in 2004, mass protests and riots in 2008 and the ‘squares’ movement in 2011, I highlight the transformations within urban struggles, leading to contemporary ones challenging and producing alternatives to austerity politics. Further, in order to analyze the spatial grounding of struggle and solidarity practices in Athens, I draw on original empirical data and examine in detail the key cases of groups I collaborated with during fieldwork in Exarcheia, Athens. Drawing on these, I outline the two key empirically-grounded concepts of ‘struggle communities and ‘urban solidarity spaces’, further developed in Chapters 6 and 7.

Chapter 6 looks into the spatial practices of struggle and solidarity unfolding at the territorial level of the neighbourhood through the notion of ‘struggle communities’. Here, the aim is to show how struggle and solidarity at the neighbourhood level become mutually constituted with broader articulations of contestation challenging austerity. To this end, firstly, I examine the crucial role of mass mobilizations and anti-austerity movements, i.e. the squares’ movement and the occupation of Syntagma square, for the dispersal of an emerging culture of bottom-up democratic politics across neighbourhoods in Athens, through the narratives of participant activists and related debates. Secondly, in order to look into the grounding of this emerging bottom-up politics, I draw on original empirical data and unpack the spatialities of resistance and solidarity in Exarcheia through geographical accounts of contentious politics (see Routledge 1993, 1997).



Complementary to Chapter 6, Chapter 7 looks into how the grounding of solidarity practices in neighbourhoods in Athens becomes entangled with the production of alternatives to austerity. In this sense, drawing on original empirical data, what is maintained here is that survival tactics and pragmatic social reproduction needs become linked to broader challenges and alternatives to austerity neoliberalism, through experimenting with a social/ solidarity economy. In accounting for these, I employ the idea of ‘urban solidarity spaces’ to show how these practices and strategies emerge at the intersecting, overlapping territorial, social and material levels. Additionally, a critical account of such practices and strategies reveals their possibilities and limitations for opening up spaces of social empowerment, contesting state power and structures and pursuing a spatially expansive politics.

Finally, Chapter 8 pulls together and assesses the key findings of the preceding chapters, in regard to urban politics and social movements in Greece and Athens and, in particular, the grassroots responses to the crisis and austerity politics. Also, specific attention is given to the research insights gained through my methodological approach as a scholar-activist and the conduct of fieldwork in Athens. Additionally, in addressing the research aims and objectives, as well as the research questions of this thesis, I discuss my contribution to social theory and accounts of contentious politics in contexts of crisis and austerity through the concepts of ‘struggle communities’ and ‘urban solidarity spaces’. In extending these understandings, I further draft some key implications for broader social change processes in an era of austerity and possible ways forward for future research into these.



Figure 1.2. "No future", Exarcheia graffiti, Athens 2013, source: author

## **2. Neoliberal Restructuring, Urban Politics and Conflict**

### **2.1. Introduction**

In order to look into the emergence and development of contentious politics and urban struggles in contexts of crises and austerity, this chapter interrogates neoliberalization processes unfolding in cities and subsequent transformations in urban politics and contestation. In this regard, drawing on a broad pool of literature, the main arguments raised here are the following: firstly, the contradictions and contingency of neoliberalization processes reveal that crises are inherent and integral to the development of the neoliberal project. Secondly, the ways in which neoliberalization unfolded signify the crucial role of cities as key laboratories for the design and conduct of entrepreneurial and competitive growth policies. At the same time, governing techniques and strategies developed in cities targeting urban populations aimed to manage the contradictory outcomes of competitive growth and contain contestation. Thirdly, contemporary contentious politics challenge and pose alternatives to the neoliberal project, revealing in this way its contradictory and highly unstable character. In expanding our understanding of urban struggles, what is suggested here, and further examined in the next chapter, is an analytical focus on the role of 'space' within their emergence and development.

In particular, the shift from post-war 'spatial Keynesianism' to neoliberalizing states over the past few decades marked a strategic redistribution of public resources and welfare to competitive growth, through the expansion of markets (Harvey 2005). In this instance, cities have been the most active sites of the neoliberalizing, authoritarian statecraft and emerging urban growth politics (Peck 2003). Local states actively engaged in entrepreneurial strategies, while at the same time, developed several methods and techniques aiming to incorporate and discipline urban populations and contestation (Nicholls 2006, Raco 2007). These impacted on community and activist groups and managed to fragment the 'urban social movements' of the 1970's, which articulated demands around the reproductive function of cities, e.g. housing, public services and infrastructure etc. (Castells 1977, Mayer 2000). Finally, focusing on the disenfranchising effects of neoliberalization and austerity politics on urban inhabitants, recent accounts on re-

claiming 'urban democracy' and 'the right to the city' seek to re-conceptualize urban struggles constitutive of broader movements around social and environmental justice manifested in cities and expanding beyond urban space (Routledge 2010). These accounts resonate with recent protests manifested in cities worldwide, e.g. the Occupy movement, the Spanish '15M- Indignados' and the Greek 'Squares' Movement'. In furthering these, an examination of the spatialities of contentious politics discussed in Chapter 3 aims to unravel the ways in which they emerge and develop.

## **2.2. Conceptualizing Neoliberalism**

Neoliberal restructuring processes introduced in the 1970's in the global economy generated a series of transformations across geographical contexts, locally, nationally and transnationally. As post-war states intervened in national economies, through centralized institutions that balanced and regulated markets, Keynesian logics underpinning the redistribution of (parts of) wealth guaranteed the reproduction of the labour force in cities and regions, through public investments in housing, transportation, social welfare and public services (Brenner 2004). As neoliberal globalization and 'free' market capitalist expansion came as a response to the 1973 recession (Harvey 2005), the neoliberal 'doctrine' was soon to be adopted as a 'permanent solution' in policy-making by national governments, aiming to sustain continuous growth. In brief, the political economy of neoliberalism involves state restructuring processes, aimed at the weakening of welfare and the privatization of public services and, at the same time, the creation of competitive markets. In interrogating how crises of neoliberal capitalism play out, I draw on key accounts of neoliberalism, firstly, as a 'class project' of wealth redistribution, secondly, as a process of state transformation and policy-making, i.e. neoliberalization and, thirdly, as the dominant rationality generating new subjectivities and techniques of governance.

Firstly, Harvey (2005) stresses that the doctrines of neoliberalism, as ensured by both states and competitive free markets, are the individual right to private property and entrepreneurial initiatives, leading to innovative strategies and wealth creation and, thus higher living standards, or so has been claimed.

Accordingly, privatization and deregulation are the major strategies that lead to alleged higher productivity and better quality of commodities. In this sense, the strategic intervention of states to redistribute wealth from welfare and labour to capital, along class lines and unevenly across geographical space, signifies a crucial break with the Keynesian ‘social contract’ and reveals that neoliberalism has been primarily a ‘state-aided class project’ (Harvey 2005). In other words, as Routledge and Cumbers (2009: 4) stress, “neoliberalism should be considered a project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and the restoration for class power...neoliberalism is first and foremost a political strategy for class rule... states and international institutions such as the IMF and WB will intervene in economic crises to protect the interests of global financial centers”. In this respect, Harvey’s argument focuses on showing how neoliberalism has primarily targeted redistributive strategies rather than the production of wealth and income. In order to unpack the above, Harvey (2005) uses the notion of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ drawing on Marx’s ‘original or primitive accumulation’ but re-adjusting the term so as to highlight the ongoing and continuous role of capital accumulation practices historically and geographically.

These involve, firstly, the privatization of public utilities, social welfare and provision and public institutions as well as the commodification of the environmental commons, cultural heritage assets and intellectual property rights. These privatization processes have been used as means to open up new pathways for capital accumulation through transferring property assets from public to private ownership. Secondly, the financialization of the global economy after the 1980’s has been facilitated by state deregulation and has set in motion specific economic activities focusing on “speculation, predation, fraud and thievery” carried out by major institutions of finance capital and hedge funds among others (Harvey 2005: 162). Thirdly, the author highlights the role of international institutions such as the US Treasury and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in creating and managing crises through the ‘debt trap’ of steep interest rate increases leading to bankruptcy and/ or structural adjustment programs, e.g. in cases of Latin America countries during the 1980’s. In Harvey’s (2005: 162) words, “crisis creation, management and manipulation on the world stage have evolved into the fine art of deliberative redistribution of wealth from poor countries to the rich”. Finally, the neoliberalizing

state acquires a central role in the above redistributive processes, by redirecting the flow of resources through reductions in public expenditure, such as housing, transportation and public services, by adjusting tax policies in favor of corporate capital investments and by assuming a role of active repression, cooptation or marginalization of oppositional movements (Harvey 2005: 164, 165). Moreover, he suggests that the application of these principles have been incorporated in what was termed the ‘Washington Consensus’<sup>7</sup> of the 1990’s, as a model previously adopted by the neoliberalizing states of Chile, the US and UK and then geographically transposed to other countries through international institutions, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the IMF (Harvey 2005). These mechanisms of ‘accumulation by dispossession’, while crucial in understanding the core principles of the development of the neoliberal project, have had differentiated manifestations in policy-making, interacting with context-specific institutional arrangements and developing unevenly across space (Harvey 2007: 27).

Therefore the above, while useful for a broad conceptualization on neoliberalism, are not considered as universal, since Harvey (2007) has also stressed the unevenness of restructuring processes. In this regard, Brenner and Theodore’s (2002) account of ‘actually existing neoliberalism’ sheds light on the context-specific character of restructuring processes and interrogates the institutional contexts of neoliberal policy-making. According to MacKinnon (2012), this allows for a more comprehensive approach to geographical contexts, which do not fit into the Western European and US paradigms, as in these the focus is mainly on the transitions from social welfarism to neoliberalism. The term ‘actually existing neoliberalism’ is used in order to stress both the historical and the geographical embeddedness of restructuring, meaning that existing or inherited institutional and regulatory frameworks in interacting with emerging neoliberal policy-making in specific locales and across spatial scales, i.e. local, regional, national etc. have had varied outcomes. Hence, the authors seek to unravel the

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<sup>7</sup> The Washington Consensus refers to a specific set of market-oriented economic policies that have been applied to crisis-ridden developing countries, e.g. Chile, through institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB) and the US Treasury Department.

‘universality’ of neoliberal ideology, as market forces which operate based on coherent patterns, rules and methods; rather they argue for an approach which places these under context-specific scrutiny, with a focus on cities and urban space as key arenas for institutional reconfigurations. Also, they describe the socially and geographically uneven and politically unstable transformations of neoliberalism, which generate crises and contradictions, through the notion of ‘creative destruction’ (Brenner and Theodore 2002). In this regard, ‘actually existing neoliberalism’ as a process of institutional creative destruction aims to bring forward the intertwined and simultaneous destruction of existing institutional arrangements, through market-oriented reform and the creation of new ones for economic growth and privatization (Brenner and Theodore 2002: 362).

Another key account that adds to our understanding of neoliberalism as a contradictory and contingent process and not as an abstract philosophical turn to ‘free-market’ economies or an ‘end-state’ is Peck and Tickell’s (2002) account on ‘neoliberalization’. Neoliberalization, instead of neoliberalism, is understood in this regard as a process of ongoing mutations and evolutions in institutional and regulation frameworks and modes of governance, focusing on cities and their key role as laboratories for these to emerge and develop. In brief, moving beyond promises around an ideal order of a global free-market economy, perpetual reconstitutions and experimentalism were required for the neoliberal project to endure its inherent crises over the years. The authors distinguish between three phases of neoliberalization processes in order to identify the above transitions. As the 1970’s echoed major struggles around the social reproduction of labour in cities (Castells 1977, Brenner 2004, Mayer 2009), this period of ‘proto-neoliberalism’ is marked by the restoration of ‘free-market’ ethics in public discourse. Secondly, the 1980’s mark a shift to ‘roll-back neoliberalism’ (Peck and Tickell 2002), as states engage in the process of deregulation and marketization, redirecting resources from welfare to growth politics and urban entrepreneurialism and impose fiscal austerity, an argument consistent with Harvey’s (2005) account discussed above. The third period of the 1990’s signifies a ‘rolling out’ of institutional reconstitution and interventionism in producing new modes of social and penal policy-making (Peck and Tickell 2002: 389).

Moreover, an important discussion in relation to the above is the one on the role of states in ‘rolling-back’ and ‘rolling-out’ processes. In regard to this, I draw

on Peck (2001, 2004) who argues for a qualitative approach to restructuring processes, as opposed to accounts that interpret the above as a ‘hollowing-out’ process of state power, state decline, retreat or withdrawal. In this sense, state restructuring processes can be understood through an account of ‘neoliberalizing states’, which have assumed an active and strategic role in securing the following: “the elimination of obstacles for the function and expansion of ‘free markets’, decreases in public expenditure, the celebration of the virtues of individualism, competitiveness and economic self- efficiency, the weakening of social welfare programs and their replacement with new ‘workfare’ labour ethics for the poor and marginalized” (Peck 2001: 445). Neoliberalizing states have been remade and reinvented in order to strategically secure economic competitiveness according to the needs of the market economy. Hence, the above do not signify the ‘death’ of the state, rather a re-invention of the state-as-we-know-it. As Peck (2001: 447) argues, “a neoliberal state is not necessarily a less interventionist state; rather it organizes and rationalizes its interventions in different ways”. Further, the redistribution of wealth from social welfare to economic growth has been achieved through a series of transformations in the relations between levels of state apparatus (Peck 2001), reconfigurations in institutional arrangements across administrative scales, levels of governance and sites of social organization such as cities, regions and national territories. Subsequently, neoliberal restructuring processes signify major re-organizations in scalar relations between ‘state spaces’, being both the “means and ends of state action” (Peck 2001, 2003). While the role of scale in spatial politics will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3 (3.3.2), it is important to highlight here an account of scale as both materially and discursively constructed, meaning that scale is understood as both a product of broad socio-political processes and as social practice and discourse (MacKinnon 2010). Hence, this processual and contested notion of scale becomes crucial for understanding the power relations within restructuring processes, as the neoliberal project has been about “exerting control over specific areas of social activity and policy” (MacKinnon 2010: 29).

Drawing on the above, ‘rolling-out’ processes in the 1990’s reveal the active role of neoliberalizing states in producing new modes of governance, i.e. techniques, policies and subjectivities. The inherent contradictions and crises that became evident through ‘rolling-back’ processes and aggressive agendas applied in countries such as the UK and the US in the 1980’s required the creation of a new

institutional backbone in order to deal with their outcomes, i.e. the rising socio-spatial inequalities and the exclusion and marginalization of parts of the populations. Hence, what followed was the production of new forms of technocratic governance alongside a new social agenda of ‘penal and discipline reform’, dealing with issues of immigration, surveillance and community regeneration (Peck and Tickell 2002, Peck 2003). Despite the neoliberal doctrine of ‘less state intervention’, this period marked a shift towards state interventions which, apart from securing the expansion of market economy, strategically sought to manage the contradictions marketization brought about (Peck 2003). Therefore, on the one hand, penal policy and repressive means targeted social groups already excluded and marginalized and, on the other hand, this production of subjectivities involved the construction of a new ‘ethos’ of ‘rights and responsibilities’ and ‘active citizenship’, becoming the driving force for urban policy reform to develop, an issue discussed in detail in section 2.3.

Finally, in taking the discussion on the new neoliberal ‘ethos’ a bit further, a distinction made by neo-Foucauldian approaches between government and governance is considered useful in our understanding of neoliberalizing states, in their transition to less government and, simultaneously, new modes of governance (Larner 2000). The main argument raised here is about the political logic underlying neoliberalism, which, on the one hand, aims to restore individual freedom and choice according to liberal ethics and, on the other hand, creates new modes of, what Larner (2000) terms ‘market governance’, meaning forms of governance in accordance with market norms. In this respect, an account of ‘governmentality’ (Rose 1996a, 1996b; Larner 2000) acquires a conceptual interest in unpacking neoliberal governing techniques, rationalities and practices aimed to govern individuals ‘from a distance’. Moving away from welfarism and collective reproduction, these new governing technologies, besides producing discourses around ‘good and bad citizens’, also engage in the production and administration of ‘free’, self-managing, responsible, ‘educated subjects’, who will respond accordingly on a community level (Ong 2006: 4). In this respect, individuals are subject to new technologies designed to ensure their conduct in accordance with specific norms of personal responsibility and self-provision (Rose 1996b in MacKinnon 2000: 298). As mentioned earlier through the notion of ‘actually existing neoliberalism’ (Brenner and Theodore 2002), however, neoliberalism has



not been universal in its expressions, rather through mutational processes has co-existed and interacted with context-specific attributes. Therefore, drawing on Ong (2006: 3), neoliberalism as a governing technology is both a set of practices capable of ‘migrating’ to diverse contexts, but also co-exists and interacts with situated political rationalities, hence cannot be conceptualized as a “fixed set of attributes with predetermined outcomes”.

As cities have had a crucial role for new governance practices to emerge and develop the section 2.3 discusses restructuring processes unfolding in urban space, through urban entrepreneurialism and competitive growth. In this sense, cities are understood as ‘laboratories’ and incubator of “new modes of institution-building designed to extend the neoliberal project, manage its contradictions and secure its ongoing legitimacy” (Peck and Tickell 2002: 396).

### **2.3. Neoliberal Urban Governance and Entrepreneurialism**

In reflecting on the above processes and their impact on urban governance, the following discussion will focus on the crucial role of cities within the development of the neoliberal project. As noted earlier, urban space has been a prominent arena and an ‘institutional laboratory’ (Peck and Tickell 2002) for experimenting with entrepreneurial and competitive growth policies (Harvey 1989), which have refashioned the city as a ‘growth machine’ (Molotch 1976) for neoliberal urbanism to develop over the past decades and more recently for ‘austerity urbanism’ to emerge as the driving force behind more aggressive forms of austerity politics (Peck 2012). Within these processes, local states, business coalitions and public-private partnerships have actively engaged in promoting urban entrepreneurialism, through ‘city-marketing’ and commodification of urban space strategies and ‘elite consumption practices’ (Harvey 1989, Brenner and Theodore 2002). At the same time the outcomes of competitive development and gentrification phenomena in cities have severely impacted on lower-income social groups and aggravated socio-spatial inequalities.

In regard to urban governance, the institutional reconfigurations that emerged were primarily oriented towards the competitive growth of cities and regions, through the placing of local economies within the global markets. Brenner (2004) discusses this new contested ‘state spatiality’ as a ‘glocalizing competitive

state regime', meaning a transitional institutional structure, which is both locally and globally oriented under the principle of competitive growth. This qualitative shift in urban governance, from securing social welfare and managing inequalities to promoting competitive growth, is highlighted in Harvey's (1989) argument of a transition from 'managerialism to entrepreneurialism'. In this respect, the managerial role of local states in providing services, infrastructure and benefits to urban inhabitants gradually became transformed to an entrepreneurial 'ethos' and market rationality underlying urban policy and privatization strategies. Further, this entrepreneurial logic behind urban governance modes, being highly unstable in managing the contradictions and crises that perpetual growth policies generated, has, according to Peck and Tickell (1994), positioned cities and regions in a constant inter-local, inter-spatial competition. As local states were deprived of national resources that would prove efficient to sustain non-market driven strategies, they were held responsible for tackling the negative effects of the devolution of risks and responsibilities from the national to the local level (Peck 2001). Consequently, regions, cities and suburban areas were held responsible for managing sustainable economic growth, through attracting international capital investments and engaging in inter-urban competition. This displacement of responsibility and the devolution of financial burdens have been further enhanced anew through 'austerity urbanism' (Peck 2012). As austerity politics have not been new in how neoliberalism has developed, more recent developments since the global crisis of 2008 show how the pressures of 'deficit politics' and 'debt economies' have escalated into further public sector and welfare cuts, having severe 'trickle-down' effects on cities and localities. In this sense, austerity policies are about intensifying and consolidating the underlying logics of previous neoliberalization processes, managing the inherent contradictions and crises, re-boosting entrepreneurial interests, or, in some cases of severe cuts in municipal budgets, lead to the de facto abandonment of local states (Peck 2012: 629, 630).

Looking into how the above were incorporated in local politics and the actors engaged in urban entrepreneurialism Cox and Mair (1988) employ the concept of 'local dependence'. The local dependence of various actors, such as capitalist firms and business coalitions, local governments and communities, portrays the dynamics of local politics and inter-local competition in competitive development processes. The authors argue that since local firms are geographically

dependent on the production and circulation of exchange values, such as investments made in the built environment, utilities and infrastructure, disruptions to the geographies of value flows, through disinvestment render them vulnerable to devaluation and reduced profits. Hence, in several instances, local firms have chosen to directly intervene in local economic development processes in order to “protect, enhance, or create a context of exchange linkages” for their own benefits, so as to avoid loss (Cox and Mair 1988: 309). A way of achieving this has been through the formation of local business coalitions, such as real estate and insurance agencies, construction and land development companies etc. These coalitions refer to particular areas of common interest and localities that firms are dependent upon in terms of market, resources, labour and built infrastructure. Hence, they pursue economic growth through accumulation tactics and engage in competitive strategies with firms dependent upon different localities, “over the location of economic activity” (Cox and Mair 1988: 310). Further, as local states have engaged in competitive growth, so as to secure income influxes through private capital investments, they have actively pursued collaborations and public-private partnerships with local business coalitions. In return, business coalitions have exerted crucial influence over specific policies, such as favourable ‘tax treatment’ and subsidies, involvement in urban redevelopment projects etc. In this sense, the city is perceived as a ‘growth machine’ (Molotch 1976), which is constantly utilized in political and economic terms in pursuit of growth. Growth being the main imperative and common interest among actors involved becomes the key motivation for reaching consensus among local elites, whatever their differences on other issues (Molotch 1976: 310). Hence, growth coalitions strive to achieve increases in profit, land values and revenue streams and compete with each other in order to attract capital investments to their respective localities (Jonas and Wilson 1999).

Looking into the material outcomes of entrepreneurial policies, development has been primarily aimed at the upgrading of the ‘images’ of places rather than the amelioration of living conditions. While local coalitions and public- partnerships have been often publicly promoted as means to mitigate the negative effects of uneven development, as Harvey (1989) suggests, they have in fact promoted a form of highly speculative development instead. Therefore, instead of investment in housing, public transportation and infrastructure, public-private partnerships have

promoted 'place-marketing' development, which would accommodate a new consumerist 'ethos' (MacLeod 2002) in privatized public spaces, shopping malls, retail and leisure areas, cultural heritage and tourist attractions and newly built housing, business and office buildings and conference centers. In this regard, the above coalitions not only sought to create the material preconditions for growth, but have also developed discourses through media and marketing campaigns and collaborations with professional chambers around the importance of economic development for the 'well-being' of local people, through the expansion of labour markets (Cox and Mair 1988). This type of 'civic boosterism' ideology has been infused with political meanings, visions, beliefs and values, which consolidated the imperative of growth, through the manufacturing of images of places and cities (Jonas and Wilson 1999).

The commodification of aesthetics through 'city-marketing' (Kearns and Philo 1993) and the colonization of historical city centres by 'creative industries for the creative class' (Florida and Gates 2001), often manifested as inner-city gentrification, reveal the rationales behind this type of cultural identification and class consolidation. On the one hand, 'cultural capital' holds a central role within the distinct lifestyle of the 'creative class', which in terms of composition and consumerist behavior pertains to a 'new-middle class' ethos. On the other hand, urban growth is pursued through the setting up of 'creative industries' securing the successful reproduction of the 'creative class' in city centers. As Zukin (1987) argues, this type of cultural and economic capital concentration sets the preconditions for real estate development and the creation of service sector jobs based on increasing demand. Therefore, gentrification becomes more than just a cultural practice and acquires a key role in urban entrepreneurialism, being both a means of social reproduction of the 'creative class' and accumulation strategies pursued by developers and local elites.

Further, in looking into how gentrification has been utilized as an entrepreneurial housing policy, Uitermark et al. (2007) stress that 'state-led' gentrification has in several instances focused on the upgrading of the built environment, through replacing social housing with expensive dwellings in low-income areas and the creation of more 'socially mixed' populations in specific neighbourhoods. Subsequently, these policies have targeted low-income social

groups, which have been forced out of their neighbourhoods and replaced by middle-class groups (Uitermark et al. 2007). These types of ‘social mixing’ policies have gained resonance based on discourses around the amelioration of the ‘liveability and safety’ of neighbourhoods and have actively promoted a ‘new middle-class citizen’ ideal (Uitermark et al. 2007, Lees 2008). In this regard, decaying neighbourhoods have been transformed through renovation, renewal and regeneration policies, leading to rent increases and changes in tenure, i.e. from rent occupation to home ownership, from social to private housing. As Newman and Wyly (2006) noted, this has been indicative of the battle between the use values of the neighbourhood and home versus the exchange values of real estate as a ‘vehicle’ for capital accumulation.

The highly unstable investment and disinvestment development patterns that the above policies have unfolded upon in several cities, coupled with the privatization of public services and infrastructure, have created ‘new geographies of marginality’ (Sassen 2002), leading to the marginalization and segregation of poor populations, alongside the ‘gated communities’ of upper class residents (Marcuse 1997). The symbolic violence underlying the displacement of low-income populations from specific areas of cities (MacLeod 2002, Helms and Cumbers 2006, Mayer 2009) is successfully captured in Smith’s (1996) account of gentrification as a ‘spatialized revenge’ of the new middle-class against the marginalized, such as the homeless and the new urban poor. This type of ‘revanchism’ manifested in city space reveals an underlying logic of, what Jonas and Wilson (1999:9) call, “a politicized mix of manufactured presences, deliberate absences and subjective taxonomies”. The deployment of these emergent taxonomies has served in order to promote entrepreneurialism, construct city images and “realities of villains, victims, saviours and threats”, which in turn privileged specific groups of participants in local politics over others (Jonas and Wilson 1999:9), an issue examined in detail in section 2.4.

#### **2.4. ‘Active Citizenship’ and ‘Civic Engagement’ in Urban Politics**

Looking into how urban politics and entrepreneurial growth policies were pursued by local states over the past decades, the role of civic participation in the

design and conduct of urban policy has been crucial in two ways. Firstly, the devolution of responsibilities to local states meant that non-state actors became responsible for organizing and delivering services previously performed by the state, for example community and neighbourhood public services, youth services, neighbourhood security etc. As Nicholls (2006) argues, in order for these to develop, local states promoted partnerships with third-sector civil society actors, i.e. neighbourhood associations and community groups, initially designed as an inclusive strategy of civic participation in urban governance. However, under the dominance of entrepreneurialism and the 'pro-growth' imperative as previously argued, these partnerships have in several cases evolved into a cost effective delivery method, which secured state legitimacy 'vis-à-vis' contestation (Raco 2000, Nicholls 2006). In other words, civic participation, although in principle empowering local communities and promote egalitarian decision-making in urban politics, became a means for displacing responsibility for the conduct of services previously organized and funded through state resources, which were redirected to competitive growth (Harvey 1989). Secondly, as argued in section 2.3, entrepreneurial growth targeted specific social groups through 'city-marketing' policies (Kearns and Philo 1993), while at the same time involved the construction of subjective taxonomies (Jonas and Wilson 1999), meaning privileged individuals and groups versus the marginalized, the poor, the homeless etc. Therefore, drawing on previous accounts of neoliberal governing techniques and rationalities that produced norms of personal responsibility and self-provision (Rose 1996a, 1996b; Lerner 2000, MacKinnon 2000), the employment of these in local politics privileged the participation of 'active citizens' who would abide by certain 'rights and responsibilities' in their respective communities (Raco and Imrie 2000, Raco 2007).

In particular, drawing on different European and US contexts, civic participation in urban governance has been adopted as means to discipline, 'divide and rule' local groups and blunt contestation. For example, in the case of the French urban politics, i.e. 'politique de la ville' (Nicholls 2006), the state interventionist tradition coupled with a growing competition for resources among public officials exacerbated divisions among local actors. As Nicholls (2006) stresses, the bureaucratic 'top-down' decision-making state structure dominated local policy, which in turn generated 'professionalized' and 'institutionalized' structures of local

associations and groups, incorporating and at the same time fragmenting contestation. Similarly, as Mayer (2000, 2009) shows, local officials' partnerships with moderate squatter associations in Germany were employed in order to promote neighbourhood regeneration policies. As these squatters were financially dependent on local states in order to engage in local development and service delivery, they shifted their strategies 'from protest to programme', which in turn brought about further distancing between the more professionalized groups and the more radical ones (Mayer 2000, 2009), an issue further examined in section 2.5. Hence, these partnerships were perceived by local authorities as means to exert control over community groups, as these were obliged to conform to the normative and programmatic restrictions of local states, such as surveillance techniques, audits, funding applications, or otherwise lose access to essential public resources (Arampatzi and Nicholls 2012).

Moreover, urban policy and planning in the UK over the past decade has been increasingly focused on the development of 'sustainable' (Raco 2007) and, more recently, on 'resilient' places and communities (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012), placing the emphasis on creating 'responsible' and 'active citizens', able to secure and maintain the function, the 'liveability' and the 'adaptability' of communities to external risks or threats. In discussing this prioritization and privileging of specific individuals over others, Raco (2007: 309) argues that this divisive strategy between 'good' and 'bad' citizens has been used so as to "legitimize and organize the differential distribution of state resources and power". In other words, the strategic redirection of welfare and public resources towards the development of 'roll-out' governing techniques generated the production of specific types of 'self-reliant', 'non-state dependent', socially and economically 'active citizens' (Raco 2007, Arampatzi and Nicholls 2012). Further, in the context of austerity urbanism, similar concerns articulated in UK urban policy regarding the development of 'resilient communities', often seem to pertain to middle-class voluntarism and social responsibility (Featherstone et al. 2012), so as to "maintain and legitimize existing forms of social hierarchy and control" (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012: 262). Additionally, as Tonkiss (2013: 315, 318) stresses, austerity urbanism in contexts of state withdrawal, supports various voluntary and non-profit localized incentives alongside business actors, which provide for absent or

inadequate public provision, serving as a strategy for ‘outsourcing’ municipal services to, often unpaid, voluntary groups. Finally, ‘roll-out’ methods and techniques were also employed so as to discipline the non-conformed individuals and deal with rising socio-spatial inequalities. ‘Welfare-to-work’ reforms (Theodore and Peck 1999) producing flexible labour relations as means to re-constitute the ‘passive welfare-dependent’ individuals alongside new surveillance and security techniques, repressive and punitive measures (MacLeod 2002, Mayer 2009), added to the revised exclusionary vocabulary around the self-reliant, hence, responsible citizen and signified a key shift ‘from welfare states to penal states’ (Wacquant 2001, Dikec 2006).

All the above show how civic participation in urban governance over the past decades has been reframed so as to meet the emerging entrepreneurial ‘ethos’, through the manufacturing of specific types of ‘subjects of governance’ and ensure the legitimacy of local governments, contain contestation and exert political control on urban politics. Based on these, in interrogating urban conflict, a question raised relates to the possibilities and constraints urban struggles were faced with in their attempts to articulate bottom-up contestation, an issue discussed in section 2.5.

## **2.5. Urban Conflict: from ‘Urban Social Movements’ to Fragmented Struggles**

The previous discussions showed how neoliberalization processes have rendered cities important laboratories for the emergence of entrepreneurial growth policies and governance techniques and strategies aiming to incorporate and discipline urban populations and contestation. Drawing on past literature on ‘urban social movements’ (Castells 1977, 1983), which examined urban struggles unfolding in cities during the 1960’s and 1970’s, I will address here the subsequent transformations within bottom-up contestation in contexts of neoliberalizing states over the past decades. While a conceptualization of urban social movements will be further examined in Chapter 3 (3.2.4), alongside a broader discussion on social movements, the focus here is on how urban struggles negotiate and contest the neoliberal shifts in urban politics.



Looking into the historical role of cities as crucial ‘battlegrounds’ for articulating contestation in the context of post-war capitalist urbanization, the 1970’s marked a period of massive urban mobilizations and struggles around the collective reproduction of labour power living and working in cities. Manuel Castells’ *Urban Question* (1977) set the grounds for conceptualizing ‘urban social movements’ (see Chapter 3.2.4) and the role of the city in national politics, through a Marxist account of the ‘urban’. Since the national state was responsible for organizing the production and distribution of public services and infrastructure, i.e. housing, transportation, health, education, welfare etc., failure to meet these collective demands led to the articulation of collective grievances through urban mobilizations (Nicholls 2008). Drawing on Castells (1977), Nicholls (2008) stresses that these ‘structural grievances’ reflected the inherent contradictions of capitalism and cities became key terrains of class conflict. In this regard, collective grievances around the reproductive function of the state served as ‘bridges’ between traditional working-class politics and urban movements, linking the ‘places of work’ with the ‘places of residence’ of urban inhabitants (Nicholls 2008). According to Castells (1977), this convergence of urban struggles, trade unions and political parties held the capacity to pose systemic threats to capitalism and “bring about fundamental change in politics and society” (Castells 1977 in Mayer 2009: 364).

As Mayer (2000, 2009) points out, urban social movements in the 1970’s emerged as responses to urban redevelopment policies, contesting threats posed on the collective reproduction of social groups in cities, through public services and infrastructure (Mayer 2000, 2009). Further, a shared understanding of the city as a reproductive field facilitated the formation of coalitions among radicals and neighbourhood groups and motivated various social groups to join up forces against urban policies that disrupted the socio-spatial fabric of their neighbourhoods (Mayer 2000: 133). In this regard, several squatter movements that appeared in European cities, across Germany and the Netherlands for example, managed to articulate a critique against policies that deprived low-cost housing residency from city populations previously entitled to social housing. At the same time, squatters served as places for building on solidarities and shared resources among community groups, providing the latter with a certain degree of unity (Mayer 2000).

In the following period, 'roll-back' neoliberalization processes and major reductions in public funds previously distributed through local services posed pressures on local governments, which turned to entrepreneurialism so as to secure capital investments. As discussed earlier, local states employed several co-optation strategies and tactics, which sought to incorporate 'moderate' neighbourhood groups into local partnerships and institutional channels and render them responsible for delivering local services, as means to legitimize the redirection of resources to pro-growth policies (Mayer 2009). As these became increasingly professionalized (Nicholls 2006), more radical groups that did not engage in local state partnerships were marginalized and excluded from local politics and decision-making processes, leading to the fragmentation of past alliances and coalitions among urban struggles (Mayer 2000). This fragmentation of urban social movements further deepened during the 1990's, as shared goals and collective interests of groups, previously serving as common ideological platforms for joint actions, were replaced by an increased concern with the protection of individual groups' interests and privileges. In this sense, Mayer (2000, 2009) argues that, while local states maintained control over community groups and successfully channelled urban grievances into development policy and 'workfare' programmes, former collective demands articulated through urban social movements shifted to fragmented struggles over the protection of the individual interests of groups.

Castells in *The City and the Grassroots* (1983) aimed to include the above transformations within urban struggles, placing emphasis on the changing role of local states in containing, channelling and, ultimately, fragmenting urban grievances through incorporation and co-optation tactics. Further, in departing from his previous structural Marxist approach, Castells (1983) pointed out the shift from struggles over collective interests to 'identity politics' expressed through local movements organized around community cultures and interests. As Nicholls (2008: 2) stresses, while collective consumption demands remain central in urban struggles, Castells (1983) highlights the shift in how these used to reflect the structural contradictions of capitalism to how community groups and activists articulated consumption concerns through the construction of 'territorial identities' and based on their immediate everyday needs. This re-conceptualization of urban social movements by Castells (1983) resonates with the above transformations in urban social movements in including several self-determination and autonomous

struggles that emerged at the time. However, what remains unaddressed is how these local struggles contest the restrictions imposed by local states and, also, how they negotiate their place-specific identities in pursuit of their respective interests. This account of a 'defensive politics of place' in Castells (1983) pertains to an understanding of place-specific identities as place-bound and restricted to their localities. Similarly, Harvey (1996) draws on Raymond Williams' account of 'militant particularisms' in order to discuss the place-specific contiguous in-group solidarities as indicative of the fragmentation of local struggles. Being grounded in particular places, these place-specific solidarities, on the one hand, are integral for building on a group's ideological and symbolic cohesion and stability, while, on the other hand, become barriers in articulating a sense of common value and purpose, a universal discourse or a 'global ambition' (Harvey 1996).

The above discussions around local struggles seem to conceive places as fixed and bounded entities and, subsequently, a defensive politics of place maintains an understanding of separately constituted solidarities, interests, goals and values, which are formed in isolation to their outside worlds (Massey 2004, Featherstone 2005). Therefore, in order to include recent transformations within place-specific, urban-based and broader social movements, e.g. the alter/counter-globalization movement opposing neoliberal globalization, I draw on Featherstone (2005, 2008) who stresses the relational identity construction within the above processes and argues for a relational understanding of 'militant particularisms', as place-based solidarities openly negotiated, contested and reconfigured historically and geographically. This account is inclusive of a globally constituted character of the 'local' (Massey 1994) and sees political identities as consolidated through multiple complex interconnections across places (Nicholls 2009) (also see 'the politics of place' discussion in Chapter 3.3.1). Finally, these reveal the importance of placing an analytical focus on the spatialities that constitute and are constituted by urban struggles and broader social movements (Routledge 1993, 1997), a crucial issue discussed extensively in Chapter 3 (3.4). In trying to further the debate on urban and spatial justice, the remaining part of this chapter will look into how urban politics under neoliberal governance were contested, through accounts on 'urban democracy' and the 'right to the city'.

## 2.6. Re-claiming Urban Democracy and Social Justice in the City

The previous discussion included accounts on urban struggles, which stressed their ongoing fragmentation, mainly due to their place-specific character and the spatial restrictions to their expansion imposed by local states. In trying to advance understandings of urban movements as responses to broader neoliberalization processes the discussion now shifts to accounts which conceptualize urban struggles through notions of ‘urban democracy’ (Purcell 2008), the ‘right to the city’ (Lefebvre 1996, original 1968) and the ‘urban commons’ (Chatterton 2010a, Hodkinson 2012). While collective consumption demands around the reproductive function of cities, e.g. housing, public services and infrastructure, remain, my argument is that the ‘relational qualities’ and ‘interdependencies’ found in cities (Nicholls 2008) render urban space crucial for the development of broader movements, e.g. social and environmental justice mobilizations (Routledge 2010). Hence, the aim is to develop a broader understanding of urban struggles as being *about* the city and, at the same time, unfolding *in* cities and beyond.

As discussed earlier (see 2.3 and 2.4), in contexts of neoliberal urban governance and competitive market-oriented growth, civic participation in urban politics and decision-making processes as well as public accountability through elected officials were gradually undermined. Several examples of public-private partnerships and urban policy-making were designed and conducted in ways that privileged elite urban actors, the corporate sector and global capital investments (Purcell 2006, Routledge 2010). These had a ‘disenfranchising’ effect on urban inhabitants, as participation and control over the decisions that shaped cities were weakened (Purcell 2002). Taking these into account, several authors have shifted the attention to rethinking the bottom-up responses to the above through concepts of ‘urban and social justice’, ‘democratic control’ and the ‘right to the city’ (Purcell 2002, Harvey 2003, Mitchell 2003, Marcuse 2009). In brief, what this literature maintains is that urban struggles seek to reinsert collective consumption issues in cities and inclusive democratic control over urban space into their demands and practices. In this way, the city becomes a key field for drawing on urban issues and place-specific struggles in order to build on broader mobilizations. As urban activists employ discourses around urban justice, democracy and the right to the

city in order to target place-specific issues, at the same time, a series of complementary 'rights' discourses, demands and resistance practices around social, economic and environmental justice are introduced which extend across and beyond the city (Leontidou 2010, Routledge 2010).

Accordingly, in several instances urban movements around the world have articulated demands around the amelioration of living conditions in cities and responded to growing inequalities that have been the outcomes of uneven neoliberal development, i.e. unemployment, homelessness and socio-spatial marginalization among others (Nicholls 2003, Nicholls and Beaumont 2004). 'The Right to the City Alliance' launched in 2007 for example, brought together diverse organizations and individuals from across the US in a common struggle against gentrification and displacement affecting working class communities of colour<sup>8</sup>. As Routledge (2010: 1174) notes, in this case, the 'right to the city' served as a unifying agenda for different communities and groups' interests to join up forces around issues of economic security, homelessness, housing and transportation. At the same time, these grassroots urban mobilizations have also played a crucial role in broader resistance to neoliberal globalization, particularly through the alter/counter-globalization movement. For example, the anti-WTO mobilizations in Seattle in 1999 and the anti-World Bank and IMF protests in Prague 2000 have managed to bring together divergent actors, such as social movements, trade unions, environmental groups and non-governmental organizations (Routledge 2003, 2010). Further, as Merrifield (2013: 59) points out, recent protests in cities around the world, from the Occupy movement in the US, to the Spanish '15M Revolution' and the Greek squares' movement, showed how the stakes were not about the city per se, but rather about the function of democracy in contexts of crisis.

Within the above mobilizations, public space acted strategically as both a subject matter of contestation and a field for manifesting contestation. In regard to the former, public spaces in cities have often been targeted by redevelopment and privatization policies, as well as 'securitization and safety' projects around the application of surveillance and discipline techniques. Further, regarding the latter, specific public spaces, such as streets, squares, parks, meeting points etc., hold a

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.ussf2007.org/en/Right To The City Alliance](http://www.ussf2007.org/en/Right_To_The_City_Alliance), viewed 7/2/12

key symbolic and material role in the development of forms of activist cultures and sub-cultures and, more generally, in how urban residents relate to community social interaction in reference to public spaces. Public spaces are collective spaces, where contestation and conflict is expressed. Also, they are ‘spaces of encounter’ (Merrifield 2013: 66), where social groups attain forms of visibility and political coherence. Drawing on Mitchell (2003), issues of ‘urban justice’, ‘urban democracy’ and ‘the right to the city’ are contested and subsequently politicized *through* and *in* public spaces in cities, where political and cultural identities engage in constant interaction and exchange. In this sense, public spaces are spaces of representation, whereby ‘the right to the city’ is ‘heard, seen and implemented’ through the physical presence of urban inhabitants exercising their civil rights and contesting the social content of justice (Mitchell 2003, Routledge 2010).

In problematizing this point, a key argument raised here is that the ‘right to the city’ can be inclusive of rights of, often, antagonistic interests and groups. For example, housing and anti-gentrification struggles, in claiming rights to housing, contest property rights of real estate capital. In this regard, Smith (1992) uses the ‘homeless vehicle’, a symbolic art project, in order to show how the property rights of real-estate markets lead to evictions, displacement and marginalization of urban populations and, as the homeless occupy public spaces in cities, they contest their rights to housing and public visibility. Similarly, Butler (2009) discusses the right to citizenship through the performative action of the right to ‘count as a subject’. By using the example of immigrants without papers taking to the streets of Los Angeles in 2006 and singing the national anthem of the US, she argues that the song became a performative action of exercising the right to assembly in public space, a right that belongs to citizens, and denoted the sudden visibility and audibility of those who are supposed to remain invisible and inaudible (Butler 2009). Therefore, in furthering the ‘rights’ discourses, which can often hinder our understanding of contentious politics, I suggest here an account of the ‘right to the city’ closely linked to issues around social and spatial justice and, as Mitchell (2003: 10) highlights, as part and parcel of an ongoing democratization process, a struggle for a “more open, more just, more egalitarian society”.

In this respect, the ‘right to the city’, as stated by Lefebvre (1996, original 1968), can be utilized as a starting point for conceptualizing urban democracy under

neoliberal and austerity urbanism. Marcuse (2009) argues for a definition of this right, in terms of the groups entitled to exercise it, the qualities included in it and the vision of the city that it entails. As he points out, Lefebvre's right is 'both a cry and a demand', revealing both the necessity and unfulfilled needs of those who are deprived and oppressed, marginalized and excluded, as well as the 'aspiration' of the ones 'alienated' from decision-making in cities (Marcuse 2009: 190, 191). Further, 'the right to the city' encompasses a series of rights, i.e. the right to public space, the right to freedom, the right to inhabit and access the city etc. (Mitchell 2003, Marcuse 2009). As Harvey (2003: 939) argues, "the right to the city is not merely a right to access what already exists, but a right to change it after our heart's desire". This point reveals a contentious interpretation of the 'right to the city', as a challenge to established rights and broader social, political and economic processes taking place in cities. Therefore, the contestation of the legal connotation of 'rights' opens up spaces for including broader social, political and moral claims around 'justice'. As Dikec (2001:1791) suggests, "in claiming these rights, a notion of spatial justice might serve as a mobilizing discourse through the cultivation of a spatial sensibility towards injustice and a spatial culture to fight against it".

Moreover, Purcell (2002, 2008) argues for an understanding of the 'right to the city' as a radical opening for re-asserting urban democracy and egalitarian participation in urban politics and, in this way, as a challenge to the socio-spatial relations underlying the production of space under neoliberal capitalism. In unpacking Lefebvre's (1996, original 1968) original account, 'the right to the city' includes two rights; namely 'the right to participation' and 'the right to appropriation'. Firstly, the right to participation involves the empowered participation of urban dwellers in decision-making processes that contribute to the production of urban space. As Purcell (2002) notes, Lefebvre's discussion of 'citadins', instead of urban citizens, seeks to problematize citizenship rights and extend these, from state mediated representation based on legal status, to the very participatory practices of urban inhabitants that produce urban space, 'before all and beyond the state'. Hence, this new type of urban citizenship as a political identity aspires to an inclusive and egalitarian city, whereby equal participation is pursued in decisions that shape the city. This political identity is not restricted to the participatory right in the political life, management and administration of the city,

but as Dikec (2001) stresses, becomes an 'enabling right', constantly defined and redefined through political struggle. Therefore, this right to a 'political space' within the city aims to reconstitute urban space as 'a space of politics' and expand the notion of urban citizenship as a legal status to a political identification with the city (Dikec 2001: 1790).

Secondly, 'the right to appropriation' includes the right of inhabitants to physically access, occupy and use urban space (Purcell 2002: 103). Further, it is inclusive of practices that seek to challenge the dominant mode of the production of space, i.e. 'exchange-value', and engage in the production of urban space based on its 'use-value', according to the everyday needs of urban inhabitants (Harvey 2003, Purcell 2008). According to Purcell (2002), the prioritization of the 'use-value' of urban space over its 'exchange-value' poses a radical confrontation to the valorisation of urban space as a key accumulation strategy for the reproduction of capitalist relations. Hence, permission to use and occupy urban space is extended to meet the needs of its users, for example in housing, services, employment etc. (Harvey 2003) In this sense, the right to appropriate urban space involves the production of spaces where homeless can be sheltered, non-commodified spaces where access to all is free and spaces where urban struggles experiment with alternatives to the 'exchange-value' capital accumulation. In turn, these practices of appropriation of urban space involve the active contestation of urban and land-use policy, planning laws and real-estate property markets (Dikec 2001: 1801).

In expanding the debate around social and spatial justice, urban democracy and participation and looking into the above practices of appropriation of urban space, several authors discuss the production of alternative, non-commodified means to fulfil social needs in the city (DeAngelis 2007, Hardt and Negri 2009, Chatterton 2010a, Hodkinson 2012). These alternatives, identified as the 'commons', are viewed as collective spaces created outside capitalist relations, in an attempt to reclaim socio-spatial relations from capitalist accumulation, market-oriented strategies and profit-making, conceptualized as capitalist 'enclosures' (Cumbers 2012). More specifically, in relation to the previous discussion on appropriation practices, which prioritize the use-value and social needs over the valorisation of urban space, an understanding of the 'urban commons' involves practices and collective projects developed through communities, local networks of



trust, reciprocity, mutual aid and solidarity, which prioritize social needs over market-driven principles of exchange-value (DeAngelis 2007).

Thinking of the city as a collective project (Harvey 2003) and a contemporary ‘common’ (Chatterton 2010a), the above practices of appropriation, or ‘commoning’, seek to challenge forces of capital accumulation, economic production and social reproduction manifested in and through urban space. Drawing on Hodkinson (2012), the city as an urban common is understood firstly, as a ‘resource-pool’ for everyone to have access to, secondly, as a ‘public sphere’ of human interaction and cooperation. In treating this two-fold function in dialectical terms, barriers to use and access the resources the city offers trigger bottom-up contestation and opposition to privatization of these resources, e.g. public services and infrastructure, social housing etc. At the same time, this contestation evokes the ‘right to appropriation’ of urban space based on its use-value, as discussed above. Further, barriers to participate and contribute to the city as a public sphere of constant interaction and socialization evoke the ‘right to participate’ in decision-making that shapes urban space, as also debated earlier. Therefore, in bringing together the above discussions around urban democracy, the right to the city and more recent accounts on urban commons, the core analytical focus lies on the collective power of the masses to shape and control urbanization processes (Hodkinson 2012: 516).

## **2.7. Concluding Remarks: Towards accounts of the Spatialities of Contentious Politics**

This chapter discussed neoliberalization processes, focusing on transformations in urban governance, urban politics and bottom-up contestation occurring in cities over the past few decades. As cities became crucial ‘laboratories’ for the development of the neoliberal project, the strategic redirection of public resources from welfare to entrepreneurial strategies and competitive growth placed localities in a perpetual competition for private capital investments (Harvey 1989, Peck and Tickell 2002, Peck 2003). In order to deal with the inherent contradictions and crises this pro-growth urban politics entailed, several governing techniques were deployed in cities, which managed to exert control over urban populations

(Larner 2000, Peck 2001). These mainly involved the incorporation and professionalization of community groups and the development of discourses around 'self-reliant citizens' (Nicholls 2006, Raco 2007), as a means to legitimize local state power and contain contestation, and, at the same time, the marginalization and penalization of non-compliant groups and individuals (Mayer 2000, Wacquant 2001). Drawing on accounts of 'urban social movements' (Castells 1977, 1983; Mayer 2000, 2009), in the past urban struggles managed to articulate contestation around the reproductive function of the city, i.e. public services, resources and infrastructure, building on broader solidarities and communicating their demands around collective consumption in cities. However, as this literature maintains, the entrepreneurial shift in urban governance and the 'divide and rule' tactics employed in urban politics and local partnerships managed to fragment urban movements, into local struggles around the protection of individual groups' interests and privileges and 'militant particularisms' (Harvey and Williams 1995).

Moreover, in rethinking movements emerging *in* cities as not necessarily restricted *to* the city, debates around 'urban democracy' and the 'right to the city' (Purcell 2008, Routledge 2010) show how cities hold a key role in the development of broader movements, based on the resources and contact opportunities available for activists and groups (Nicholls 2008). In this sense, Lefebvre's 'right to the city' (1996, original 1968) is understood as a radical opening and an enabling right to a political space, one which extends across and beyond the city, to meet broader issues of social and spatial justice, economic and political democracy (Dikec 2001, Purcell 2002). In defining the right to the city as the right to appropriate urban space and the right to participate in the decisions that shape urbanization processes, contestation is interpreted in two closely linked ways. Firstly, a prioritization of the social needs of urban inhabitants over market-driven strategies of privatization of urban space becomes a right to appropriate urban space based on its use-value as opposed to the exchange-value of capitalist accumulation (Purcell 2002, Harvey 2003, Hodkinson 2012). Secondly, the right to open participation in the production of urban space contests the entrepreneurial 'ethos' of the 'good, responsible citizen' (Raco 2007) and the subsequent marginalization of urban populations excluded from these processes.

However, a few creative tensions are raised in relation to the above discussions. As noted earlier, while the role of the local plays a key role in the emergence of place-based contestation, ‘militant particularisms’ and political identities are able to create inter-local conflict and fragmentation among groups. At the same time, the right *to* the city, while able to unify struggles around urban space and blunt inter-local fragmentation, creates tensions when interrogating peasant or rural movements. Drawing on Massey (1994), I argue for an open understanding of ‘place’, rather than an enclosed entity, which encompasses multiple, as opposed to single, identities and ‘senses of place’. Further, the privileging of one spatial scale over another, e.g. the ‘local’ over the ‘global’, or the ‘urban’ over the ‘rural’, hinders our understanding of contentious politics as *de facto* fragmented and spatially trapped (Purcell 2006). Instead, spatial scales are mutually constituted through relational interactions and complex economic, political and cultural networks (Routledge 2010).

What is maintained here is that, while urban issues are still crucial in the emergence and development of urban struggles, cities are understood as key sites where broad social, economic and political relations intersect. In this sense, cities provide crucial resources and contact opportunities among local and non-local actors, community groups, trade unions and international groups mobilizing around environmental and broader social justice issues (Nicholls 2008, Chatterton 2010b, Leontidou 2010, Routledge 2010). As Mayer (2009) points out, contemporary urban struggles contest the commodification of urban space, the privatization of public services and the displacement of social groups due to real estate strategies. At the same time, demonstrations, strikes and often, violent protests are growing into more coordinated, better organized and pragmatic struggles which challenge the ongoing global crisis and austerity (Mayer 2009).

Finally, in adding to our understanding of how movements emerge and develop, bottom-up practices of resistance and alternatives to austerity politics articulated in and beyond cities, the analytical focus now shifts to the spatialities of contentious politics. In this regard, Chapter 3 looks into relevant debates around the geographies of social movements and the role of space within movements’ strategies and practices.

### **3. Geography and Social Movements**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

Following the debate on neoliberal governance and urban conflict in Chapter 2, this chapter addresses theoretical accounts of social movements focusing on the role of geography in contentious politics. In this regard, a series of arguments are raised that pertain to the following: firstly, social movement theory conceived collective action as the ability to pool and mobilize resources, through the formation of organizations and interest groups (McCarthy and Zald 1977, Kriesi 1996), the ability to make use of political openings in state structures so as to articulate grievances and challenge elites (Tilly 1978, McAdam 1996, Tarrow 1998), and the crucial role of identity-formation for collective action to emerge (Touraine 1981, Castells 1983, Offe 1985, Melucci 1996). According to McAdam et al. (2001), social movements are collective forms of contentious politics aiming to effect goals through non- traditional means, e.g. non- electoral politics. In this sense, movements bring together groups and individuals pursuing certain goals, they are contesting specific interests and they pose demands to states (Nicholls 2007).

Secondly, even though these accounts sought to unravel the processes of collective action, they nevertheless failed to acknowledge that geography matters in examining social processes and contentious politics. Therefore, what is argued here is that key conceptualizations on space, place and scale provide for renewed understandings of broad socio-spatial processes and contentious spatial practices. In this sense, the politics of place signify contestation around the meanings, symbols and representations of places, as well as the production of new political imaginaries. Additionally, the politics of scale, understood processually, denotes a complementary arena of struggle for contentious practices. Thirdly, thinking of ‘multiple spatialities’, e.g. place, scale, networks etc. (Leitner et al. 2008) as multiple, overlapping, interdependent dimensions of contentious practices provides for more comprehensive context-sensitive approaches to the geographies of social movements. Hence, the role of networks becomes highly relevant in examining the development and expansion of social movements across geographical sites and scales.

Fourthly, as discussed through empirical studies of movements unfolding in various contexts, space shapes contentious practices (Routledge 1992, 1993) and is simultaneously shaped by social movement practices and strategies (Routledge 1996a, 1997). Also, multi-scalar strategies movements pursue can enable their expansion through connections to geographically distant allies and networks spanning geographical space (Routledge and Cumbers 2009). At the same time, these strategies can depend on political contexts (Miller 2000) and make use of state structures, or seek to create alternative autonomous spaces for collective empowerment (Chatterton 2005, Zibechi 2010). Finally, the diversity of the cases discussed below reveals the relevance of context in furthering our understandings of contentious politics, in relation to the actual social processes and practices grounded in places and occurring across geographical space.

### **3.2. Conceptualizing Social Movements**

While early social movement accounts interpreted collective action and mobilizations as ‘irrational responses to malfunctioning institutions and norms’ (Nicholls 2007), this view was soon rendered incapable of explaining the worldwide movements and protests that erupted during the 1960’s and 1970’s i.e. ‘ghetto riots’, the Civil Rights and anti-war movements in the US, the feminist and environmental movements, as well as local autonomy struggles. At the same time, the diversity of intellectual traditions, contexts and empirical studies developed in the western world, i.e. North America and Europe led to the emergence of two main schools of thought within social movement literature, drawing on sociology and political science (Della Porta and Diani 1999). On the one hand, scholars in the US, drawing on structural functionalism, examined social movements through asking ‘how’ collective action is formed and manifested, following the organizational logic of US movements and their structuration as interest groups. On the other hand, scholars in Europe were concerned with transformations of the structural bases of conflict, asking ‘why’ collective action emerges. In this sense, the ‘new social movements’ accounts developed in Europe after the 1960’s mainly focused on issues of ideology, forming a particular variant of previous research on class-focused movements (Della Porta and Diani 1999). These broadly identified

approaches formed three main strands of literature on social movements, which, while not homogeneous, share conceptual frameworks and theoretical understandings. These involve the ‘resource mobilization’ and ‘political process’ approaches and the ‘new social movements’ accounts, discussed throughout sections 3.2.1- 3.2.4.

### **3.2.1. The ‘Resource Mobilization’ approach**

Firstly, the ‘resource mobilization’ approaches became dominant within studies of Northern American social movements during the 1960’s onwards, e.g. the Civil Rights, the anti-war and the feminist movements. The main argument raised within these accounts maintains that a determinant factor for the development and sustainability of collective action is the availability of resources for movement actors, i.e. material resources, expertise, knowledge, legitimacy, leadership, social networks etc. (McCarthy and Zald 1977). These approaches focus on the internal organizational characteristics of social movements and understand the deployment of resources and strategic decision-making as integral to the mobilization capacities of movements. This relates to conceptual influences from neoclassical economics and ‘rational choice’ theory, leading to interpretations of social movement participation as rational and purposive, serving the interests of actors in ways that benefits outweigh costs (Miller 2000: 19). Additionally, resource mobilization accounts highlighted the crucial role of organizations and institutions, i.e. coalitions, bureaucracies, divisions of labour etc., in securing, gathering and deploying resources in highly effective ways, so as to pose demands and exercise political pressure (Kriesi 1996 in Nicholls 2007).

In particular, resource mobilization approaches aimed to address ‘how’ social actors mobilize, arguing in this way that, while social discontent is universal, collective action is not (Foweraker 1995). In other words, this argument maintained that the emergence of grievances did not lead to the emergence of collective action in a linear way. On the contrary, what these scholars showed was that the emergence and development of social movement depended on highly complex processes of pooling resources and strategically deploying them, through collaborations with other actors and allies, in order to fulfil specific goals. For this

reason, the internal organization of social movements and leadership skills were understood as vital for setting goals and promoting strategic decision-making so as to achieve these goals (Foweraker 1995). Accordingly, actors engaged in these processes in rational and purposeful ways (Tilly 1978), which served their specific interests, while their participation in social movement organizations was based on cost-benefit calculations influenced by the availability of resources necessary for the development of collective action (Della Porta and Diani 1999). Finally, the availability of resources which defined the mobilization capacities of social movements involved key material resources, such as labour, money, benefits and services, as well as non-material or symbolic resources relating to authority, moral engagement, faith, friendship and solidarity (Della Porta and Diani 1999).

### **3.2.2. The ‘Political Process’ approach**

Secondly, the ‘political process’ approach (McAdam 1982) developed closely linked to US studies of social movements and aimed to examine how the political and institutional structures within which organizations and movements operate influence their mobilization capacities and effectiveness in achieving their goals (Miller 2000). Hence, the key analytical focus was placed on the relationship between institutional political actors and protest, or, in other words, on the relationship between the internal organizational characteristics of collective action and their external political environments (Della Porta and Diani 1999). Charles Tilly (1978) highlighted this relationship between organizations’ interests and the political opportunities or barriers that facilitate or impede respectively their mobilization capacities within given historical and political contexts (Miller 2000: 24). Therefore, the political context within which collective action unfolded acquired a key analytical focus, either relating to formal institutional arrangements and actors, i.e. national or local governments, or informal articulations of power relations. In this way, these conceptualizations produced more nuanced approaches to resource mobilization accounts, as they interrogated the role of national and local states, as well as other kinds of political authority, that produced variations in social movement organizational characteristics (Foweraker 1995).

In particular, Tarrow (1998) stressed that potential ‘openings’ in political structures reinforced the opportunities for social movement development, as they generated incentives for the participation of groups and individuals in mobilizations in ways that enhanced the possibility of success and minimized the risks of failure (Nicholls 2007). Additionally, McAdam (1996: 27) defined the ‘political opportunity structure’ firstly, as “the openness or closure of the institutionalized political system”, secondly as “the stability or instability of elite alignments that undergird a polity”, thirdly, as “the presence or absence of elite allies” and fourthly, as “the state’s capacity and propensity for repression”. Based on these, social movements followed ‘cycles of protest’ (Tarrow 1989), as they emerged historically and across social and political contexts, expanded or contracted given the context-specific circumstances and political opportunities (Miller 2000). As Foweraker (1995) stresses, the analytical contribution of this approach mainly involved the identification of the social and political terrain that conditioned the emergence and development of social movements. Finally, in furthering this argument, these accounts provided for an analysis, which treated social movements as political actors in their own right, as they expanded conceptualizations on the relationship between institutionalized systems of interest representation and new actors employing ‘unconventional forms of action’ (Della Porta and Diani 1999).

### **3.2.3. The ‘New Social Movements’**

Shifting the attention to structural changes in western societies, European scholars during the 1970’s and 1980’s conducted research on emerging student, gender and peace movements, as well as anti-nuclear and environmental struggles (Touraine 1981, Habermas 1984, Offe 1985, Melucci 1996). These movements were understood as reflections of the different cycles of capitalist development and were termed ‘new social movements’ as opposed to earlier class- centered paradigms. The term ‘new social movements’, according to Touraine (1981), signified the transition from an industrial society to a post-industrial one, from the working-class movements of the past and contestation around distributive and material issues to the new ‘middle-class’ movements that raised issues of autonomy and identity (Foweraker 1995). In this regard, the grievances of the ‘new social



movements' involved mainly sexuality, gender, environmental and religious issues and marked a qualitative shift to identity politics, departing in this way from traditional labour politics. As Foweraker (1995: 36) notes, the new social movements' accounts developed "in response to what was considered to be an outmoded style of class analysis". In this sense, the class-focused contradictions of industrial societies were rendered analytically insufficient for understanding the multiple and diverse social conflicts of post-industrial societies (Foweraker 1995). However, it is important to stress here that these debates related to European contexts of well-established and developed welfare states in the post-war period, as well as to traditions of institutionalized labour movements unfolding across European countries. Therefore, these accounts lacked analytical strength in other contexts of weak welfare states and working-class politics, such as the US for example (Foweraker 1995).

In particular, as Della Porta and Diani (1999) note, the new social movement scholars highlighted that orthodox Marxist approaches to social conflict were rendered inadequate to explain for emerging social transformations and contestation. In this regard, this analytical inadequacy lay in the prioritization of the capital-labour conflict as the core antagonism, which generated social conflict over the control of the means of production. In shifting the attention to contestation around issues of culture and identity, as articulated through public discourse, collective identities, symbolic narratives and political demands, the new social movements' accounts tried to show how these grievances were not class-specific per se but universal (Touraine 1981, Habermas 1984, Offe 1985, Melucci 1996). While Touraine's (1981) critique focused on unravelling the deterministic interpretations and accounts of movements as internally homogeneous, Offe (1985) stressed that the new social movements depicted the contradictions of social rather than economic transformations. In this sense, the new social movements did not focus on struggles over material resources, rather they pursued the defence of their autonomous spaces through fluid, inclusive participation and non-institutionalized organization (Della Porta and Diani 1999).

Additionally, Melucci (1996), drawing on Habermas (1984), argued that the repercussions of consumerism capitalism, the commodification of social reproduction and the bureaucratization of states had set in motion several

grievances around the defence of collective identities and forms of life threatened by the economy and the state, i.e. ‘the colonization of the lifeworlds’ (Miller 2000, Nicholls 2007). In other words, according to Melucci (1996), the new social movements sought to defend their autonomy vis-à-vis means of state and economy intervention into social life, e.g. security, well-being etc. Further, Melucci’s (1996) account of these movement as ‘processes of identity formation’ showed how subordinated actors identified with each other, the system and their position within it, in a processual fashion through repeated interactions of social networks. As Della Porta and Diani (1999) stress, these contributions not only managed to capture the characteristics of the new social movements, which ceased to identify themselves in relation to their position within capitalist production and conflict around material interests, but also shifted the analytical focus to agency-oriented approaches, as well as processual notions of movement formation.

#### **3.2.4. ‘Urban Social Movements’**

A particular variant of social movement literature that dealt with social conflict emerging in cities during the 1960’s and 1970’s treated ‘urban social movements’ as a field of study in its own right (also see Chapter 2.5). This period was marked by mobilizations that rendered urban space crucial within the social reproduction of labour power in cities, through public services and infrastructure, i.e. housing, transportation, welfare etc. Urbanization processes and uneven development leading to the displacement of urban populations, as well as the commodification of public services were some of the issues contested by urban social movements, as discussed in the previous chapter. In this sense, cities emerged as analytical foci of political and social conflict in the work of theorists, such as Lefebvre (‘The Right to the City’ 1996, original 1968), Castells (*The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach*, 1977) and Debord (*The Society of the Spectacle*, 1994). These accounts brought together urban theory and Marxism in order to conceptually grasp the transition from industrial cities of ‘capitalist structure and working-class agency’ to post-industrial urbanization trends (Tajbakhsh 2001). In this sense, urban movements were understood as responses to the non-class effects of broad socio-economic processes, as, on the one hand, capitalist economic

development created urban structures and patterns of everyday life, such as the separation between workplaces and community residential spaces and, on the other hand, these urban structures shaped new patterns of group identity formation and social conflict (Tajbakhsh 2001: 15).

In particular, Castells' (1977) account of 'urban social movements' shifted the analytical focus on issues of power and conflict in urban politics and highlighted the contradictory role of the state in advanced capitalist societies. An 'urban social movement' according to Castells (1977) is defined as: "a system of practices resulting from the articulation of a conjuncture of the system of urban agents with other social practices, such that its development tends objectively towards the structural transformation of the urban system, or towards a substantial change in the balance of power in the class struggle, that is to say, on the power of the State" (Pickvance 1975: 30). In this regard, state intervention in the social reproduction of labour power in cities triggered contestation, for the reason that not all social groups benefited or had access to public services and infrastructure. In understanding this contestation through the notion of 'collective consumption' grievances raised by urban populations that were excluded from the above, Castells (1977) introduced a complementary front of conflict to the one between labour and capital. Therefore, urban social movements portrayed the contradictions of both broader structural forces and urban actors and, in developing links to trade unions and party politics, were understood as anti-systemic threats able to bring about social change (Pickvance 2003). However, this interpretation of urban social movements involves an underlying hierarchical and somewhat normative understanding of the political effects of collective action. According to Pickvance (1975, 2003), this account becomes restrictive, as it distinguishes between participation, protest and urban social movements as forms of collective action. While participation brings about symbolic change, having the least effect, protest leads to reform and falls short of challenging structural conditions (Pickvance 2003: 103). Accordingly, an urban social movement is able to bring about fundamental change in political power, based on links developed to economic and political aspects of class struggle (Pickvance 1975).

Finally, in his later work, Castells (1983) departs from structural Marxism and the above arguments. In discussing the 'new social movement' accounts,

Castells (1983) provides an understanding of urban social movements, which combine collective consumption demands, trade unionism and identity politics, but have little to gain from developing links to party politics (Pickvance 2003). As discussed in Chapter 2.5., this re-conceptualization of urban social movements aimed to include identity politics and self-determination struggles that emerged at the time. In this sense, grievances articulated by community groups and local movements did not necessarily reflect the structural contradictions of capitalism, rather they originated in community cultures and interests and territorial identities (Nicholls 2008). Additionally, as the city was conceived of as a product of macro socio-economic forces, urban social movements lost their capacity to bring about drastic transformations in power relations and were restricted to act locally (Pickvance 2003). While still relevant in thinking urban movements as potentially effective collective action manifested in cities (Pickvance 2003), this account raises some questions in regard to how urban struggles negotiate their place-specific identities and contest the above restrictions. In turn, these require a conceptualization of the 'politics of place' (see 3.3.1.) pursued by local movements and the key role of their spatialities in their development.

### **3.2.5. Social Movements Opposing Neoliberal Globalization: Towards New Paradigms**

More recently, scholars have shifted the analytical focus to social movements opposing neoliberal globalization (Della Porta and Diani 1999, McAdam et al. 2001, Della Porta and Tarrow 2005). The emergence of transnational movements articulating grievances locally to globally and mobilizing around various issues, e.g. alter/counter-globalization, religious and environmental movements, has raised debates that draw on the above literatures and expand conceptualizations. As Della Porta and Diani (1999: 55) mention, the material and redistributive dimension of conflicts has not lost its significance in contemporary non-working-class movements. As neoliberalization has aggravated inequalities, grievances around collective consumption and quality of life issues remain central in mobilizations around urban development or public infrastructure in urban areas, the same struggles also focus on the redistribution of material resources and

economic justice (Della Porta and Diani 1999, Nicholls 2007). Consequently, various alliances and coalitions between working-class movements and community groups are formed, which not only seek to secure their relative autonomy towards the disenfranchising effects of neoliberal governance, but also reclaim material resources for social groups, e.g. mobilizations of homeless people, unemployed or other marginal groups etc. (Della Porta and Diani 1999, Nicholls 2007).

At the same time, the resurgence of structural grievances does not automatically relate to collective action. Hence Della Porta and Diani (1999) suggest an understanding of these mobilizations through a synthetic approach, which incorporates social movement conceptualizations to contemporary empirical research. In other words, equally important are the organizational infrastructure of movements, their ideological and symbolic interpretations, as well as the available political opportunities in relation to specific political contexts (Della Porta and Diani 1999). As Tarrow (2005) notes, these approaches can conceptually contribute to understandings of recent transnational mobilizations opposing neoliberal globalization. In this regard, transnational movements are seen as complex sets of horizontal relations between state and non-state actors and vertical linkages between subnational, national and transnational levels. According to Tarrow (2005), interactions between local and global politics offer a variety of resources and opportunities for the emergence and development of new transnational activist networks and coalitions.

Therefore, social movement literature can still prove relevant for looking into emerging forms of collective action. However, this literature does not necessarily provide for a universal paradigm, through which understandings of movements and contestation can be produced. As Leitner et al. (2008: 157) argue, the term ‘contentious politics’ which replaced ‘social movements’ in order to describe phenomena of organized resistance to hegemonic power, falls short in acknowledging the differences within all collective action and often remains state-centric and interest oriented. Instead, they propose for a broader definition, which understands contentious politics as “concerted, counter-hegemonic social and political action, in which differentially positioned participants come together to challenge dominant systems of authority, in order to promote and enact alternative imaginaries” (Leitner et al. 2008: 157). This refers to various forms of contestation,

organized by individuals and groups, counter-hegemonic strategies and practices for social change that produce alternative imaginaries of struggle, as well as the negotiation and contestation of the different positionalities of participants. Furthermore, as McDonald (2006) stresses, context-sensitive approaches and studies of action and cultures in different movements emerging worldwide, e.g. the Zapatistas in Mexico, produce more nuanced understandings, which western paradigms that adhere to state-centered, instrumental action accounts, often fall short in addressing. In this regard, also relevant for studies of contentious politics are the embodied practices of collective action, which draw on cultures, memories, lived experiences, affinity politics and ‘sensuous solidarities’ (McDonald 2006, Juris 2008, Routledge 2012). Finally, social movement accounts remain a-spatial, as processes of collective action have been understood as occurring ‘on the head of a pin’ (Miller 2000). In this sense, as it will be discussed in the remaining part of this chapter, geography matters in how contentious politics emerge, operate and develop in and across places, locally to globally.

### **3.3. Conceptualizing ‘Space’, ‘Place’ and ‘Scale’**

Having looked into key accounts of social movements developed in the past and more recent understandings that discuss these as responses to neoliberal globalization, this section will discuss the key geographical concepts of ‘space’, ‘place’, ‘scale’ and ‘networks’. The main argument posed here is that these concepts provide for various understandings in which geography matters within broad socio-spatial processes (Massey 1984) and, in particular, for contentious politics. As Miller (2000) argues, interaction *in* and struggles *over* space (emphasis added), place-specific milieus and the scalar extent of social movement processes hold a crucial role in understanding how contestation emerges and unfolds. In other words, *context matters* in understanding socio-spatial processes and, at the same time, becomes a matter-subject of contestation itself within broad power relations. Therefore, here I address key accounts of the above geographical concepts, in order to further elaborate on the role of geography in social movements in section 3.4.

### 3.3.1. The Politics of Place

In order to look into how space and place acquire a central role in our understanding of socio-spatial processes and, in turn, within articulations of contentious politics, firstly, I draw on Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1991). Lefebvre (1991) argued for an account of space as socially produced, both materially and through its representations. In this regard, Lefebvre (1991) identified three types of socially produced space, namely 'conceived space', which involves broad representations of space, through knowledge, symbols, signs, codes etc., 'perceived space', or 'experienced space', defined as the material practices of social production and reproduction, and 'lived space' or 'representational spaces', including symbolic spaces, spatial imaginaries, new imagined meanings and 'senses of place' (also see Agnew 1987). According to Lefebvre (1991), the potential for contestation to emerge lies on the disjunctures between contradictory simultaneous experiences of 'conceived', 'perceived' and 'representational' spaces. In unpacking this argument, orderly planned, 'conceived' spaces in cities, such as conference centers and shopping malls, often coexist with and contradict underdeveloped areas of decaying housing and crumbling public spaces, i.e. experienced or 'perceived' spaces (Martin and Miller 2003: 147). At the same time, 'perceived' spaces of broader processes, such as material flows, transfers and interactions occurring in and across space, are actively negotiated by 'lived' or 'representational' spaces, i.e. spatial practices of actors that draw on place-specific identities, spatial imaginaries and 'senses of place' (Martin and Miller 2003). In turn, these 'representational' spaces contest the 'conceived' spaces, consolidated by broader knowledge and codes, e.g. academic disciplines such as urban planning and architecture. In other words, this account becomes relevant in examining how contentious politics and place-based struggles "strategically manipulate, subvert and resignify the symbolic character of places, prioritize and defend their places and, at the same time, produce new (representational) spaces (of resistance) and possibilities for contentious spatial practices" (Leitner et al. 2008: 161, 162).

Secondly, in furthering our understanding of the politics of place, I draw on Agnew (1987), who argues for the following multidimensional definition of place: firstly, 'location', meaning the distinct geographical area of social interaction, as defined by broad socio-economic processes, secondly, 'locale', meaning the setting

where everyday social relations are constituted, whether formal or informal, and thirdly, 'sense of place', which involves the spatial meanings and imaginaries of the specific 'lifeworlds' of people (Routledge 1992, 1993; Miller 2000, Leitner et al 2008). Therefore, what is stressed here is the contextual character of human interaction and institutions, defined by socio-economic processes operating at wider scales, the geographies of everyday social interaction and meanings and symbols attributed to specific places (Agnew 1996). In this regard, a politics of place involves the spatialized processes of multiple political interests, influences and identities and is not reduced to an account of aspatial 'localized' outcomes or effects of these processes (Agnew 1996, Miller 2000). In turn, these spatialized processes define the ways in which people appreciate and understand specific places and how they articulate contestation based on notions of belonging, symbols and cultural representations of place, social norms, attributes of class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality etc. (Routledge 1993, Martin 2003, Martin and Miller 2003, Nicholls 2009).

Thirdly, Massey (1984) has argued for the mutual constitution of the 'social' and the 'spatial'. What is maintained here is that, as space is socially produced, so social processes necessarily take place over space. Hence, in adding to Lefebvre's (1991) and Agnew's (1987, 1996) above accounts, space is understood not only as an outcome or result of social processes, but also as a constitutive element within processes of geographical differentiation, spatial distribution, distance, movement etc. (Massey 1984: 4). Therefore, in furthering the discussion on the politics of place, and following Massey (1993, 1994, 2004), places are constructed relationally, through multiple interacting spatial practices and trajectories locally to globally. (As this point raises the key issue of 'scale' within geographical conceptualizations, the following sections will elaborate on relevant ideas on the 'politics of scale' and relational accounts of space by geography scholars). In particular, Massey (2004: 6) argues for a notion of place that encompasses hybridity, porosity and internal multiplicity, as places, i.e. localities, regions, nations, become the locations of intersecting disparate trajectories and distinct narratives, hence become places of negotiation of identities, differences etc. This notion of a 'global sense of place' (Massey 1994) focuses on the complex relations of time and space that span geographical space and produce places, or, in Massey's



words (2004: 6), “a global sense of place means that any nation, region, city as well as being internally multiple, is also a product of relations which spread out way beyond it”. This argument questions the space-place, or global-local, conceptual counter-position, which often understands space as abstract, limitless, disembodied, disabling, meaningless etc. and place as necessarily meaningful, authentic, homogeneous, enabling and particular: “space is not the outside of place; it is not the abstract... ‘up there’ or disembodied” (Massey 2004: 7, 8).

In turn, the notion of a ‘global sense of place’ generates an understanding of a politics of place as a ‘politics of connectivity’ (Amin 2002), through the relational construction of place-based identities, through the constant negotiation and contestation of far-reaching geographical relations (Amin 2002: 391). This account refers to a politics of place, as specific, distinctive and, at the same time, open to negotiation. And, in this sense, denies notions of place as particular, fixed and parochial, which often produce varied forms of defensive politics, i.e. localisms, nationalisms etc. (Featherstone 2008). Analytically, this point becomes useful for acknowledging the interactions between the construction of place-based identities and the far-reaching ‘power-geometries’ that penetrate the geographical stretching of social relations (Massey 2004). In this regard, within these broad processes of flows and connectivities spanning across geographical space, social actors, e.g. groups, individuals etc., are positioned in distinct ways, often uneven in terms of mobility, communication, empowerment and disempowerment etc. In turn, this account of the uneven positioning of actors within power-geometries brings forth the contested character of relations of domination and subordination, solidarity and cooperation, order and chaos, coherence and paradoxical spatial arrangements (Massey 1993: 80, 81).

Finally, in a similar way, Keith and Pile (1993: 4) argue that space, is not an abstract, passive container of social relations, but rather is filled with politics and ideology; hence space is constitutive of the social. In this regard, space is understood as “an active constitutive component of hegemonic power, as an element in the fragmentation, dislocation and weakening of class power, as both the medium and message of domination and subordination” (Keith and Pile 1993: 37). In identifying ‘spatiality’ as a ‘modality’, through which contradictions are normalized and naturalized, as well as ‘spatiality’ as a location of struggle, imbued

with meanings, symbols and people's experiences, where identities are articulated in a processual way, Keith and Pile (1993) argue that spatiality is political as it becomes both the medium and expression of asymmetrical power relations. Therefore, this account relates to a politics of place as a spatialized politics, which draws on real, imaginary and symbolic spaces and contingent and contradictory experiences, e.g. displacement, dislocation, fragmentation etc. (Keith and Pile 1993). In turn, this understanding of a politics of place involves the contestation of 'power-geometries' (Massey 2004), through the reproduction and re-making of new geographies of struggles and political spaces, from small tactics to geopolitics (Keith and Pile 1993).

### **3.3.2. The Politics of Scale**

The above discussion raised several arguments on the role of 'space' and 'place' in our understanding of geographical processes and articulations of contestation. In addition to these, I discuss here the geographical concept of 'scale' in relation to accounts on 'the politics of scale' that draw the attention to its contested character. In particular, drawing on Marxism and theory on the production of space under capitalism (Lefebvre 1991), political economy approaches have conceived scale as a material entity, crucial for unravelling uneven development processes (Smith 1984). These approaches maintain that scale is socially produced, through broad social, political, economic and cultural processes. In furthering these accounts in his later writings, towards a conceptual interpretation of the contested character of scale, Smith (1992, 1993, 1996, 2004) introduced the notion of 'the politics of scale'. In this regard, scale is understood as "the geographical resolution of contradictory social processes of competition and cooperation" (Smith 1992: 64) and as a potential site of struggle for social actors who seek to subvert and transform scalar relations (MacKinnon 2010). Hence, alongside processes of capital accumulation and state regulation, this account aimed to open up political economy approaches and include struggles over social reproduction, gender and identity (Brenner 2001).

In unpacking the above, Brenner (2001) stresses that a 'plural interpretation' of 'the politics of scale' understands scale as a process, through which socio-spatial

differentiation unfolds. In this sense, the key conceptual contribution of the politics of scale notion is that scale is not perceived as an essential boundary, which separates forms of socio-political organization and enclosed geographical units, e.g. urban, regional, national etc. Rather, interpreting scale as a process provides for an understanding of the ways in which spatial units are produced, differentiated, reorganized and reconfigured in relation to one another (Brenner 2001). Subsequently, the analytical focus shifts from scale in its own right to the production of scale as “a central organizing principle, according to which geographical differentiation takes place” (Smith 2000: 725). Hence, in this regard, scale serves as “a criterion of difference not between places so much, as between different kinds of places” (Smith 1992: 64). Further, Brenner’s (2001, 2004) account of ‘scalar structuration’ incorporates a temporal dimension within processes of scalar transformations, occurring over time between inherited institutional structures and emerging regulatory strategies (MacKinnon 2010: 25, 26). What this point raises, is that scales are not eternally fixed or pre-exist social relations, rather scalar transformations involve processes of negotiation of previous rounds of scale production (MacKinnon 2010).

In a similar way, Swyngedouw (1997: 141) argues for a process-based approach to scale, which perceives spatial scales as “never fixed, but perpetually redefined, contested and restructured in terms of their extent, content, relative importance and interrelations”. As this account highlights the heterogeneous and conflictual element of the processes through which scales are produced, it opens up ways to interrogate scale as both the product of wider socio-political processes and the expression of underlying power relations among social actors (Kaiser and Nikiforova 2008, MacKinnon 2010). In turn, this becomes analytically useful for looking into contentious spatial practices that subvert scalar relations. The ways in which contestation plays out in scalar relations and impacts on scale was argued by Smith (1993, 2004) through the notions of ‘scale-jumping’ and ‘scale-bending’. In particular, scale-jumping refers to the ability of social groups to overcome scalar constraints imposed by powerful actors and elites that restrict them to act on ‘lower’ scales, e.g. the local and the neighbourhood, and pursue their interests on ‘higher’ levels, e.g. the urban, the national etc. (MacKinnon 2010). Similarly, Cox (1998) discusses the politics of scale in relation to this ‘upwards’ shift of conflict to

different scales. In this regard, local and regional actors engage in ‘spaces of engagement’, through links to national or supranational actors, in order to secure their local ‘spaces of dependence’, i.e. specific areas of local reproduction of social relations, legitimacy and welfare (Cox 1998). Finally, the notion of ‘scale-bending’ (Smith 2004: 201) refers to the ability of social actors to confront and undermine “assumptions about which kinds of activities fit properly at which scales”, an argument which relates to neoliberal restructuring processes and, what Smith (2004: 201) terms, “the contradictory geographies of globalization and state formation”.

### **3.3.3 Relational Space and Networks**

The effects of neoliberal globalization in economic, political and social terms, discussed in the previous chapter, raised a series of discussions in relation to the above conceptualizations of space, place and scale. In order to interrogate emerging forms of contestation in the context of globalized neoliberalism and shifting the analytical focus to agency-oriented approaches, several scholars sought to examine the spatiality of globalization (Massey 1994, Amin 2002; Massey 2004, 2005). What is mainly argued within this literature, is that neoliberal globalization brought forward a series of transformations in forms of socio-spatial organization, through far-reaching flows of communication, people, ideas and information and connections between local everyday practices, networks of actors and global forces stretching across space and time. Also, this literature sought to pose a critique of political economy approaches on ‘the politics of scale’ and establish a relational understanding of space, as “open, multiple and becoming” (MacKinnon 2010: 21). Here, I will discuss some key ideas on the above, in order to further examine the geographies of social movements and contentious politics in the following section.

In particular, Massey (2005) argues for a relational account of space, in order to analytically incorporate the new processes of social organization that neoliberal globalization brought forward. In defining relational space, Massey (2005) follows a three-fold argumentation that seeks to understand the ‘spatial’ closely linked to the ‘social’ and the ‘political’: firstly, space is the product of interrelations, hence constituted through a series of complex social interactions and processes, occurring locally to globally. Secondly, according to Massey (2005: 9),

space signifies the sphere where difference and distinct trajectories co-exist; therefore space becomes the sphere of co-existing heterogeneity and multiplicity. Thirdly, relational space is understood as constantly ‘becoming’, “always in the process of being made... never finished; never closed” (Massey 2005: 9). Therefore, ‘the politics of space’ that emanates from this account relates to: firstly, political subjectivities and identities that are relationally constructed and open to negotiation, through ongoing socio-spatial interactions, rather than already constituted entities and enclosed identities (Massey 2005, Featherstone 2008). Secondly, relational space generates a ‘politics of space’ that celebrates the heterogeneity, multiplicity and plurality of disparate trajectories co-existing in space. And, thirdly, introduces a space ‘of loose ends and missing links’, which is perpetually re-made over time, hence integral to an open and fluid political future (Massey 2005).

In interrogating the transformations that globalization set in motion, Amin (2002) notes the centrality of a new spatial organization of social relations. This spatiality relates to increasing connectivities at the global level, extensive flows and networks of activity and interaction of people, goods, ideas, information and communication technologies (Amin 2002: 385). In this sense, Amin (2002) argues that globalization marks a new ontology of place/space relations, as places are increasingly seen as the sites of intersection of geographically extensive social processes and flows. Hence, Amin’s (2002) account pertains to Massey’s (1994) argument on a ‘global sense of place’ discussed above, which acknowledges the multiple spatio-temporal relations that cross a locality to produce it as a place. In problematizing accounts that stress the ‘authentic and progressive’ character of the local or place and space/place divisions that render spatial units distinct and separate to each other, Amin (2002) calls for a relational understanding of space and place. On the one hand, this account does not adopt a fluid, amorphous, de-territorialized or de-materialized geography, hence does not imply that “all that is solid has melted into air” (Amin 2002: 389). On the other hand, Amin (2002: 389) argues that the materiality of everyday life is constituted through a number of broader spaces, i.e. physical, discursive, institutional, organisational, technological etc., and this geography is not reducible to bounded spatial units. In this sense, place still matters, albeit refashioned, or as Massey (2004: 6,9) argues, “thinking in terms

of vast networks and flows does not deny a politics of place and does not deprive of meaning those lines of connections, relations and practices that construct place... but goes beyond it”.

Relational accounts of space also included criticism of the political economy of scale literature, which was questioned on the basis of over-stressing vertical and ‘fixed’ articulations of social relations (Amin 2002, Marston et al. 2005). What is stressed in these critiques is that, instead of discussing social relations through a ‘nested hierarchy’ perspective of scales from local to global, the emphasis should be placed on connectivities and flows. In this regard, Amin (2002: 397) understands scalar relations through a ‘topology’ of the spatial practices of multiple actors, networks of affiliation and multiple political identities, that simultaneously feature “at all spatial scales of organization and activity”. Moreover, Marston et al. (2005) argue that the ‘local-global’ conceptual architecture of scale accounts suggests an inherent hierarchy within the concept of scale itself. In turn, they stress that this ‘reification’ of scale suggests that higher scales command lower ones and the global is equated with empowerment, while the local is deprived of its possibility (Marston et al. 2005, Leitner et al. 2008). According to Marston et al. (2005), accounts of scale are de facto limited by hierarchical top-down structural constraints; hence what is suggested is an overall rejection of the concept of scale, in favour of a ‘flat ontology’. Their argument maintains that, “horizontality, conceived open multi-directionally and unfolding non-linearly, provides more entry points for progressive politics, offering the possibility of enhanced connections across social sites” (Marston et al. 2005: 427).

In developing a critical account of the above, firstly, while global connectivities are of increasing importance, as MacKinnon (2010: 22) notes, we still live in a world of places, cities, national states etc. In this sense, as argued earlier, place still matters, as open and internally multiple (Massey 1994), for looking into broad social processes and articulations of contentious politics (see next section). Secondly, seeing scale as a process, socially constructed and contested, becomes analytically useful for unpacking the underlying power relations among actors (Kaiser and Nikiforova 2008). In this regard, the complete rejection of scale as a conceptual tool suggested by Marston et al. (2005) becomes problematic, as it denies an understanding of scalar relations and underlying power asymmetries.

The 'flat ontology' replacing scale in Marston et al. (2005) also fails to acknowledge the internal operational logics of networks of actors, which suggest uneven power relations in terms of their positionalities within these networks, participation, access to resources, legitimacy etc. (Routledge and Cumbers 2009). As it will be further discussed in the next section and in following chapters, even in cases of horizontal networking among groups and individuals, 'hidden hierarchies' (Freeman 1970) and informal divisions of labour problematize the notion of 'horizontality' in how connections develop and sustain networks of movements.

Instead, in order to examine articulations of progressive politics and contestation, the analytical task in hand is to treat hegemonic power relationally, hence interrogate how scalar relations are negotiated, transformed, subverted and contested (Leitner et al. 2008, MacKinnon 2010). In this regard, as argued by MacKinnon (2010), thinking of a 'scalar politics', instead of a 'politics of scale', shifts the analytical focus from scale *per se*, to scale as a dimension of broader social and political processes and practices. Hence, 'scalar politics' becomes useful for unpacking both the material production of scale, through broader processes of capitalist restructuring and, at the same time, discursive means and social practices, i.e. 'scale frames' or 'scale-talk' developed in contentious politics (Kaiser and Nikiforova 2008, MacKinnon 2010). Further, an account of 'multiple spatialities', i.e., place, scale, networks, positionality etc. as interdependent and overlapping aspects of contentious politics and socio-spatial theory provides for broader insights into contentious spatial practices, without conceptually privileging one spatial category over another (Leitner et al. 2008). Finally, it is important to stress here that the analytical focus is placed on the social processes and the spatial practices of contestation that are constitutive of the above spatialities. Therefore, drawing on MacKinnon (2010) and Leitner et al. (2008), the strengths and weaknesses of the above theoretical accounts are dependent upon their relevance and visibility within particular contexts under study. To this end, section 3.4 addresses studies that dealt with the spatialities of social movements and their role in their emergence and development.

### **3.4. Geography and Social Movements**

Drawing on the previous discussion of key conceptualizations of space, place, scale and networks, as well as their role in broad social processes and contestation in particular, here I elaborate on these and examine how they were incorporated in studies of the geographies of social movements and the spatialities of resistance politics (e.g. Routledge 1993, Miller 2000). Through these studies, the above conceptualizations have been revised and modified in close relation to particular geographical contexts and empirical research, which sought to ground social movements in places, unpack their scalar tactics and broader strategies vi-a-vis hegemonic power and look into networking processes among struggles. Although these approaches are organized below into sub-sections in relation to place, scale and networks, so as to maintain an open dialogue with section 3.3, it is important to note that they often highlight multiple overlapping spatialities and draw on synthetic conceptual frameworks.

#### **3.4.1. Social Movements and Place**

Firstly, Routledge (1992, 1993, 1996a, 1997) examined the mediation of social movement agency by place in South Asian contexts. In this regard, the main argument posed is that place-specific attributes and broader contexts are crucial for understanding the reasons why movements and resistance emerge in specific places, as well as their greater strategies and mobilities. In particular, looking into place-based Indian movements, which challenge broad forces of domination and state power, Routledge (1992, 1993) utilized the above conceptualization of place as locale, location and sense of place (Agnew 1987) in order to interpret the dynamics of resistance to dominating power. As Routledge (1992, 1993) argued through the cases of the Baliapal and Chipko peasant movements, processes of domination and resistance depend on both broader as well as place-specific social and cultural contexts and movement agency and create 'terrains of resistance'. As domination in the Indian context played out through consent, co-optation and coercive mechanisms of state power and central institutions (also see Gramsci 1971), these movements resisted processes of modernization and industrialization through defensive struggles around their local economies, culture and environment, as well



as through the production of alternative ecological ideologies (Routledge 1992: 119).

Additionally, in furthering the discussion on the role of place-based movements within contestation of state-centered notions of hegemony, consent and power, Routledge (1996a) argued that, firstly, 'place' is central in the creation of 'terrains of resistance' and the articulation of alternative knowledges in places and, secondly, local contexts of resistance matter in examining global processes and articulations of power. In this regard, what is stressed here is the importance of everyday practices of resistance grounded in places within broader social movement strategies and geopolitical understandings of dominating power, e.g. state and international institutions. As Routledge (1996a) notes, terrains of resistance involve the material and symbolic everyday practices, knowledges and identities grounded in physical places and, at the same time, constituting the representational spaces of conflict. Further, these involve multiplicities and processes that draw upon and simultaneously transcend place-specific, cultural and economic relations, as in the case of the Baliapal movement, which encompassed place-specific interests of groups involved, individual and collective identities, as well as overarching ideologies, symbolisms and strategies.

Moreover, the above multiplicities of movements suggest complex interrelations of domination and resistance. Since conflict is grounded in places, where structural forces and movement agency intersect, relations of power, domination and resistance emerge (Routledge 1992). In this sense, as also highlighted by Pile and Keith (1997: 2, 3), resistance always *takes place* (emphasis in original) and can be understood through the geographies that shape and are shaped by resistance *where* (emphasis added) it takes place. As Pile and Keith (1997) argue, resistance holds its own distinct spatialities, which become useful for understanding why certain resistance forms are made possible where they rise or become obstructed due to specific geographical arrangements of power. Therefore, this argument draws attention to the multiplicities and subtle 'spatialities' of resistance to dominating power as expressed in differential spaces. Also, Pile and Keith (1997: 3) stress that thinking through the geographies of resistance, means unravelling the complex uneven relations of domination and resistance, which, once

situated, reveal the possibilities for resistance practices to occupy, subvert and create alternative spaces from those defined through oppression and exploitation.

Similarly, Routledge (1997: 71) argues that in order to interpret processes of resistance, an understanding of how resistance sites are created, claimed, defended and used is crucial. Hence, an account of the spatiality of resistance involves the spatial practices of actors, groups, individuals, collectivities and movements. In turn, these practices involve, what Routledge (1996a, 1997) terms, ‘strategic mobilities’ of actors, meaning the tactical interactions and communication channels among groups, strategic occupation of spaces and dispersal tactics across geographical space. Through the case of the Nepali resistance movement against the autocratic regime in 1990, Routledge (1997) showed how these spatial practices involved multiple contingent tactics and strategies that created ambiguous spaces and temporary meanings of places, i.e. liberated zones and community meeting places, albeit inclusive of oppositional forces and interplays of power relations. Therefore, in adding to the above, the spatiality of resistance involves: firstly, broader processes and relations across space as well as place-specific ones, which facilitate or constrain articulations of resistance; secondly, resistance practices these relations give rise to, in relation to strategic mobilities and, thirdly, new meanings of place created through resistance practices (Routledge 1997: 72).

Additionally, what Routledge (1997) stressed is that these practices of resistance are always entangled with practices of domination. Dominating power, as an act of control, coercion and manipulation of consent, can be located in the realms of the state, the economy and civil society, while at the same time articulated through political configurations and cultural representations of class, race, gender etc., such as patriarchy, racism, homophobia etc. (Routledge 1997: 70). As social movements engage in resistance practices towards broader goals and strategies, they often tend to favour specific groups’ interests and identities at the expense of others, reproducing in this way forms of domination and exclusion, e.g. sexism, homophobia, racism etc. Hence, as also argued in Sharp et al. (2000), resistance practices cannot be separated from practices of domination; rather their entangled symbiotic relationship produces hybrid practices, as “one always bears at least a trace of the other, that contaminates or subverts it” (Routledge 1997: 70).

### **3.4.2. Place and Scalar Strategies of Social Movements**

Secondly, Miller (2000) argued for the need to analytically engage with the ways in which, on the one hand, geography shapes social movements (Routledge 1992, 1993) and, on the other hand, social movements employ geographical strategies in order to achieve their goals (Routledge 1996a, 1997). In doing so, Miller's (2000) account draws on social movement literature (see section 3.2) to highlight the multiple geographical implications for looking into, firstly, the resources that define mobilization capacities of movements across space, secondly, the political opportunity structures and their varying formations between places and scales and, finally, the distinct geographies of collective identity formation in places. In other words, what is stressed in Miller (2000) are the spatially uneven ways through which the economy, the state and international institutions develop and the geographic constitution of collective identities.

As stressed earlier, broader processes and relations across space as well as place-specific attributes potentially give rise to differentiated resistance practices among places. Accordingly, Miller's (2000) study of anti-nuclear activism in Boston, US between the late 1970's and mid-1980's, showed how the peace movement had different expressions among the three municipalities analysed, based on broader processes of economic restructuring, regional economic activities, community activism cultures and class social structures. Further, as also noted earlier, political activity employs strategic mobilities of actors (Routledge 1997), tactics and strategies that create complex interplays of power relations across space. In this regard, Miller's (2000: 53) study showed how the role of central and local states is contested within these strategies, for example when protest is channelled through local states, this can serve as contestation to central state policies, through the diffusion of protest across localities; at the same time, local and broader economic interests can also intervene in state function, hence revealing the limits to state autonomy and contestation. Further, Miller (2000: 64) stresses that the structuring of lived experience across geographical space contributes to the construction of multiple identities and collective action through, in and across places, which can be simultaneously place-specific, shared and overlapping.

In turn, the construction of collective identities involves representations of spatial practices (Miller 2000), new meanings attributed to places (Routledge 1997), as well as engaging in processes of identification and ‘place-making’ (Kaiser and Nikiforova 2008), both materially and discursively. The latter include the development of ‘scale frames’ or ‘scale-talk’ and, as discussed in the previous section, hold a key role in looking into the representational dynamics of spatial practices of contestation. In order for actors to define conflict, they engage in conceptualizations of its spatial scale, processes which also entail contestation, especially when movements seek to legitimize their struggles and gain public resonance (Martin and Miller 2003: 149). For example, EU immigration policy has at times been challenged by immigrant-rights organizations and, at the same time, by nationalist political parties, the former articulating claims around a universal human rights agenda and the latter around the defense of national-identities (Leitner et al. 2008). As Miller (2000: 33) notes, scale is crucial in this sense, in order to understand “how people conceptualize and represent the geography of their lives”; for example community can be thought of as a principal site of social interaction and belonging, while at the same time, spatial imaginaries of broader communities and belonging, i.e. national, international etc., potentially contribute to the development of contestation.

Finally, the issue of scale within contentious politics is first and foremost an empirical question, one which, through context-sensitive approaches, seeks to interpret the tactics and strategies of actors involved (see MacKinnon 2010). As Miller (2000: 145) argues, an understanding of the strategies and empowerment potential of social movements must be contextual. And as articulations of power relations and opportunities for social empowerment vary among places and shift geographically and temporally (Miller 2000), social movements often employ multiple, dynamic and, often, hybrid (Routledge 1997) strategies in order to pose challenges to dominating power and effect their goals. These involve small tactics as well as greater strategies (Routledge 1992, 1993, 1996a), which suggest the simultaneous operation of struggles and resistance practices across various geographical sites and scales. In turn, these multi-scalar strategies and multiple struggles, in conceptual terms, do not reduce the broader social movement space to a place or scale politics per se, but, as Leitner et al. (2008) argue, reveal that these

strategies make use of diverse spatialities in complex and contingent ways so as to make new geographies, inclusive of place, networks and scale. For example, scalar strategies can include actions that broaden the scale of struggle and enable the outwards expansion of movements, through the overcoming of local constraints, as in the cases of the Zapatistas movement, feminist and environmental justice movements and labour unions (Miller 2000, Leitner et al. 2008). Also, these can involve localization strategies, which reinforce local empowerment through attachment to place and local cultures, as well the production of alternative knowledges in places (Routledge 1993, Escobar 2001).

### **3.4.3. Networks of Social Movements**

As neoliberal globalization impacted upon a series of political, economic, social and structures, contestation that emerged worldwide challenging the doctrines of neoliberalism, gained an analytical focus among geography scholars (Cumbers et al. 2008). In particular, the alter/counter-globalization movement or global justice movement developed since the 1990's reveals how social movements, labour unions, several organizations and particular struggles aimed to pose challenges to neoliberal globalization through articulations of networks of support and solidarity (Routledge et al. 2007). Hence, conceptualizations around the geographical constitution, emergence, function and development of networks of movements spanning geographical space acquired a key role in studies of the geographies of social movements. As Leitner et al. (2008) stress, an understanding of the geographies of contentious politics requires conceptualizations of multiple spatialities, e.g. place, scale, networks, mobilities etc., which correspond to the actual practices of contestation, such as scalar strategies, as noted above, as well as horizontal networks of movements developing across places. In this regard, as Nicholls (2007: 614) notes, these strategies are by necessity relational processes that involve the development and reconfiguration of social networks across geographical and social boundaries.

In particular, looking into transnational networks of solidarity and communication Routledge (2003) and Leitner et al. (2008) suggest that these hold a crucial role in the creation and sharing of knowledge around strategies and tactics of

social movements and facilitate the development of common political identities, oppositional narratives and alternative imaginaries. Keck and Sikkink (1998, 1999) conceptualized these kinds of network tactics as: firstly, ‘information politics’, meaning the fast sharing of vital information to specific political targets, secondly, ‘symbolic politics’, referring to the use of certain meaningful symbols, actions and stories that relate to a specific situation, thirdly, ‘leverage politics’, namely the effective utilization of powerful actors necessary for exercising influence and, fourthly, ‘accountability politics’, or the effort to oblige the involvement of more powerful actors. The functioning of these networks relies simultaneously on proximate, face-to-face interaction of actors and distant communication through technological means, hence connecting groups, organizations, institutions and individuals locally to globally. The spatiality of such activist networks spans over geographical space in order to enable the diffusion of ideas, imaginaries, knowledges etc. (Routledge 2003, Routledge et al. 2007, Leitner et al. 2008).

The transnational character of these networks also involves localized practices of individual movements that comprise broader networks, which, while not necessarily place-restricted, draw on territorialized struggles to articulate opposition to neoliberalism (Cumbers et al. 2008). Also, networking processes show how some movements are able to override spatial constraints and expand their reach, while others remain more localized. This shows that networks develop and operate unevenly over space, for the reason that movements are differentially placed within networks, in terms of power, resources, knowledges etc. (Routledge et al. 2007). For example, in discussing the People’s Global Action<sup>9</sup> (PGA) resistance network opposing neoliberalism, Routledge (2003) suggests that grassroots globalization networks employ multi-scalar politics of solidarity among different struggles, which involve dynamic processes of interaction and negotiation among

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<sup>9</sup> The People’s Global Action (PGA) network coordinates communication and action among various place-based movements, through regional networks operating worldwide in Latin America, Europe, North America and Asia. The PGA owes its birth to an international meeting held in Ziapas, Mexico in 1996 organized by the Zapatistas and officially came into existence in 1998 in Geneva, Switzerland. The main goal of the PGA is to enable communication and sharing of information among grassroots movements that resist neoliberal globalization (Routledge and Cumbers 2009: 103).

differentially positioned actors, individuals and groups (Routledge and Cumbers 2009). These 'process geographies' (Routledge 2003) of grassroots globalization networks show, on the one hand, how place-based movements employ connections to distant allies in order to organize solidarity and support actions, which contribute to the construction of collective identities, shared action repertoires and common targets of protest e.g. conferences, activist caravans and global days of action, such as the mobilizations against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle, 1999, against the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Prague, 2000 and against the G8 in Genoa, 2001. On the other hand, the process geographies of these networks involve contested power relations, which problematize the networks' function in terms of unequal relations of power, e.g. uneven positioning of actors within these networks in relation to resources, social and political capital, knowledge, mobilities etc.

Moreover, Nicholls and Beaumont (2007) stress that the geographically uneven character of power relations and political contexts contributes to different spatial organization forms of movement networks, which, combine both territorially intensive and geographically extensive relations. For example, the cases of Los Angeles and Rotterdam showed that differences in state institutions, i.e. decentralization in the US and national centralization in the Netherlands, produced forms of territorialized networks in the city of Los Angeles, albeit extensive, while in the city of Rotterdam territorialization was embedded at the national state level (Nicholls and Beaumont 2007). In this regard, the development of intensive relations in places is based on proximity and face-to-face interaction. These involve 'strong-ties' and trusting relations among individuals and groups that enable collective action and contribute to the construction of shared solidarities, collective visions, shared norms, affinity bonds and cognitive frames (Nicholls 2007, 2009; Routledge and Cumbers 2009). At the same time, extensive connections to distant actors and allies, or 'weak-ties' are enabled through the relational qualities of places, i.e. multiple interactions, exchanges, contact points found among geographical sites and actors etc. (Nicholls 2009) In turn, as Nicholls (2007, 2009) argues, these multiple connections in and across places are crucial for the development and sustainability of networks of movements, as they secure necessary

material resources as well as permit the circulation of cognitive understandings, activist repertoires and flows of information and communication.

Furthermore, networks of movements can be understood as articulations of an alternative politics to formal political party structures and representation, as they are formations based on egalitarian participation of groups and individuals, hence strive to be horizontal, as well as direct action tactics and distant communication through the internet (Cumbers et al. 2008). Therefore, the spatialities of global justice networks, such as the PGA or the World Social Fora can be conceptualized, not as totalities, but rather as 'convergence spaces' (Routledge 2003) of movements, national and transnational alliances, various organizations, activists and resources that come together at particular moments in time so as to articulate contestation to neoliberal globalization. Drawing on Routledge and Cumbers (2009), convergence spaces are comprised of place-based, but not necessarily place-restricted movements, such as the peasant movements participating in the PGA. These draw on place-specific characteristics, local cultures and knowledges, grassroots and community organizing, senses of place, spatial imaginaries and activist narratives that are embedded in particular places and territories. In their attempts to form extensive coalitions with distant actors based on common interests, place-specific identities and cultures are actively negotiated and reconfigured.

These processes add to our understanding of 'place' as open and internally multiple (Massey 2005) and reveal the relational construction of place-based identities and 'militant particularisms' (Featherstone 2005) originating in places and, at the same time, expressions of shared grievances against common enemies. For example, as argued by Featherstone (2003), the case of the Inter-Continental caravan for Solidarity and Resistance (ICC), which brought together Indian peasant movements and west European activists, showed that counter-globalization networks of movements opened up joint articulations between place-based struggles. These, in turn, generated alternative political imaginaries and practices, as well as reconfigurations of place-based political identities (Featherstone 2003).

Further, collective visions, i.e. values, principles, goals etc. and mutual solidarities among participant groups and individuals generate working relations and common actions among actors based on diversity and heterogeneity, albeit not



without conflict around differences (Routledge and Cumbers 2009). In particular, mutual solidarities as relational achievements forged across place-based movements, through specific actions and communication among activists, enable the creation of common spaces of dialogue and exchange whereby difference is negotiated. In this regard, as also stressed by Featherstone (2012), solidarities can act as inventive, generative forces of political relations and spaces, therefore become transformative forces within processes of contestation for actors involved. In turn, this practical politics of solidarity within convergence spaces based on commonality and difference (Routledge and Cumbers 2009), involves multiple embodied interactions, which are able to generate a politics of emotion and affinity (Juris 2008, Routledge 2012).

Negotiations of similarity and difference among multiple struggles and movements can also be understood through what Laclau and Mouffe (1985) term 'chains of equivalence'. In this regard, shifting political terrains of contestation and different subject positions within these, for example workers', feminist and environmental movements, generate multiple struggles, which, when welded together form 'chains of equivalence' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). This process of welding together struggles simultaneously relies, on the one hand, on difference and incompleteness, meaning that the missing elements of each struggle vis-a-vis hegemonic power become their links, and, on the other hand, on similarity and equivalence, common visions and goals vis-a-vis a common enemy. According to Laclau and Mouffe (1985), these chains of equivalence are understood as articulation of counter-hegemonic power. Purcell (2009) draws on this idea of equivalence to discuss how 'networks of equivalence' of movements are articulated around difference and similarity. In this sense, different movements become interdependent, while, at the same time, retain their autonomous character. In this sense, Purcell (2009) stresses that networking processes involve the processual transformation of actors, which become interdependent as they come into play with each other, while at the same time retain their autonomous character. Hence, these networking logics involve partly dependent and partly autonomous struggles, which in turn organize and coordinate network mobilization around partial, temporary and shifting centers (Purcell 2009: 306).

At the same time, solidarities are often constructed through uneven power relations, which can be contested or reproduced in the process (Featherstone 2012). Indeed, as noted earlier in this discussion and stressed by Routledge and Cumbers (2009), in pursuit of extensive political action by local movements and connections to non-local networks and distant others, practices of solidarity-building within convergence spaces involve uneven power relations, inequalities among participant movements and differentially located actors, in terms of political contexts and opportunities, access to power, resources, support and legitimacy. Further, as showed by Routledge and Cumbers (2009: 98, 99) convergence spaces may become dominated by the politics of particular movements, which promote a defensive politics against neoliberal globalization threats, or choose to exercise conflict which primarily targets national governments' policies. And this creates questions as to the effectiveness of the spatially extensive political action and its sustainability over time. For example, the case of the regional PGA branch in Asia, showed how the development and sustainability of networking processes was hindered, due to the fact that participant movements' time, resources and interests adhered to a prioritization of movement-specific issues within their national contexts (Routledge and Cumbers 2009: 136).

Moreover, connections within networks of movements and processes of facilitation and interaction among place-based struggles are enabled by key mechanisms, which include specific events that offer contact opportunities, i.e. conferences, campaigns, protests and days of action, activist caravans etc., as well as key activists which mediate communication and contacts. Routledge and Cumbers (2009: 99) term these mechanisms 'networking vectors', whereby embodied interaction among participants in conferences and meetings provides a type of communicative infrastructure crucial for the operation of convergence spaces. In regard to key individuals acting as networking vectors, these 'imagineers' (Routledge and Cumbers 2009) or 'brokers' (Tarrow 2005, Nicholls 2009) serve as mediators of connections across networks, facilitate information flows and provide feedback to participant groups, enable the organization and coordination of events and meetings and mobilize crucial resources. In particular, 'imagineers' in convergence spaces are responsible for linking groups through a process of grounding, or 'grassrooting' (Routledge et al. 2007), the imaginary of the network,

i.e. goals, concepts, narratives, strategies, discourses, cognitive frames etc. These individuals hold key roles due to the fact that they possess certain forms of social and political capital, knowledge, contacts, expertise, as well as mobility etc., which renders them useful for the diffusion of these across networks and geographical space. Tarrow (2005: 206) discusses these as ‘rooted cosmopolitans’, who become “the connective tissue of the global and the local, working as activators, brokers and advocates for claims both domestic and international”. These individuals draw on various resources, networks and political opportunities and facilitate processes of exchange between local and international politics, reconfiguring in this way forms of action and political identities.

Finally, the role of key activists as well the operational logics of networks, i.e. vertical, centered, horizontal, de-centered etc., bring forward contested social and power relations penetrating networks of movements. As key activists possess certain qualities and expertise that render them crucial for the operation and sustainability of networks, they concentrate roles and responsibilities that problematize the egalitarian participation and horizontalist logics of network function. Further, the diversity of groups that comprise convergence spaces often advocate conflicting goals, concerns and interests, as well as political ideologies, action tactics and strategies (Routledge and Cumbers 2009: 100). Also, as noted earlier, they are differentially placed in regard to access to resources, mobility, power and political contexts. Hence their networking attempts reveal a processual construction of commonalities and mutual solidarities that go hand in hand with conflict and antagonisms, whereby relations of domination and resistance co-exist producing multiple hybrid practices of contestation (Routledge 1997, Sharp et al. 2000).

#### **3.4.4. Social Empowerment Strategies of Movements and State Power**

An issue often raised within the above debates and studies of contentious politics is how spatial practices and strategies of movements deal with power relations of oppression and domination, e.g. state power as well as transnational institutions, and how these enable the creation of spaces for social empowerment and transformation. As discussed above, in cases of networking logics of

movements, the egalitarian participation of actors, albeit contested, reveals a process of exercising power, rather than attempting to seize it (Routledge et al. 2007: 2580). In this sense, social empowerment becomes a means to an end, whereby movements seek to contest hegemonic power through the creation of spaces of engagement and collective action. At the same time, as Miller (2000: 145) notes, even in cases of movements that do not necessarily pursue strategic action that targets state institutions, they contest oppression and domination stemming from systemic power relations, institutionalized within and legitimized by the state; hence need to address state power to a certain extent, e.g. articulating oppositional voices in state decision-making institutions. Therefore, contestation of hegemonic power encompasses multiple, often hybrid (Routledge 1997) strategies and practices of resistance, solidarity and social empowerment that, while not reduced to a state-focused politics per se, engage to a certain extent with state power. These are inclusive of movements that address the state as a set of relations open to contestation, hence, in conceptual terms, acknowledge the potential of effecting social change through state structures (see Cumbers 2012), as well as autonomous struggles, which choose to bypass state institutions and instead create alternative spaces for social empowerment (see Holloway 2002).

Looking into the ‘autonomous geographies’ of the Unemployed Workers Movement (MTD) in Argentina, Chatterton (2005) discussed the spatial practices of this movement developed at three overlapping levels, namely the territorial, the material and the social. Firstly, at the territorial level, a network of loosely connected neighbourhoods emerged, whereby collective self-organization, cooperation, mutual trust and a ‘politics of necessity’ acted as survival strategies in the face of the crisis and rising unemployment in Argentina. In this regard, strategic connections among neighbourhoods were pursued in order to forge inter-place solidarities. Also Chatterton (2005: 554) stresses that the selective engagement of this movement with broader social and political actors, such as the church, unions and organizations, was pursued in order to enhance skill-sharing and secure financial aid and legitimacy. Secondly, at the material level, a rejection of the formal economy was followed by the creation of a local solidarity economy, “oriented to meet community needs while reducing dependency on the state and exposure to the market” (Chatterton 2005: 555). In doing so, MTD groups pursued

struggles over trade union funds and the co-operatives that were set up utilized central government unemployment benefits that were collectivized through local projects. Thirdly, at the social level, a politics of collective organizing, solidarity and community was promoted, through horizontal decision-making, distribution of work and collective responsibility. According to Chatterton (2005: 558), the above reveal a rejection of politics embedded in the power of the state and, at the same time, a production of alternative societies.

Similarly, Zibechi (2010) stressed the key role of community organizing within the success of the El Alto movement against neoliberal policies in Bolivia. In this regard, community bonds built during the turbulent decade of the 1980's contributed to the overthrow of the national government and the subsequent Morales administration since 2006. Zibechi's (2010) account provides an understanding of community as a relationship, as grounds for building on reciprocity and collective organizing, which in turn, secured the survival of El Alto inhabitants in the face of extreme poverty and displacement occurring during the 1980's. Zibechi (2010) also questions notions of fragmentation stressed by social movement theorists in how they favour an understanding of power primarily centralized around state structures. Instead, he suggests that the Bolivian context showed how the dispersal of community struggles made it extremely difficult for the state to neutralize, homogenize and, ultimately, exert control over these. Hence, Zibechi (2010) suggests that resistance nuclei that disorganize and disperse power and simultaneously produce renewed openings, social imaginaries and ways of collective living beyond capitalist state structures hold the potential for social empowerment and emancipation. These are understood as communities or societies 'in-movement', signifying the mobilization of non-capitalist relations, i.e. economic, social, cultural, in pursuit of struggle that adhere to a paradigm outside state structures.

At the same time, in regard to autonomous struggles and their relations to state power, Bohm et al. (2010) argue for the (im)-possibilities of autonomy vis-à-vis capitalist relations, the state and hegemonic power. Looking into notions of autonomy, Bohm et al. (2010) distinguish between, firstly, autonomy as a creative affirmation of labour power and self-management vis-à-vis capital (see Negri 1991), secondly, autonomy from the state and self-determination as a negation of

state power (see Holloway 2002) and, thirdly, autonomy as means of defensive localization and preservation of local lifeworlds vis-à-vis hegemonic forms of development and colonization (see Escobar 2001). These understandings draw on several movements and autonomous struggles taking place worldwide, e.g. Latin American movements, such as the Zapatistas in Mexico, the MTD in Argentina, the El Alto movement in Bolivia, as well as European movements in Italy, Germany, France etc. However, Bohm et al. (2010: 25) stress that as autonomy has become increasingly incorporated into neoliberal policy-making and discourse, e.g. non-profit sector service distribution, self-reliant individual etc., the limits to autonomous practices become visible as they cannot be fully realized or complete. In this sense, what is stressed here is, on the one hand, the inherent impossibility of autonomy as an end state and, on the other hand, the possibility of autonomy as an elusive goal and promise. This leads to a re-thinking of autonomous practices as sites of struggle and antagonisms (Bohm et al. 2010) and autonomy as “a process and a tension that is worked out in the here and now” (Chatterton 2005: 559).

As the above debates show, the practices and strategies of contentious politics are often juxtaposed through a conceptual divide between ‘a politics of the act’ and ‘a politics of demand’ (Day 2004), whereby the former relates to a politics of ‘against’ or ‘beyond’ the state and the latter involves political intervention ‘in’ the state. As noted earlier in this discussion, movements strategically choose to engage with state power in order to put pressure on institutions for their own benefit, such the MTD groups’ struggle over governmental unemployment benefits (Chatterton 2005). At the same time, as Zibechi (2010) pointed out, the decentralization of resistance practices in El Alto proved highly effective in dispersing the exertion of state power. Hence, depending on the context, organizational forms of contentious politics focusing solely on state institutions, e.g. party or trade union politics, do not necessarily meet the goals and strategies of movements. Therefore, the actual strategies and practices of movements, often involve multiple hybrid complementary strategies and practices that are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

In conceptual terms, I draw on Wright (2010) to argue here that the potential of social empowerment and social change lies in the ability of social movements to simultaneously engage with multiple complementary and co-dependent strategies of

social transformation. Based on the traditions of the Left and anarchist/ autonomous politics, Wright (2010) distinguishes between ‘ruptural’, ‘interstitial’ and ‘symbiotic’ strategies of social transformation. In this regard, ruptural transformation is conceived in revolutionary politics as the overthrow of the capitalist state and siege of state power by the working-class. Despite the limitations of this approach based on historical lessons of the past century, Wright (2010) highlights that, based on the context, looking into ruptural strategies, as opposed to total ruptures, of direct confrontation with the dominant classes and the state is still relevant for studies of contentious politics, as these are able to generate spaces of social empowerment. Further, interstitial strategies, conceived as incremental cumulative steps towards a qualitative social change (Wright 2010: 321) choose to bypass the state and build on autonomous spaces of social empowerment, through self-enactment and self-determination, e.g. ‘autonomous practices’ (see Day 2004). Hence, interstitial transformation involves the piecemeal process of replacement of social and state structures of social reproduction with alternatives, aiming to cumulatively transform the society at large. Finally, symbiotic transformation involves the enlargement of social empowerment spaces through the systematic and instrumental use of state institutions (Wright 2010: 322). In this instance, Wright’s (2010) argument is crucial in acknowledging that, based on different contexts, these broad strategies of transformation are able to produce co-dependent practices that co-exist spatially and temporally and, often, complement each other in pursuit of social empowerment and change. Also, this pertains to acknowledging the possibilities and impossibilities of autonomous practices (Bohm et al. 2010) and the symbiotic relationship between state power and contestation (Wright 2010).

### **3.5. Conclusions**

This chapter discussed conceptualizations of social movements, with a particular focus on the geographies of contentious politics. Social movement accounts of the resource mobilization capacities of movements (McCarthy and Zald 1977, Kriesi 1996) and political processes (Tilly 1978, McAdam 1982), stressed the crucial role for their development and sustainability of material and non-material resources, as well as organizational forms and political opportunities available in

given contexts. Further, accounts of the 'new social movements' shifted the analytical focus to non-material, identity and autonomy issues raised by social movements of the 1970's and 1980's, mainly in European contexts (Touraine 1981, Offe 1985, Melucci 1996). At the same time, 'urban social movements' approaches (Castells 1977, 1983) looked into mobilizations in cities as responses to collective consumption issues around housing, public services and infrastructure etc. Finally, the emergence of transnational mobilizations, such as the alter/counter globalization movement, brought forward renewed understandings of social movements challenging neoliberal globalization (Della Porta and Diani 1999, McAdam et al. 2001, Della Porta and Tarrow 2005). However, as Miller (2000) pointed out, these social movement accounts remained aspatial, as they failed to acknowledge the geographical contexts of collective action, as well as the ways in which these are able to shape new political spaces and alternative imaginaries.

Therefore, geography matters for the emergence and development of social movements, as discussed through concepts of 'space', 'place', 'scale' and 'networks'. Debates on the role of space and place within broad socio-spatial processes (Agnew 1987, Massey 1994) revealed the mutual constitution of the social and the spatial, how places are relationally constructed at the intersection of broad processes and forces, as settings of social relations and senses of place, meanings and spatial imaginaries. In this sense, an account of the 'politics of place' involved understandings of how contentious politics make use, subvert and resignify the symbolic character of places, i.e. identities, symbols, values, spatial imaginaries and senses of place, prioritize and defend their places and, simultaneously, produce new political spaces and contentious spatial practices (Leitner et al. 2008). At the same time, discussions of 'the politics of scale' (Smith 1992, 1993, 1996, 2004) pointed out the character of scale as socially constructed, hence contested, and as a potential site of struggle for actors who seek to subvert and transform scalar relations (MacKinnon 2010). The importance of scale seen as a process provides for a renewed understanding of a 'scalar politics' (MacKinnon 2010), analytically useful for interrogating how scale is materially produced, through broad processes of capitalist restructuring as well as discursively articulated, i.e. 'scale-frames' or 'scale-talk', through social practices (Kaiser and Nikiforova 2008). Also, relational understandings of space and place (Massey 2005)



looking into transnational connectivities, flows and networks showed how these become inscribed into the spatialities of contentious politics. Drawing on Leitner et al. (2008), conceptualizing ‘multiple spatialities’, i.e. place, scale, networks, mobilities etc., as overlapping, interdependent and mutually constitutive of the social processes and spatial practices of contentious politics, can provide a more comprehensive understanding, in close relation to particular contexts and empirical studies.

Subsequently, the discussion shifted to studies of the geographies of social movements, which sought to incorporate the above debates into analyses of movements and resistance politics. Firstly, Routledge (1992, 1993, 1996a, 1997) showed how place is important for movement agency and resistance to emerge and unfold, as well as for greater strategies and mobilities of movements. In this sense, place and local contexts are central in the creation of ‘terrains of resistance’ and the articulation of alternative knowledges and political imaginaries, as well as in looking into global processes and entanglements of domination and resistance (Routledge 1997, Sharp et al. 2000). Hence, an account of the spatiality of resistance involves the spatial practices and strategic mobilities of movements, from small tactics in places to dispersal across geographical space (Routledge 1997). Secondly, as Miller (2000) argued, as political contexts and opportunities for social empowerment vary among places and shift geographically and temporally, movements often employ multiple strategies and tactics in order to effect their goals. This, in turn, suggests the simultaneous operation of struggles across geographical sites and scales and these multi-scalar strategies can involve the outwards expansion of movements, beyond their places, as well as localization tactics, through attachment to place and local cultures.

Thirdly, the increasing importance of the role of networks among these strategies was revealed through understandings of global networks of movements, or global justice networks (Cumbers et al. 2008, Routledge and Cumbers 2009). Through the notion of ‘convergence spaces’, Routledge and Cumbers (2009) showed how place-based struggles pursue an expansive politics and connect to distant movements, organizations and activists in order to contest neoliberal globalization. These connections draw on shared understandings and collective visions to forge alliances and achieve their goals. At the same time, the forging of

mutual solidarities across place-based struggles (Routledge and Cumbers 2009) generates the creation of common political spaces for dialogue and exchange (Featherstone 2012), whereby similarity and difference are negotiated and contested. Further, these connections are enabled by key mechanisms, i.e. key events, meetings and individuals termed ‘networking vectors’ (Routledge and Cumbers 2009). Finally, the differential positioning of movements and individuals within the operational logics of networking reveals the uneven distribution of power within these processes, e.g. access to resources, legitimacy and mobility for movements and key activists, ‘imagineers’ (Routledge and Cumbers 2009), which enable communication and interaction among groups.

At the same time, as often raised in the above studies, social empowerment strategies pursued by social movements vary, from movements that choose to engage with the state, aiming to transform and contest state institutions, to autonomous struggles that seek to bypass the state and produce alternative political spaces, through direct action tactics and self-organization (Chatterton 2005, Zibechi 2010). As argued earlier, conceptual juxtapositions of a ‘politics of demand’ versus a ‘politics of the act’ (Day 2004) reveal potential weaknesses in producing understandings of grounded cases of movements, which often, employ multiple and interdependent strategies that address state institutions and, at the same time, build on alternative structures to the capitalist state. Hence, as Wright (2010) suggests, social empowerment strategies are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as they often co-exist and become interdependent in broadening the spaces for creating ruptural ‘moments’, building on ‘interstitial’ alternatives and symbiotic relationships with the state.

To conclude, I suggest here that the above theoretical understandings become relevant in relation to the concrete social processes and contentious practices. Hence the process of building on conceptualizations of contentious politics is intrinsic to the empirical context under study. As I will show through the case of Athens, Greece throughout Chapters 5-7, place-specific attributes, as well as the relational qualities found in city center areas, become crucial for the emergence of struggle and solidarity practices in contexts of crisis and austerity. In this regard, through the notion of ‘struggle communities’ developed in Chapter 6, I suggest that the territorial level of the neighbourhood becomes a key contestation level for

building on resistance and solidarity practices that are mutually constituted to broader articulations of struggle and alternatives to austerity. In this sense, the spatial politics of struggle and solidarity suggest a re-thinking of: firstly, 'place' as internally multiple and constituted through broader relations, that extend beyond its material limits (see Massey 1994, 2004) and, secondly, 'community' as grounded in the neighbourhood, but not necessarily self-enclosed in its spatial scale (see MacKinnon and Derickson 2012). Further, as I will discuss in Chapter 7, self-organization in the neighbourhood and the forging of place-based solidarities becomes part of an expansive politics that seeks to build on connections across the city and beyond. In turn, this expansive politics encompasses multiple tactics and strategies that, while place-based, interact with broader anti-austerity mobilizations and, at the same time, build on alternatives to austerity, i.e. social/ solidarity economy structures. In order to unpack these, I employ the notion of 'urban solidarity spaces' (see Chapter 7), which suggests an inverted account of the spatial politics of 'convergence spaces' (Routledge and Cumbers 2009), from articulations of global networks of movements to grounded bottom-up struggles expanding outwards. In this regard, contestation is articulated through bottom-up links among activist groups and broader actors, 'networking from below' through ongoing interactions and 'messy horizontalities' that bring forward the power relations implicated within these processes.

Finally, as I will show in the following Chapter 4, in methodological terms, these ideas are developed in close relation to the empirical material and draw on interactions, participant observation and discussions held with activists in Athens, during and after the conduct of fieldwork. Further, Chapter 4 includes debates on qualitative and scholar-activist methodological approaches, a discussion of the methods employed while conducting fieldwork in Athens, as well as reflexive remarks around my positionality and relevant ethical considerations.

## **4. Methodology and Methods of Research**

### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter addresses key methodological issues that relate to my research, understood as ‘principles of reasoning’ (Cloke et al. 2004), responding to ‘how’ I approached the research field, so as to set the grounds for analysing and interpreting the empirical material in Chapters 5-7. In this regard, firstly, I draw on feminist and radical/ critical geography debates, which argued for empirically grounded approaches and the situatedness of knowledge production, placing academic praxis vis-à-vis the researched and broader power relations (see Haraway 1991). Secondly, the convergence of these approaches and ethnographic methodologies with scholar-activist research sought to redefine scholarly endeavours, as means not only of interpreting, but also effecting social change (Kobayashi 1994: 73). In this sense, activist-academics focused on employing research as means to engage in political activity, contribute to struggles and enhance academic material through the co-production of knowledge, in the field, along with resisting others (see Chatterton et al. 2008, Routledge 2009).

Thirdly, drawing on activist-academic methodologies and moving on to discuss my research field, I outline the rationale for choosing to collaborate with specific activist groups in Exarcheia, Athens and potential ways to extend understandings through the employment of the specific cases. Fourthly, I address the process of data collection and analysis, examining the actual methods and techniques used during fieldwork in Athens, elaborating on the strengths and benefits for using multiple methods to gather material, i.e. interviews, participant observation, field diary etc. and discussing the organization of the empirical material into key themes and categories. Finally, the chapter concludes with an extended discussion on the ‘lessons’ learned while conducting fieldwork in Athens, drawing on my personal experiences of critical engagement and collaboration with activist groups, positionality issues and ethical considerations.

## **4.2. Methodological Reflections**

This section addresses broad methodological issues and debates around qualitative research and its relevance for geographical studies. In particular, inputs by feminist and radical/critical geographers over the past decades that introduced qualitative methodologies into particular communities and groups argued for the relevance of academic praxis in the production of situated knowledge. As these converged with participatory ethnographic methods and activist-led academic research, debates around the role of the academic engaged in political activism focused on the potential gains for effecting social change and expanding theory through grounded critical engagement in struggle.

### **4.2.1. Qualitative Methodology in Human Geography**

As broadly defined by DeLyser et al. (2010), the focus of qualitative research is primarily placed on the complexity of everyday life, the meanings of the world we inhabit and also the ways in which human experiences are defined. In other words, “qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is being studied and the situational constraints that shape inquiry; they seek to answer questions that stress *how* social experience is given meaning” (DeLyser et al. 2010). In geography, qualitative research sought to understand the role of place and the importance of situatedness and context in broad social processes and relations, i.e. how particular places hold symbolic roles in people’s lives, how places shape and are shaped by everyday lived human experience, ways of life, understandings of the world etc. In this sense, qualitative research developed in human geography problematized and unpacked the spatialities of social phenomena by taking off the ‘cloak of neutrality’ often attributed to space (DeLyser et al. 2010).

In particular, following the development of radical geography since the late 1960’s, which primarily engaged with Marxist theory to produce radical and critical theory on social, economic and environmental issues, feminist geography in the 1980’s brought back attention to issues of praxis (Fuller and Kitchin 2004). In this regard, academic praxis sought not only to analyse power relations but also

challenge them and empower research participants. As Fuller and Kitchin (2004: 3) note, these debates stressed the need for reflexive approaches to research, along with the recognition that the production of knowledge is situated and shaped by the researcher. Hence, the main argument raised within these debates is that the research process, being imbued with power relations, calls for a re-thinking of the positionality of the researcher vis-à-vis the researched and broader social relations. In turn, these understandings unsettled conceptions of the 'objective researcher', distanced and detached from the researched and the social worlds under study. As Haraway (1991: 195) stressed, "I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims".

As the above feminist approaches stressed the empirically grounded production of knowledge through reflexive interaction 'in the field' of study, they utilized ethnography as a methodological 'toolbox' borrowed from anthropology and social sciences. In this regard, DeLyser et al. (2010: 7) argued that "the understanding of lived experience calls for an empirically grounded and necessary subjective approach that acknowledges the situatedness of all knowledge". Ethnographical research and data collection in geography employed grounded interaction in places and communities for long periods of time in order to examine understandings of place-specific, local identities of groups and individuals and the ways these are constructed (see Ley 1988, 1992). According to Herbert (2000), ethnography becomes a powerful tool for geographical studies as it provides fruitful insights into the processes and meanings that people attribute to places, which are simultaneously 'place-bound' and 'place-making'.

Moreover, the situatedness of ethnographic research suggests that the positionality of the researcher within the actual field of study creates several commitments, making the researcher 'accountable to fieldwork'. According to DeLyser et al (2010: 7), "grounding theory in observation, interaction, analysis and interpretation requires of qualitative geographers a commitment to actively engaging, through diverse means, the empirical worlds we study". This opens up new ways for combining several research methods and techniques employed in ethnographic research, such as participant observation, field notes and field diaries, interviews and surveys, audio-visual material, secondary material analysis, archival

research, document and discourse analysis etc. Hence the active engagement of the researcher with the field of study is able to enrich qualitative research with new creative approaches, dependent upon transformations that the empirical worlds call for in the process of doing research (DeLyser et al. 2000). These creative approaches can include multiple and contingent methods employed to capture the richness of diverse contexts and situations (Baxter and Eyles 1997).

In addressing key methodological issues that specific approaches and qualitative methods bring forward, firstly, I draw on Burawoy's (1998) account of the 'extended case method', which suggests the employment of ethnographic research and participant observation as means to destabilize conceptions of the world and unsettle theory, through the reflexive engagement of the researcher with the field and subjects under study. In this sense, Burawoy (1998) argued that, since impartiality and distancing depend on unproblematized power relations, the goal is to embrace participation as inevitable intervention in the field and context disruption. In turn, this type of reflexive participation creates grounds for dialogue and intersubjectivity between the observer and the observed. Specifically, the key elements of the 'extended case method' are the following: firstly, participant observation is understood as the extension of the observer into the world of the participant, which aims to "unpack the situational experiences of the participant by moving with them through their space and time" (Burawoy 1998: 14). Secondly, the extension of observations over space and time, through repeated interactions in the field, enables the examination of the production of situational knowledge, either discursive, i.e. personal narratives, or non-discursive, i.e. tacit knowledge in the form of practical consciousness. Thirdly, situated knowledge produced in ethnographic locales can be employed in order to unravel the connections between specific social processes and broader forces, or, in other words, "how each case works in its connection to other cases" (Burawoy 1998: 15). Fourthly, the extension of a specific case from process to social force allows for the extension of theory understood as destabilization, disruption and refutation of theoretical accounts. Therefore, the 'extended case method' brings forward the contingent character of reflexive ethnographic research and, at the same time, aims to unpack broader phenomena, generalize and extend theory, through the instrumental use of a case.

Secondly, Cloke et al. (2004) suggest that the employment of interviews in qualitative research focuses on gaining authentic insights into people's experiences through conducting conversations 'with a purpose', based on either structured or unstructured formats. In this sense, the purpose of conducting interviews is not merely obtaining information over a specific issue, but rather understanding the underlying meanings that people attribute to socio-spatial phenomena and their experiences. Further, while interviews are useful for extracting information, points of view and 'truths' over specific subjects, at the same time the interviewer needs to address a wide array of socio-cultural conditions within which the interview is constructed and carried out, simply because "the supposed vessel of objective knowledge is actually an active maker of meaning" (Cloke et al 2004: 150). Hence, 'rigour' in interview analysis provides with means to attend to the interactions between the researcher and the researched, as well as the broader field of study, e.g. 'hidden' meanings and hints, pauses, expressions of emotions etc. Also, similarly to the researched being an active subject with the research process, the researcher holds an active role in interaction, mediation, negotiation and construction of theory. This being acknowledged throughout the research process, methodological rigour and reflexive contribution of the researcher produce a creative tension, albeit legitimate. As Cloke et al. (2004: 151) point out, "the recognition of the active subject and the reflexive self in human geography has rendered entirely legitimate an approach which makes explicit the intersubjectivities inherent in interview practices".

Finally, in a similar way, Baxter and Eyles (1997) argue that 'rigour' is essential throughout the research process, from specifying the rationales and respondent selection to potential changes in analytical procedures. In this regard, Baxter and Eyles (1997) stress the need to establish a set of criteria and principles for evaluating qualitative research. These include the credibility and transferability of a single case towards generalizations and theory modification. Also the principles of dependability and confirmability as to how interpretations and analyses proceed require from the researcher, according to Baxter and Eyles (1997) a certain degree of responsibility towards knowledge production. While these remarks are useful for evaluating qualitative research, what remains to be addressed are the ways in which the above criteria will not subdue the self-reflexivity of the researcher to rigid sets



of principles. Also, the issue of responsibility of the researcher towards knowledge production raised in Baxter and Eyles (1997) is addressed as a rather one-sided concern around academic theory construction. In this sense, the researcher becomes accountable to sets of criteria that adhere only to the academic world. In turn, this raises ethical issues around the responsibility of the researcher towards the empirical worlds we study. Drawing on scholar activist methodologies (see section 4.2.2), I suggest here that the self-reflexivity and critical engagement of the researcher require a sense of responsibility also, if not specifically, towards the 'researched'. As Routledge (2009: 12) stresses, this kind of responsibility relates to 'a relational ethics of decolonizing the self', i.e. researcher and, also, "is attentive to the social context of collaboration and the situatedness of the researcher with respect to that context, enacted in a material, embodied way, through relations of friendship, solidarity and empathy".

#### **4.2.2. Scholar-Activism: Theory (is) in Action**

Since the 1970's research by Marxist, feminist and critical/ radical geographers produced critical theorizations of inequalities, injustices and oppressed communities. While these inputs proved highly influential in the vast field of social sciences, as Routledge (2009) notes, they to an extent became confined within the academy, rather than engaging with actual contributions and interventions in struggles and social movements. As a response to this separation between the academic discipline and activism, radical geographers since the mid-1990 started to engage with activist-led research outside the academy (e.g. Kobayashi 1994, Routledge 1996b). These approaches, drawing on feminist praxis discussed above, stressed the social responsibility of the researcher to expose inequalities, challenge these and commit to bridging divides between theory production and social praxis (Fuller and Kitchin 2004, Routledge 2009). At the same time, more recent strands looked into, firstly, participatory approaches to research (Kindon et al. 2008), which argue for the participation of the researcher and the researched in the empirical worlds under study and knowledge production respectively and, secondly, 'autonomous geographies' (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006, Chatterton et al. 2010), which understand empirical studies as the active contribution of the researcher to

the construction of collective spaces of non-capitalist relations and identities. While a detailed account of how the above converge or differ in bridging academic research and activism goes beyond the scope of this discussion, in the remaining part of this section I will point out some key methodological issues raised in activist-led research that relate to my methodological approach as a scholar-activist.

In unpacking activist methodologies and the responsibilities and ethical issues that emerge from the multiple positionalities of the researcher within and beyond the academy, Routledge (2009) and Chatterton et al. (2008) make the following arguments: firstly, the motivation that guides scholar-activist approaches prioritizes social transformation practices, whereby theory, knowledge and critical interpretations become entwined with struggle and are jointly produced with resisting others. Secondly, the ways in which these are made possible rely on solidarity-building with groups, communities and individuals, based on a common identification of problems, shared goals and commitment to social change. This 'politics of affinity' (Routledge 2009) developed with resisting others provides for mutual support and non-hierarchical participation and accessibility to the production of context-relevant knowledge. Thirdly, these processes involve challenging and negotiating power relations that permeate collaboration with resisting others, through messy relations of difference and similarity. Hence, collaborating with groups and communities, on the one hand, aims to bring forward oppressive relations and empower people to take control of their lives and, on the other hand, involves the development of critical reflexivity towards the reproduction of power relations between actors throughout the research process (Chatterton et al. 2008, Routledge 2009). Fourthly, this politics of affinity and mutual solidarity involves an engagement with emotion that triggers and motivates action as response to injustice. Interaction and encounter with resisting others is embodied, intersubjective and relational, as well as transformative in generating meaning and purpose toward personal and collective action. Fifth, this action becomes a prefiguration of social change, through everyday practices of collaboration and cooperation. Prefigurative action in this way enables the crystallization of aspirations of transformation into everyday lived experience and workable alternatives, through the organization of events, protests and other forms

of activism. Sixth, these alternatives to capitalist relations are expressed through the creation of spaces for action, e.g. common spaces such as occupations and social centers, whereby solidarity, critical dialogue and collaboration between groups and individuals become spatially grounded.

Moreover, activist methodologies involve a ‘relational ethics of struggle’ (Routledge 2004), which is contextual, as a product of reciprocity and collaboration, and relational, as it is negotiated throughout the conduct of research (Routledge 2009: 12). These suggest the sincere acknowledgement of the multiple positionalities of the academic-activist, acting in and beyond the academy, interacting with resisting others and engaging with broader social relations, hence an acknowledgement of the power relations involved in these processes. As Chesters (2012) notes regarding this argument, relationality and reciprocity are crucial ethical commitments, which seek to open up the production of knowledge to new ways of being, acting together and developing alternative political imaginaries. However, the critical engagement of the researcher with resisting others does not necessarily exclude potential censorship, silencing of opinions or becoming an advocate of a specific struggle. As Routledge (2004) notes, these issues of the researcher’s responsibilities in regard to transparency and confidentiality are not pre-determined, as they are re-worked through the contingent self-reflexive practices and the relationships built through collaboration. Hence, as also highlighted by Cordner et al. (2012: 171), ethical issues can be understood as “fluid, dynamic and value-laden guideposts that must be constantly and self-consciously reflected upon”.

Further, the multiple positionalities of the academic-activist are actively negotiated in, what Routledge (1996b) termed ‘a third space’, operating in-between the physical location of academic life and the sites of political activism the researcher engages with. This ‘third space’ constantly changes so as to subvert the meanings and roles of the spaces of academia and activism it draws upon and strives to blur their in-between boundaries (Routledge 1996b). As argued in feminist approaches discussed earlier, maintaining observational distance between the researcher and the researched is understood as attempting to represent someone else’s reality and, as Routledge (1996b:401) notes, “as such we are alienated from the lived moment, enmeshed in the theory market, where the production of theory

becomes another part of spectacular production, another commodity”. The third space conceived and enacted as critical engagement disrupts and unsettles this divide between theory and praxis. It also, enables the grounding of collaboration, in particular ways, in particular places and, as such, the acknowledgement and negotiation of similarity, difference and power relations (Routledge 2009). In addition to this, the ‘third space’ illuminates and enhances both academic material and struggle, through the circulation of ideas, narratives, lived experiences and emotions (Routledge 1996b).

Similarly, Juris’ (2007: 164) account of ‘militant ethnography’ stressed the entangled positionalities, research methods and political practices in “a politically engaged and collaborative form of participant observation carried from within rather than outside grassroots movements”. In this regard, as divisions between academic research and political practice become blunted, researchers become ‘active practitioners’ and new opportunities to enter and understand the social practices under study emerge. Another empirical gain of militant ethnography according to Juris (2007) is the grounding of embodied action and practical understandings generated through intense emotional situations e.g. tension, fear, joy etc. during mass actions or demonstrations. During such actions, the body of the researcher becomes a research tool, as organization skills, expertise and knowledge are put into action, contribute to strategies and enable connections to resisting others.

As a concluding remark, activist methodologies destabilize notions of the nature of the intellectual that have produced theory from a distance, being *about* rather than *for* movements (Juris 2007: 172). As Gramsci (2005: 51) stressed, all sorts of human activity entail some form of intellectual participation, creating particular conceptions of the world, consciousness and moral conduct and, hence, contribute to sustaining, modifying or bringing about new modes of thought. Therefore, intellectual activity, as part of human activity, is able to produce situated knowledge. However, Gramsci’s (2005) ‘organic’ intellectual, operating within a broad spectrum of social relations in and beyond the academy, is often undermined in reality and, according to Juris (2007), confined to the production of programmatic directives and strategic analyses that do not necessarily employ the above forms of situated knowledge. Without dismissing these as potentially useful

for struggle, activist methodologies seek to expand theoretically informed analyses, through collective practice and critical engagement with resisting others. And, in this way, they extend the role of the ‘organic’ intellectual, towards a ‘critical organic catalyst’ and an enabling actor operating in a ‘third space’, in-between academia and activism (Routledge 1996b). Regarding this, Routledge (2001: 119) poses the following conceptual metaphor in discussing the Narmada river struggle in India: “resisting is about being within the river, within the flow of action, rather than watching it from the bank. It is about making politics the subject, rather than the object, of research so that life will not be drenched in tears”.

### **4.3. Research Study Rationale: Key Groups and Movements, Exarcheia and Athens**

Following the above discussion on methodological debates that relate to my research, this section addresses the rationale for choosing the city center neighbourhood of Exarcheia, Athens and the key groups I collaborated with during the conduct of fieldstudy. Drawing on my research aims and objectives (see Chapter 1), the goal is to make new sense of contentious politics in contexts of crisis and austerity, through the examination of the spatial politics of grassroots groups in Athens, Greece. Also, as argued above (see 2.2), drawing on scholar-activist approaches, in methodological terms the aim is to bring forward oppressive relations and challenge them. Hence, the analytical focus is placed on groups and initiatives, which, on the one hand, engage in contentious practices opposing neoliberalism and austerity politics and, on the other hand, seek to produce alternatives to austerity.

As examined in detail in Chapters 5-7, the spatial politics of grassroots groups operating currently in Athens pertain to multiple contentious practices, which can be understood through the following loose typology suggested by Leitner et al. (2007) and expanded here based on the Athenian context: firstly, direct action, protests, rallies and demonstrations organized in public spaces and buildings, such as streets, squares, governmental offices, public services buildings etc., secondly, legislative actions often pursued by grassroots groups and initiatives, such as petitions aimed at state officials and politicians, legal actions and lawsuits filed on

behalf of affected groups, connections to advocacy and other civic rights groups etc. Thirdly, the production of alternative knowledge through political action and connections to scholar-activists, community organizations and other bottom-up initiatives that often enables the articulation of narratives that challenge the dominant neoliberal discourses. Finally, this knowledge contributes and is simultaneously produced through alternative economic and social practices of contestation, which include experiments around non-monetary economic activity, e.g. exchange and barter markets, time-banks etc., social/ solidarity economy initiatives, e.g. farmer-producer markets and co-operatives that prioritize social needs over profit, as well as the organization of collective forms of living in occupations, social centers etc. The above practices are often overlapping, as in many cases groups engage in several at the same time in order to achieve their goals.

Moreover, broad movements unfolding in Athens and Greece, e.g. from alter-globalization and Social Forum mobilizations, to student movement and post-Olympics urban-based struggles during the 2000's, as well as recent mobilizations contesting austerity politics, e.g. from the riots across cities in Greece in 2008 to the squares' movement in 2011, can be understood as cross-articulations of activism and historical political cultures, place-based struggles and broader movements spanning locally to globally. In this regard, the city of Athens and particularly city center areas hold a prominent role within these movements, historically and symbolically. From past movements against the military coup in the early 1970's, to the recent occupation of the Syntagma (Parliament) square in 2011 (see Chapter 6.2.), Athens city center areas acted as the material sites for contentious practices to unfold, such as mass public protests and demonstrations, riots and clashes with police forces, rallies and trade union strikes, social events and fundraisers etc. All these provide for the visibility of groups and broader actors participating in the events, through banners, slogans and mottos, as well as for face-to-face interactions among people, whereby intense emotions of anger, hope and fear for example are expressed. For example, the Syntagma square occupation lasting for more than two months, provided for frequent interactions and exchanges among participant groups and individuals through several forms of direct action, organization of campaigns and social events. At the same time, communication was established with distant

movements occurring at the same time, such as squares' occupations in Madrid and Barcelona, through social media and blogs.

Drawing on the above, contentious practices and broader anti-austerity, anti-neoliberal mobilizations are spatially grounded in everyday life settings, neighbourhoods, public spaces, workplaces etc. For example, already existing local groups contributed to the occupation of Syntagma square, as activists transposed know-how and organizational tactics, circulated information and resources and successfully mobilized participation. At the same time, this centralization of political activity at the occupied square was later diffused in neighbourhoods across the city, where local assemblies picked up the thread of organizing actions. Hence, contentious practices are characterized by 'territorially intensive' relations, drawing on place-based struggles, such as local groups active in neighbourhoods, and 'geographically extensive' flows of resources and people, which are able to contribute to broad movements, campaigns and actions (Nicholls 2007). As noted earlier, these are primarily evident in Athens city center areas, where historically and symbolically mass mobilizations occur. In particular, the neighbourhood of Exarcheia holds a key role in the development of activist and political cultures during the past decades. This area, on the one hand, has acted as a geographical node for movements over the years and, on the other hand, holds a place-specific activist geography of local groups currently active in the neighbourhood. As these will be developed in Chapter 6 (see 6.3), here I address the reasons for choosing the neighbourhood of Exarcheia in order to examine how place matters in shaping contentious practices, such as the ones mentioned above, and, at the same time, look into politically extensive action and networking processes taking place across Athens, nationally and broader solidarity links to European anti-austerity movements.

In particular, as shown in Tables 4.1. and 4.2. (also see section 4.3.1), several local groups co-exist in the neighbourhood of Exarcheia, forming a place-specific activist geography. This particular geography originates in past forms of activism and movements and a historicity of political cultures and alternative lifestyle sub-cultures. Some of the groups have been active in the area for several years, such as the Autonomous social center and the Networks for social and political rights for immigrants, while others have been formed more recently, such

as the KVox occupation and the Time Bank. Also, groups in Exarcheia are rather diverse in relation to their political backgrounds and goals, ranging from the local residents' committee comprised of mostly non-aligned activists, to anarchist occupations and social centers, as well as Solidarity initiatives funded by the party of Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left). At the same time, in relation to the above typology of contentious practices, while several groups pursue direct action tactics to effect their goals, legal action is also at times chosen as means to exert pressure; further, other groups are experimenting with alternative forms of non-monetary economy, e.g. the Time Bank and the producers' market. The common organizational means for actions, events, campaigns etc. among groups is the assembly, held on a frequent basis, e.g. weekly or monthly. Finally, participation in group assemblies involves relatively small numbers for most groups, often between 10 to 15; nevertheless, since membership is informal and fluid these numbers are often in flux.

Additionally, the multiplicities of groups active in Exarcheia simultaneously reflect the broader conjuncture of the crisis, how austerity has put pressure on social reproduction issues and how these are currently contested. These involve the transformations existing groups have undergone and the emergence of new ones across Athens and Greece, which primarily deal with alternative means of organizing economic and social activity. In this sense, local groups that existed prior to the crisis, e.g. the local residents' committee, the Autonomous and Nosotros social centers, have shifted their goals and activities towards solidarity initiatives and structures, while new ones that were formed during the past few years, mainly since 2011, also undertake similar projects, albeit through various trajectories. Further, the diversity of local groups regarding their political backgrounds, e.g. leftist, anarchist, non-aligned activists etc. and character, e.g. residents' committee, social centers, occupations, solidarity structures etc. is also representative of the different groups and initiatives mobilizing in several areas across Athens and Greece. In this regard, many neighbourhoods across the city host popular assemblies and local committees, solidarity initiatives and structures, occupied spaces and social 'hangouts', farmer-producer markets etc. that share certain characteristics, goals, organizational means, tactics and practices with the ones active in Exarcheia.



Here Exarcheia has a double role: firstly, as a place, a neighbourhood, a community where political activism and struggle are grounded through multiple diverse groups sharing overlapping spatialities and temporalities; and, secondly, as a geographical node within broader mobilizations, historically and currently. As such, this area was considered highly relevant in methodological terms for looking into the role of place as constitutive of contentious spatial practices and politically extensive action across Athens and beyond. In this sense, Exarcheia was chosen as an instrumental ‘entry point’ within the geographies of grassroots contentious spatial practices and networking occurring in and beyond the neighbourhood. Further, the groups I primarily collaborated with during fieldstudy, namely the local residents’ committee and the solidarity network of Exarcheia, while co-hosted in a social center, have a broader spatial reference to the neighbourhood and simultaneously participate in broader campaigns and actions across Athens. Hence, these groups were chosen in order to examine how place shapes contestation, i.e. the role of the neighbourhood in contentious practices, and, at the same time, how connections to distant allies, coalitions, campaigns and mobilizations occur across the city and beyond. Another key objective that contributed to the choice of the above groups was to identify and represent broader transformations within contentious practices that austerity has brought forward, in regard to social reproductions needs and the emergence of solidarity structures and initiatives in response to these, e.g. the time bank and the solidarity network of Exarcheia. Finally, and as a particular attention to the specific methods used for data collection is placed in the following section (see 4.4), in conceptual terms the above relate to Burawoy’s (1998) ‘extended case method’ discussed earlier. In this regard, the case of Exarcheia and key groups operating in the area is used in order to spatially ground contentious practices, through tracing their particularities, and, at the same time, extend understandings of broader social processes, through their relational links to the particular case.

<b>Exarcheia Group</b>	<b>Committee of Residents' Initiative</b>	<b>Solidarity Network</b>
<b>Year of start</b>	2007	2011
<b>Background/ Origin</b>	Local Initiative	Local Popular Assembly
<b>Based in</b>	Occupation (hosted)	Occupation (hosted)
<b>Organizational means</b>	Self-organized/ Volunteer	Self-organized/ Volunteer
<b>Deals with</b>	Local issues/ Public spaces/ Time Bank	Housing/ Solidarity
<b>Contentious Practices</b>	Direct Action/ Legal Action	Direct Action/ Legal Action
<b>Political Orientation</b>	Leftist/ Non-aligned activists	Leftist/ Non-aligned activists
<b>Operation</b>	Weekly Assemblies	Weekly Assemblies
<b>Participants (Approx.)</b>	10-15	10
<b>Exarcheia Group</b>	<b>Time Bank</b>	<b>Navarinou occupied Park</b>
<b>Year of start</b>	2012	2009
<b>Background/ Origin</b>	Solidarity Structure/ Residents' Committee	Residents' Committee
<b>Based in</b>	Occupation (hosted)	Occupied open space
<b>Organizational means</b>	Self-organized/ Volunteer	Self-organized/ Volunteer
<b>Deals with</b>	Non-monetary exchange of services	Open green space/ Community Garden/ Cultural
<b>Contentious Practices</b>	Alternative Economy	Direct Action/ Alternative Knowledge Production
<b>Political Orientation</b>	Leftist/ Autonomous/ Non-aligned activists	Leftist/ Anarchists/ Non-aligned activists
<b>Operation</b>	Monthly Assemblies/ Online platform	Weekly Assemblies
<b>Participants (Approx.)</b>	30-40 (registered members more than 150)	10-15
<b>Exarcheia Group</b>	<b>Autonomous Hangout Social Center</b>	
<b>Year of start</b>	1998	
<b>Background/ Origin</b>	Autonomous/ Libertarian Left	
<b>Based in</b>	Rental	
<b>Organizational means</b>	Self-organized/ Volunteer	
<b>Deals with</b>	Political and cultural activities/ Solidarity structures	
<b>Contentious Practices</b>	Direct Action/ Alternative Economy	
<b>Political Orientation</b>	Autonomous/ Libertarian Left	
<b>Operation</b>	Weekly Assemblies	
<b>Participants (Approx.)</b>	10	
<b>Exarcheia Group</b>	<b>Autonomous Hangout Collective Kitchen</b>	<b>Nosotros Social Center</b>
<b>Year of start</b>	2008	2005
<b>Background/ Origin</b>	Autonomous Hangout	Anarchist/ Anti-authoritarian
<b>Based in</b>	Rental	Rental
<b>Organizational means</b>	Self-organized/ Volunteer	Self-organized/ Volunteer
<b>Deals with</b>	Solidarity Structure	Political and cultural activities/ Solidarity structures
<b>Contentious Practices</b>	Alternative Economy	Direct Action/ Alternative Economy
<b>Political Orientation</b>	Autonomous/ Non-aligned activists	Anarchists/ Non-aligned activists
<b>Operation</b>	Weekly community cooking	Weekly Assemblies
<b>Participants (Approx.)</b>	10	15-20

Table 4.1. Local groups in Exarcheia, Athens 2013, source: author

<b>Exarcheia Group</b>	<b>Solidarity for All Network</b>	
<b>Year of start</b>	2012	
<b>Background/ Origin</b>	Syriza (Radical Left Coalition Party)	
<b>Based in</b>	Rental	
<b>Organizational means</b>	Volunteer/ Funded by Syriza	
<b>Deals with</b>	Social Economy/ Networking among Solidarity structures	
<b>Contentious Practices</b>	Direct Action/ Legal Action/ Alternative Knowledge Production	
<b>Political Orientation</b>	Left/ Leftist	
<b>Operation</b>	Monthly Group Meetings	
<b>Participants (Approx.)</b>		
<b>Exarcheia Groups</b>	<b>Social Medical Center</b>	
<b>Year of start</b>	2013	
<b>Background/ Origin</b>	Syriza (Radical Left Coalition Party)	
<b>Based in</b>	Rental	
<b>Organizational means</b>	Volunteer/ Funded by Syriza	
<b>Deals with</b>	Free Healthcare services/ Solidarity structure	
<b>Contentious Practices</b>	Alternative Economy	
<b>Political Orientation</b>	Left/ Non-aligned activists	
<b>Operation</b>	Daily	
<b>Participants (Approx.)</b>	30	
<b>Exarcheia Groups</b>	<b>KVOX Occupation</b>	<b>Without Middlemen market</b>
<b>Year of start</b>	2012	2012
<b>Background/ Origin</b>	Anarchist Social Center	KVOX Occupation
<b>Based in</b>	Occupation	Exarcheia square/ open public space
<b>Organizational means</b>	Self-organized/ Volunteer	Self-organized/ Volunteer
<b>Deals with</b>	Political and cultural activities/ Solidarity structures	Goods distribution/ Solidarity Economy
<b>Contentious Practices</b>	Direct Action/ Alternative Economy	Alternative Economy
<b>Political Orientation</b>	Anarchists/ Non-aligned activists	Anarchists/ Non-aligned activists
<b>Operation</b>	Weekly Assemblies	Monthly
<b>Participants (Approx.)</b>	80	
<b>Exarcheia Groups</b>	<b>Migrants Hangout Social Center</b>	<b>El Chef Collective Kitchen</b>
<b>Year of start</b>	2003	2008
<b>Background/ Origin</b>	Political and Social Rights Network for Immigrants	Migrants Hangout
<b>Based in</b>	Rental	Occupation (hosted)
<b>Organizational means</b>	Self-organized/ Volunteer	Self-organized/ Volunteer
<b>Deals with</b>	Cultural Activities/ Greek Language courses	Solidarity Structure
<b>Contentious Practices</b>	Direct Action/ Legal Action	Alternative Economy
<b>Political Orientation</b>	Leftist/ Non-aligned activists	Leftist/ Non-aligned activists
<b>Operation</b>	Weekly Assemblies	Weekly community cooking
<b>Participants (Approx.)</b>	10	8

Table 4.2. Local groups in Exarcheia, Athens 2013, source: author

### **4.3.1. Exarcheia Groups**

#### Committee of Residents' Initiative and Time Bank of Exarcheia:

Formed in 2007, the local residents' committee of Exarcheia has dealt with several local issues since, such as re-claiming public spaces for the neighbourhood, recycling, drug trafficking and police repression. These involved mainly direct action tactics, as well as legal appeals and pressure to the municipal authorities. In 2012 the committee launched a Time Bank project, aiming to involve locals in non-monetary exchange of services and strengthen community bonds in the face of the crisis. These principal functions are captured in two of the main mottos of the Time Bank, namely "when we do not have money, we have time!" and "no-one alone in the crisis". The Time Bank 'With Time' is a solidarity/ social economy structure, which operates independently, based on an online platform where services are recorded, while at the same time links to other similar initiatives and structures active in the area, such as the Autonomous cooking collective, and across Athens and Greece, through the Solidarity for All network. The Residents Committee and the Time Bank assemblies and social events are hosted in Tsamadou 15, an occupied building minutes away from the central Exarcheia square, used by several local initiatives and groups.

#### Solidarity Network of Exarcheia:

Following the eviction of the Syntagma square occupation and the dispersal of activism across Athens, through local popular assemblies held in several neighbourhoods, the local popular assembly of Exarcheia gave its place to the Solidarity Network, which was formed in 2011. This solidarity initiative mobilizes around issues of housing taxation, evictions and foreclosures, through coordinative campaigns and direct action organized across Athens with other local assemblies and solidarity groups, and often contributes to the gathering of goods for impoverished locals. The Solidarity Network is also hosted in Tsamadou 15 occupation and participates in local campaigns and has developed links to the residents committee, the time bank, the autonomous social center and other groups.

### Navarinou Occupied Park:

In 2009 the Residents Committee of Exarcheia placed an open call for action in the neighbourhood and across Athens, so as to organize a day of taking over the decaying former parking lot on Navarinou street and transform it to an open green space for locals to manage. As several activists and groups contributed to the initial phase of re-planting this lot, the Park formed an independent assembly which has been active since. The park acts as a community garden and a space for the organization of cultural activities and is run based on volunteering manual labour. Lately, its use as an open public space by everyone has raised concerns and controversy to assembly members due to drug trafficking and anti-social behaviour incidents.

### Autonomous ‘Hangout’ Social Center and ‘Collective Kitchen’:

The Autonomous social center is active in Exarcheia since 1998, participating in local political and cultural activities and coordinative campaigns, e.g. the planned redevelopment of the central Exarcheia square in the past, as well as more recently, in the ‘Exarcheia in movement’ campaign. Also, since the onset of the crisis, activists from this social center focused actions around solidarity and social economy, setting up groups such as a community cooking collective, i.e. ‘collective kitchen’, a self-education library and an organic products distribution group.

### Nosotros Social Center:

The Nosotros social center started in 2005 from a group of anti-authoritarian anarchists, pertaining to the Italian tradition of cultural/ political social centers. Nosotros organizes a series of cultural activities, free language and arts courses, a cooking collective and contributes to other solidarity projects, cooperatives and ‘without middlemen markets’ across Greece. Also, Nosotros activists often participate in local campaigns and actions organized in Exarcheia and Athens.

### ‘Solidarity for All’ Network:

The ‘Solidarity for All’ Network started in 2013 and is mainly comprised of a core group of activists who coordinate contacts among solidarity structures and initiatives across Athens and Greece. This coordination is made possible through the operation of theme groups on social economy, social medical and pharmacy centers, culture, education and food/ farmers markets. The network also operates through an online platform, where people from solidarity groups can record their actions, circulate experience, know-how and information and exchange ideas on how to set up and run similar projects. The ‘Solidarity for All’ network is funded by Syriza, the radical left coalition party.

### Social Medical Center:

The Social Medical Center based in Exarcheia started in 2013 and provides for free primary healthcare for the uninsured, the unemployed, immigrants etc. Volunteers, such as doctors, pharmacists and nurses provide for medical services and individual donations on equipment and utilities. Also, volunteers are responsible for administrative tasks and daily shifts. The medical center is funded through the municipal Syriza branch and the Solidarity for All network, while often collaborates with other medical centers, such as the ones in Helliniko (southern suburb of Athens) and in Thessaloniki.

### KVOX Occupation and ‘Without Middlemen’ market:

KVOX, a former cinema building at Exarcheia central square, was occupied by anarchist groups in 2012. The occupation hosts a café and library, open daily to the public, while other activities include cultural and political discussions and social events. Also, this space hosts other groups’ assemblies, such as the ‘without middlemen’ market, which brings together local producers and farmers from surrounding areas and organizes open-air organic product markets once a month at the central Exarcheia square.

### Migrants 'Hangout' Social Center and 'El Chef' Collective Kitchen:

The migrants hangout was set up by the Political and Social Rights for Immigrants network in 1985 and deals with practical issues immigrants face, from legal actions, integration in the Greek society, free language courses etc. This group also contributed to the adjacent occupation of Tsamadou 15 in 2009, where several local Exarcheia groups host their assemblies and events. The 'El Chef' cooking collective comprised of members of this group also operates in this occupation since 2008 and organizes weekly meals for immigrants and locals. This collective kitchen often contributes to Anti-racist festivals and joint actions with other similar projects, such as the Autonomous collective kitchen group.

#### **4.4. Research Methods, Data Collection and Analysis**

Moving on to discuss here the process of data collection and analysis, firstly, I examine the actual methods and techniques used during fieldwork conducted in Athens between October 2012 and May 2013. Secondly, based on my personal experience, I reflect on some of the benefits and strengths of using multi-method qualitative research approaches, such as interviews, participant observation, field notes, field diary and secondary material. Finally, I outline the process of data analysis and the organization of the empirical material into categories and key themes of analysis, developed throughout Chapters 5-7.

##### **4.4.1. Research Methods and Techniques**

Regarding the methodological rationale and actual methods and techniques employed during fieldstudy, firstly, 53 open semi-structured, in-depth interviews in total were conducted with anonymous respondents who participate in grassroots groups and broader movements. Interviews were employed so as to gain authentic insights into participants' experiences, ideas and knowledge on various topics. Also, in acknowledging that respondents are much more than 'information pools', rather they are active subjects that interact with the researcher within the process of interviewing (see Cloke et al. 2004), the opinions and interpretations expressed in

interviews were cross-examined with data collected through participant observation, field notes and secondary sources, such as blogs, pamphlets etc. (also see section 4.4.2). Hence, interviews as a method acted complementary to other techniques of data collection. Further, the 53 interviews are divided into two main groups: firstly, 39 of the interviews were conducted with residents and participants from Exarcheia local groups. Secondly, 14 interviewees participate in groups based in neighbourhoods across Athens and suburban areas (metropolitan area of Athens): 7 of them are activists from Athens city center (municipality of Athens) neighbourhoods of Petralona, Koukaki, Psyrri, Kypseli and Academy of Plato, while another 7 interviewees are participants from groups in the suburban areas of Helliniko, Glyfada, Nea Smyrni (southern suburbs), Chaidari (western suburb) and Vyronas (eastern suburb) (see Figure 4.1). The interviews were conducted in settings across Athens suggested by the interviewees at their convenience and availability, such as cafes, occupations, social centers etc. Interviews were held in the form of conversations, so as to provide respondents with sufficient 'space' and time to share their experiences, express their opinions and develop their accounts over specific subjects in a less formal fashion. Also, interviews followed a semi-structured format, which included a brief introduction to my research study and key themes relating to my research aims and questions, included in an interview guide (see Appendix). The interview guide was used to navigate through interviews, providing at the same time for open discussions, rather than asking participants to respond to fixed questionnaires. The open interview format employed proved to be very useful in expanding understandings towards new directions, as the key themes were enriched through conversations with respondents, e.g. the transformations of contentious practices towards alternative economy and solidarity projects versus charity. Finally, all interviews were conducted in Greek, recorded upon respondents' signed consent and lasted approximately an hour each on average.



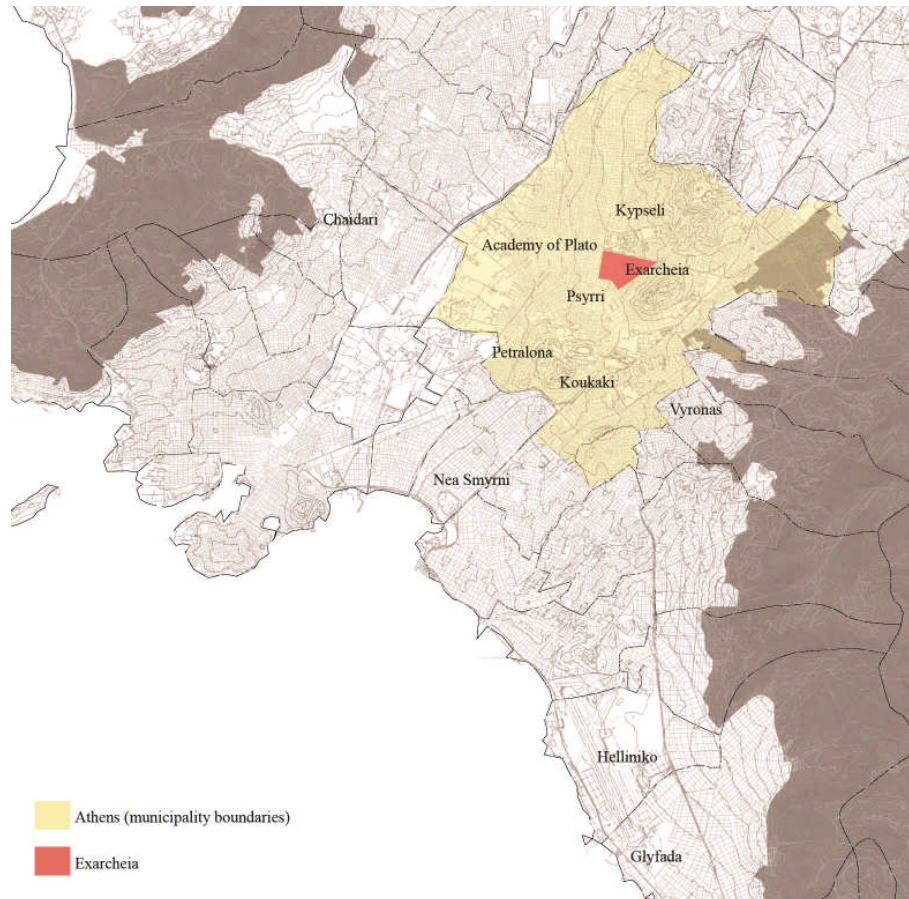


Figure 4.1. Map of Athens: Locating the respondents, source: author

Secondly, participant observation was employed in order to further understandings of contentious practices and narratives produced by activists and, also, drawing on ‘scholar-activist’ methodologies (see 4.2.2), so as to engage and collaborate with groups and individuals. In this sense, as argued through Burawoy’s (1998) ‘extended case method’ in section 4.2.1, participant observation facilitated my engagement in the research field, through extended interactions over time. Also, these interactions with activists contributed to gaining understandings and participating in the production of situated knowledge, i.e. narratives, tacit knowledge etc., as well as broader socio-spatial processes, e.g. accounts extending outwards in spatial terms over various topics. Further, this type of engagement over a period of time was helpful in unravelling the underlying meanings and opinions stated during interviews, contextualize activists’ responses and critically reflect on these in my field diary (also see section 4.4.2). In particular, participant observation involved mass public protests, rallies and demonstrations, often organized in city

center areas and at the Syntagma square, assemblies, public discussions, social events and campaigns organized by groups and organizations, workshops and festivals etc. While attending several of these actions across Athens, particular attention was given to the key groups mentioned earlier, namely the residents' committee and the solidarity network of Exarcheia. Hence, my collaboration with these groups involved the attendance of their weekly assemblies and actions organized, such as local demonstrations and rallies, producing and giving out leaflets in the neighbourhood, for example in the weekly open-air market and outside public services, putting up posters in streets, volunteering in writing texts and translating, contributing to manual labour, such as painting the occupied building where these groups hold their assemblies, help organize fundraiser social events and gather food and other goods, participating in Time Bank exchange of services, attending collective kitchens etc. During these, I also obtained secondary illustrative material, such as texts, pamphlets and posters from other groups around actions and events, as well as photos of the events. Further, field notes during weekly assemblies, public discussions and events were used so as to note down the specific issues raised during these, key opinions and perspectives stated, as well as arguments raised among activists. Complementary to field notes during meetings and events, I used a field diary, which I frequently completed after participation and interviews ended, so as to reflect on observation and information obtained.

Thirdly, secondary material gathered involved photos, texts, pamphlets, leaflets and posters in published form, as well as e-documents and information from blogs, social media and email lists the groups use for communicating actions and events. These were important so as to get informed on specific actions and events, as well as to look into extensive accounts and opinions of particular topics activists discussed in texts and other published material. It is important to highlight here the constant communication among activists through the Internet. Specifically blogs and email lists, as well as emergency text messaging and phone calls, are widely used in order to circulate information, decide on actions, arrange meetings, set up connections to distant campaigns, alert people in cases of emergency, exchange opinions on several issues and distribute tasks. In the case of the Time Bank of Exarcheia, an online platform is used in order to record requests and offers for services, exchanges of services and distribution of credits among participants.

While email lists are open for everyone to share information and opinions, specific individuals are responsible for running the blogs and the online platform, circulating information, photos and minutes from discussions. Additionally, secondary sources employed involved video footage and documentaries, produced by artists, activists and groups, illustrating actions, personal opinions and campaigns organized. Further, drawing explanatory diagrams and mapping actions during fieldstudy helped tracing potential connections among groups across the city. Based on these, I also produced maps after fieldstudy ended, during the data analysis process, aiming to illustrate the settings of actions and key spots of activism in Exarcheia and Athens.

Finally, in drawing links between the research questions this thesis addresses (see Chapter 1.3) and the methods employed during fieldwork, i.e. which methods respond to which questions, I suggest that the use of multiple methods provides for the simultaneous complementary cross-examination of specific topics (also see section 4.4.2). Hence, while the questions that involve the narratives, meanings and symbols, as well as imaginaries activists attribute to their struggles and particular spatial settings, these were addressed mainly through in-depth interviews, as well as secondary material, such as texts that analyse groups' opinions and stances towards various topics. Also, regarding the questions posed around the cooperation tactics and networking logics developed among groups, these, while addressed through interviews, became more illuminated through participant observation in events and actions. Complementary to participation, keeping a field diary throughout fieldwork was highly useful for reflecting on these processes and drawing links between what was stated and what actually occurred. In particular, the first research question addressed the role of 'place' within resistance and solidarity practices, involving both activist narratives and the spatialities of these practices. Hence, while interviews proved useful in gaining insights into the former, the latter were also examined through participant observation in actions organized by groups in Exarcheia. Similarly, the second question involved the material and discursive means of cooperation among activists and groups, hence interviews and participant observation acted as complementary methods in examining these. The third question shifted the focus on the relational tools employed for contacts among groups to occur, i.e. key events, actions,

festivals, campaigns etc. In this regard, participant observation, especially through ongoing interactions with activists over time, proved relevant for following these. At the same time, activists discussed in interviews past campaigns and established connections to groups; hence interviews in this sense helped contextualize the means of collaboration. The fourth question, in a similar way, looked into the networking logics among groups. Again here, participant observation became more relevant in examining the underlying processes of facilitation and communication, i.e. ‘who is responsible for what’; hence bring forward tensions, conflicts, arguments and uneven power relations. Finally, the fifth question involved links between small tactics and broad strategies of social change. In this respect, interviews and participant observation, as well as secondary material, were crucial for establishing understandings of these.

#### **4.4.2. Methodological Context and Data Collection**

In furthering the discussion on the above methods and techniques employed during fieldwork, here I discuss some key issues in relation to the data collection process, the recruitment of respondents, the benefits of using multiple methods, i.e. interviews, participant observation, field notes etc. Firstly, prior to fieldwork in Athens, I established contacts with activists, based on my personal acquaintances, friends and previous engagement and connections to activist groups, as discussed in detail regarding my positionality in section 5 (4.5). These contacts provided for broad information on actions and campaigns taking place in Athens, local groups and initiatives and, also, suggested new contacts to people mobilizing in these. In acknowledging the key role of city center areas in mobilizations and the vibrant political activism culture of Exarcheia, I chose to rent accommodation in this area, so as to start tracing the multiplicities of local groups in Exarcheia and across Athens.

Secondly, upon my arrival in Athens and during the first few weeks of fieldwork, I participated in several events and mass protests, such as general strike demonstrations and rallies at Syntagma square, where I had the opportunity to informally discuss with my contacts on the specifics of movements and activism occurring at the time. Also, during these events I had the opportunity to get

introduced to new people, who provided for information on local groups they are involved in and invited me to participate in their assemblies and actions. Hence, participation in events and face-to-face interactions are indicative of how the information circulates among groups and this type of informal networking often based on contingency is able to establish new connections to distant groups and activists. Additionally, during these first few weeks and as I started participating in events and assemblies of Exarcheia groups, I became acquainted to participants and, through observation, started gaining perceptions on ‘who is who’, responsible for ‘what’, key roles of people, which other groups they connect to, goals and issues at stake, as well as the internal dynamics of the groups. In this regard, participant observation, as well as informal conversations and the first few interviews with activists, enabled an initial understanding of which groups pursue connections in the area and beyond, how and why these are made possible etc. In turn, these contributed to the choice of the groups discussed earlier, namely the residents’ committee and the solidarity network.

Thirdly, in tracing the multiplicities of struggles during the first month of fieldwork, I also conducted interviews with activists from Exarcheia as well as other areas, such as Petralona, Glyfada and Nea Smyrni. The recruitment of these respondents (10 interviewees in total) was made through my personal acquaintances; hence a type of ‘snowball’ method was initially employed so as to gain general understandings of local groups active across Athens. While this proved useful in accessing people and information in a short period of time, in acknowledging the potential limitations of ‘snowball’ recruitment, e.g. similar topics and shared opinions, potential bias etc., the recruitment of respondents was later re-fashioned. In this regard, as noted above, participant observation in public actions and events became a ‘tool’ in contacting activists and recruiting new respondents. In the following months of fieldwork, participant observation on a regular basis in events and weekly assemblies of local groups in Exarcheia provided the opportunity, through collaboration and engagement in activism, to meet with more people and recruit new interviewees. This involved a process of gaining people’s trust and building on proximate solidarities (see section 4.5).

Fourthly, keeping field notes throughout the fieldstudy became helpful in keeping records of information, tracking down upcoming actions, which activists

are responsible for what, issues at stake and, also, how contacts occur among groups, in Exarcheia and across the city. At the same time, the employment of a field diary, often after interviews and participant observation ended, proved useful in reflecting on these, highlighting impressions and details, marking inconsistencies between opinions stated in interviews and actual practices, expanding on issues observed but not verbally stated, describing settings and interactions among people and drawing explanatory diagrams.

Drawing on the above, the strengths of using multiple methods, i.e. interviews, participant observation, field notes and diary, secondary material etc., lies on their complementary simultaneous function during the data collection process and analysis. In this sense, interviews with activists in Athens in the form of conversations became a key ‘tool’ for acquiring information, e.g. ongoing contacts to other groups, campaigns and actions, insights into specific topics and in-depth accounts of key issues, e.g. ‘solidarity versus charity’, ‘senses of place’ and ‘struggle community’ (see Chapters 5-7) and personal experiences and narratives over key past events, e.g. Syntagma occupation. At the same time, while participant observation lacked these benefits of in-depth discussions, it became crucial in rendering visible new issues and details that, often, respondents did not address, deliberately or not, during interviews. And, in turn, the use of field notes and diary helped reflect on these throughout the research process and draw links between interview responses, actual practices and theory. For example, interviewees’ responses to the question of ‘how do connections to other activist groups occur’ involved verbal representations of a practice, which, when lived, enacted and observed, acquired more complex dimensions, in relation to the actual spatial-temporal setting, i.e. where, when and, most importantly, why, who was responsible for making these contacts and what this meant in regard to their role within this particular practice. Finally, as examined in section 4.5, participant observation, engagement and collaboration became extremely important in building on trust and shared solidarities with activists in Athens, which in turn enhanced the depth of responses during interviews.

#### **4.4.3. Data Analysis: Coding and Categorizing the Empirical Material**

Regarding the empirical material analysis, following fieldwork in Athens, here I outline the process of coding and categorizing interviews and field notes, the key themes that emerged out of these and how they will be further addressed in Chapters 5-7. Firstly, interviewees and interview transcripts were given numbers, in the order they were conducted, so as to keep a record of respondents and, at the same time, guard their anonymity (interview quotes used in this thesis are introduced through general characteristics of respondents, e.g. age, gender, groups they participate in etc., in order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity). Further, as all interviews were conducted in Greek and transcripts were produced in English, particular attention was given to translating the responses accurately, so that all opinions and issues were stated in detail. Also, during transcribing interviews, keeping notes and highlighting details helped in organizing them later on e.g. underlining broad themes, noting similar or contradictory opinions expressed elsewhere etc.

Secondly, in identifying key themes that could potentially form categories, the coding of the material involved attentiveness and reflexivity, a process of navigating the material, advising my field diary and notes acquired from particular interactions and events and producing new notes in order to make sense of categories. In particular, the coding of individual interviews was made manually, through using numbers, different colours and side notes in order to highlight key issues that came up frequently, complementary and contradictory responses on these and note down small details and potential links to theory. Field notes and diary input, as well as other secondary material, were accordingly organized per group, event, action, theme etc. and folded into the interview key themes so as to maintain an open dialogue between in-depth accounts acquired from interviews and relevant observation and reflective notes.

Therefore, 10 sets of responses and key discussion themes were formed out of the empirical material, which were later re-worked and merged into three main discussions forming Chapters 5-7. These involve: firstly, background information on groups respondents participate in from Exarcheia and other areas in Athens, i.e. goals, actions, social characteristics of participants, connections to other activists

and groups etc. This discussion is employed in Chapter 5 so as to show the grounding of struggles in relation to the broader context of the crisis and social movements and examine in detail the key groups from Exarcheia I collaborated with. Secondly, discussions around the role of Exarcheia in forging place-based struggles and solidarities and links to broader mobilizations in Athens, such as the squares' movement, are included in Chapter 6. In brief, these involve responses on: firstly, the occupation of Syntagma square and counter- austerity politics since, secondly, the double role of Exarcheia within movements discussed above, i.e. how political cultures, senses of place and spatial imaginaries contribute to expansive spatial politics or block these, thirdly, the key spots of activism and meeting points in Exarcheia and fourthly, through the example of a local coordinative campaign, i.e. 'Exarcheia in movement' and the notion of a 'struggle community, understandings of how struggle and solidarity become entwined with community bonds and networking through face-to-face interaction, as well as antagonisms and informal hierarchies within these. Thirdly, sets of responses that form Chapter 7 mainly revolve around the role of solidarity/ social economy local initiatives and structures in posing alternatives to austerity. In particular, these include discussions on: firstly, the transformations of urban struggles due to austerity politics, secondly, solidarity narratives and counter-charity discourses produced by activists, thirdly, specific characteristics, differentiations and groupings of structures and initiatives currently active across Athens and Greece, fourthly, understandings of how these groups sustain an emerging 'urban solidarity space' and the formation of a solidarity/ social economy and fifth, a closer examination of the underlying spatial politics, coordinative campaigns and actions, multiple strategies and tactics pursued and networking among activists and groups.

Finally, it is important to note here that the above key themes and sets of responses, while organized into three main discussions, so as to shift the analytical focus among key groups, the neighbourhood, the city and beyond, are often overlapping and complementary. In this sense, they signify a process of moving between territoriality and relationality and they represent the grounding of struggle and solidarity as mutually constitutive of broader contentious practices. Before moving to analyse the empirical material (see Chapters 5-7), the following section



(4.5) addresses some key ethical issues in regard to my positionality within the research field.

#### **4.5. Critical Engagement, Positionality and the Ethics of Struggle**

In positioning myself within the research field and the key methodological debates on academic praxis and scholar activism discussed earlier (see section 4.2), here I address some ‘lessons’ learned while conducting fieldwork in Athens, reflecting on my personal experiences of collaborating with activists and engaging in struggles, as well as ethical considerations regarding these.

Fieldwork in Athens began in October 2012; yet the motivation behind this new ‘journey’ felt rather familiar as the ‘ticket’ read the same: ‘commitment to social change’. What was different this time, however, was that my engagement served as means to interpret political activity and people’s practices and, through collaboration in the field, produce a form of meaningful knowledge around these (see Chatterton et al. 2008, Routledge 2009); and this ‘double’ identity of being an activist and researcher, among others, meaning that I had to negotiate before, throughout and after fieldwork ended, operating in-between struggle and my research as a PhD student in the university (see Routledge 1996b, 2004). My prior involvement and experience in political activism served as the main ‘toolbox’ for re-approaching people and groups I already knew from before, as well as new ones, and start collaborating with them. These involved personal contacts, friends and former colleagues active in Thessaloniki and Athens, dating back to the mass university student movements against cuts and the privatization of public education during the 2000’s. Also, acquaintances involved activists from local groups, occupations and social centers in Athens, which I had met and interviewed in 2010, as part of my master’s degree field research.

Upon my arrival in Athens and mainly during the first few weeks I re-established contacts with old acquaintances and had the opportunity to meet new activists, as discussed earlier. In particular, the people I shared accommodation with in Exarcheia proved very useful in providing insights on the specifics of actions, as they are members of a scholar-activist group based in Athens, called ‘Encounter

Athens', which aims to bring together activism and critical academic knowledge, as well as being active in local initiatives and struggles. Also, as I started following local assemblies and events, I noticed that several new groups were formed, new members joined in older groups, and their goals and actions changed drastically due to the pressing issues austerity and cuts have brought forward. In turn, the severity of the crisis had intensified responses, commitment and motivation within activist groups, seeking to mobilize more people so as to deal with the outcomes of austerity. In this regard, activists were willing to share their ideas and opinions, accept contributions and input by new participants and initially welcomed my request for permission to participate in local Exarcheia assemblies, as both an activist and a researcher.

This initial step into participating in group assemblies, meetings and actions was made possible through my personal contacts and based on the fact that, being a Greek native and already politically active in previous years, I was embedded in the context of struggles and familiar with 'how things work' and means of organizing, e.g. open assembly participation, taking turns to express ideas and opinions, distribution of tasks and volunteering to write texts and produce pamphlets, potential issues and disputes originating in long-lasting divides and political identities etc. However, given the fact that the crisis and the outcomes of austerity have drawn the attention of numerous academics and independent researchers, journalists and activists from abroad, visiting and spending time in Athens so as to look into grassroots responses, a few local activists I approached in the first few weeks of fieldwork expressed an initial reluctance to give 'yet another interview'. In this regard, this reluctance originated in mistrust in mainstream media and how struggles are represented, e.g. sensationalist approaches, defamation etc. At the same time, other activists, while willing to provide with information, expressed reasonable concerns as to how this could have an actual effect and prove useful for their groups. As a male activist from Exarcheia stressed during an informal chat in the first month of fieldwork in Athens,

...many people like *you* have come to Exarcheia and approached *us*, took interviews, video footage, information... none of them stayed around to help out with the work... don't ask me to *tell* you what our group is about; join us on Sunday morning and *work with us*... then

you will get to know what our group is about! (activist quote, field notes, Athens 2012).

In reflecting on these and my collaboration with the two local groups in Exarcheia, namely the residents' committee and the solidarity network, during the months that followed throughout fieldwork, the concerns expressed in the above discussion became highly relevant, in political, ethical and methodological terms. Hence, what became evident was that deeper understandings of struggles require the critical engagement of the researcher as a process of moving beyond participation, towards developing shared solidarities, eschewing the conceptual divides between 'us' and 'them' and co-producing ideas and knowledge through practice (see Chatterton et al. 2008, Routledge 2009). In this regard, and since I was not a participant in these specific groups before, the first step of identifying common problems and sharing the commitment to effect some form of change in the face of the crisis, gradually led to the building of shared solidarities with other activists. This type of participation, moving beyond the gathering of data and information, involved the development of trust and reciprocal bonds with resisting others, through prolonged interactions on a weekly and often everyday basis, through working together, identifying issues and goals, co-shaping ideas and actions, producing solutions to practical problems, sharing skills etc.

Drawing on the above and my personal experiences during the conduct of fieldwork in Athens, I suggest here that this type of engagement proved meaningful in enriching the empirical input and, hopefully, struggles (see Routledge 1996b) in four ways: firstly, participation and collaboration with activists involved practical support and contribution to the groups in several ways, from practical tasks and manual labour, requiring time and effort, e.g. organizing events, putting up posters and giving our leaflets etc., to sharing skills and insights, translating texts, making contacts etc. As most grassroots groups rely on self-organization and do-it-yourself logics, contribution of personal resources, both material and non-material, is highly important for their sustainability, as noted by the activist above, especially given the small numbers of participants and the amount of tasks needed to be carried out. Secondly, working together with activists, exchanging ideas and sharing experiences was crucial for building on reciprocal bonds and mutual trusting relations, which, through constant interactions over time, was crucial in overcoming

concerns expressed by activists, such as the ones mentioned above, gaining in-depth insights on several issues, capturing non-verbal details and approaching underlying meanings, contexts and controversial issues that were not clearly stated during, for example, public discussions or interviews.

Thirdly, the process of building on reciprocal, trusting relations and mutual support also involved a 'politics of affinity' (see Routledge 2009), whereby emotional responses to injustices served as grounds for developing embodied interactions and relations of friendship, empathy and responsibility with other activists (see Juris 2007, Chatterton et al. 2008). These emotional responses, not only acted as motivation to engage in struggles, as means to oppose austerity politics and help produce alternatives, but also generated ethical commitment and affinity bonds with activist others, e.g. accepting, helping and trusting the other, sharing emotions of hope, frustration and fear, finding ways of empowering the other, developing senses of care and responsibility etc. These were forged through grounded embodied interactions and the practical sharing of everyday experiences, i.e. working together, co-creating and putting ideas into action, identifying common problems and possible solutions, finding ways to gather crucial resources, delivering tasks and experimenting with self-organization. In turn, these embodied interactions became transformative emotional experiences over time, through devoting time and effort, moving from despair, passive acceptance, anger and fear, to productive solutions, sharing the disappointment when a goal is failing, as well as the joy and hope when a project is successful etc.

Fourthly, engagement and collaboration with activists involved the exchange of ideas and knowledge in the field, along with the people involved, using plain and accessible language and meanings (see Chatterton et al. 2008). At the same time, during and after fieldwork ended, this knowledge and insights were employed so as to produce interpretations and constructive critique of the same contentious practices I participated in, as well as make available this feedback to the groups I worked with. All these involved a process of moving, physically and intellectually, in-between acting, participating, collaborating and writing, reflecting on how activist narratives and discourses relate to actual practices and drawing links between concepts produced in the field and theory (see Routledge 1996b), e.g. how activists set up a campaign and how do they interpret their practices through the

notion of a 'struggle community' (see Chapter 6), how is solidarity understood versus the notion of charity and how to distinguish these based on actual practices (see Chapter 7) etc. Within the process, 'moments' of withdrawal from action, e.g. keeping notes after interviews and events, spending time during the day to update my field diary and read through blogs, journals, articles etc., proved useful in producing critical interpretations of the above. Additionally, it is important to stress here that a key mechanism for jointly producing situated knowledges is the assembly. In most grassroots groups' assemblies and the groups I collaborated with in Exarcheia in particular, egalitarian participation and unanimity in decision-making served as the main operating mechanisms, instead of voting. Given the relatively small numbers of participants, this type of horizontal participation offered the possibility for, what several activists called, the 'co-shaping' of ideas and goals, a process that involved the synthesis of opinions and the co-production of alternatives. In turn, this type of jointly produced knowledge crystallized into texts and other material, actions and events, while at the same time acted as know-how and a resource 'pool', which was collectivized, diffused and constantly re-worked through interactions among participants.

However, the co-shaping of ideas during assemblies did not come without disagreement, as participants, including myself, came from different backgrounds, had varying opinions, ideologies, personalities and held multiple positionalities within this process (see Routledge 1996b, 2004, 2009), e.g. some were more privileged than others, having access to knowledge, expertise, resources, being 'well-connected' within activist networks or affiliated to other groups and political organizations etc. In this sense, co-shaping ideas, actions, solution to problems etc. through frequent, face-to-face interactions and embodied practices also served as means to bring forward, make visible and heard, acknowledge and negotiate similarity and difference (Routledge 2009). In identifying and negotiating similarity and difference with activist others, and drawing on some of the sociological attributes Mason (2011) highlights as reasons for 'why it (struggle) is kicking off everywhere', I collaborated with people of similar age and backgrounds, both women and men, often well-educated, unemployed 'graduates with no future' or in precarious jobs, with access to technological means, such as social media, as well as with older activists, employed or pensioners, with less technological skills and

prone to traditional means of organization, e.g. attributing roles, albeit informal, in groups. This particular 'mix' of people, identities, ideologies, agendas, desires, know-how etc. often produced disputes over, for example, how to pursue goals, how to organize public actions, what are the resources needed to deliver these, which people to contact etc. While these, in specific instances, perpetuated divides between, for example, experts and non-experts, affiliated and non-aligned activists, in other cases, differences produced hybrid practices, serving as complementary and not necessarily antagonistic, for example using social media, public events and street parties to disseminate ideas and opinions on issues, as well as producing and distributing texts.

Finally, engagement and collaboration involved an ethical commitment to contribute to struggle, through mutual support, reciprocity and responsibility towards others. At the same time, this ethical responsibility of struggle, constituted relationally with resisting others (Routledge 2004), involves the production of constructive critiques, which aim to contribute to ongoing discussions within groups, provide with alternative ideas and meaningful feedback. In this regard, I suggest here that sensational interpretations of struggles as 'spectacles' or 'utopias' and, on the other end of the spectrum, complete rejections of these, often produced by media journalists, researchers and activists, eventually have similar disempowering effects, as they fail to acknowledge that struggles are part of the worlds they are striving to change, often perpetuating the inherent contradictions, social and power relations of these same worlds. Therefore, drawing on my experience, and since activists and groups already produce critical interpretations of their own practices, the ethical responsibility of an activist-researcher also involves the identification of strengths and weaknesses of these practices, which is able to empower participants, e.g. acknowledge the practical outcomes of actions, how these can actually effect change in an immediate, tangible way, how contentious practices can act as resources of creative ideas other groups and activists can draw upon and develop etc. In turn, this empowering logic behind critical interpretations can serve as means to eschew conceptual divides between 'us' and 'them', i.e. activists and researchers, as expressed in a quote earlier in this discussion by an activist, as well as enhance the porosity of the hyphen (-) between activist-scholars.

## 4.6. Conclusions

Drawing on broad methodological debates that argued for the situatedness of knowledge production as means, not only to interpret, but also to effect social change (see Kobayashi 1994, Routledge 1996b), in this chapter I outlined my methodological positionality in relation to scholar-activism. In particular, I showed how I employed my research techniques and methods as means to engage in political action and key issues raised while conducting fieldwork in Athens, Greece. Additionally, I discussed the rationale for choosing to employ these methods and collaborate with groups in Exarcheia, how these contribute to insights into place-specific struggles and practices of solidarity and resistance, as well as to broader understandings of transformations of struggles in the context of the crisis and austerity. In looking into these, I suggested that the use of multiple methods, e.g. in-depth interviews, participant observation, field notes and diary, secondary material etc., proved useful in gaining broader perspectives into the topics this thesis addresses. Finally, through a discussion of my personal experience of critical engagement and collaboration with activists in Athens, I showed how these aided in enriching the empirical material, through developing proximate solidarities and trusting relations with activist others, exchanging and sharing ideas, gaining understandings of the underlying context of struggles etc. Also, these aimed to enhance the actions of the groups I collaborated with in Exarcheia, through my participation in various political activities, as well as through the ideas developed in this thesis and the ongoing communication with activists.

Finally, as this chapter examined the ways in which I approached the research field, Chapters 5-7 include an analysis of the empirical material gathered during fieldwork in relation to key theoretical ideas and conceptualizations of contentious politics. In particular, the following Chapter 5 interrogates, firstly, the broad context of the crisis and austerity politics in Greece and Athens, secondly, the context of social movements, i.e. the antecedents and contemporary struggles and, thirdly, the key groups I collaborated with during fieldwork, namely the residents' committee and the solidarity network of Exarcheia, so as to further expand on accounts of the spatial grounding of struggle and solidarity in Exarcheia and Athens.

## **5. Politicizing the Crisis: Counter- Austerity Politics in Athens, Greece**

### **5.1. Introduction**

Having addressed my research methodology Chapter 4, responding to ‘how’ I approached the research field, the discussion here shifts to the empirical analysis. In particular, this chapter includes a discussion on the crisis and austerity politics that have been recently introduced in Greece and their outcomes in the city of Athens. Following this, in order to further contextualize my research, a discussion on social movements in Greece focuses on the continuities and development of urban struggles. While my main research focus spans the period of the past few years, mainly since 2010 when austerity politics and structural reform were officially introduced in Greece, these discussions briefly address key events within the period since the mid-1990’s, which acted as critical turning points and ‘catalysts’ for contestation to emerge for two main reasons: firstly, the mid-1990’s marked a neoliberal shift in urban politics in Greece, as the country officially entered the Eurozone in 2001 and Athens prepared to host the Olympic Games in 2004. Secondly, urban struggles emerging during and after the Olympics in Athens also followed a key transformation towards contemporary ones challenging and, at the same time, producing alternatives to austerity politics. Additionally, in expanding on the discussion of the key groups I collaborated with during fieldstudy, i.e. the local residents committee and the solidarity network of Exarcheia (see Chapter 4.3), I examine here in detail the spatial grounding of struggle and solidarity, through place-based grassroots organizing in the neighbourhood and beyond. Finally, drawing on these, I briefly introduce a conceptual framework of interpreting contentious practices in Exarcheia and Athens, through the ideas of ‘struggle community’ and ‘urban solidarity space’, further developed in Chapters 6 and 7.



## **5.2. From Neoliberal Development to Austerity: The ‘Greek Success Story’ Unravelling**

Since 2008, the global financial crisis and the subsequent austerity politics manifested in several European countries have revealed the contradictions, through which processes of neoliberalization have developed in different geographical contexts worldwide. As debated in Chapter 2, crises being inherent in how globalized neoliberalism has developed, they have become powerful ‘tools’ in the hands of the political and economic elites in order to strategically redistribute wealth and resources from welfare to capital investments (Harvey 2005). As the previous major crisis of 1973 has been dealt with a series of neoliberal restructuring processes during the 1980’s and 1990’s across Europe, the mantra ‘TINA’, i.e. ‘there is no alternative’, prevailed among governance strategies. In this regard, national governments have facilitated, managed and created new ‘territories’ for markets to expand in cities and regions (Harvey 1989, Brenner and Theodore 2002). In particular, cities have acted as key laboratories for experimenting with entrepreneurialism and competitive capital investment policies (Brenner and Theodore 2002, Peck and Tickell 2002). These generated capital circulation cycles, through investment and disinvestment, and competitive growth was pursued among cities and regions, through ‘city-marketing’, ‘place-branding’ and elite consumption strategies (Harvey 1989). In turn, uneven development patterns emerging among urban areas aggravated socio-spatial inequalities, segregation, marginalization and the displacement of lower-income populations.

While the above apply mainly to Northern European contexts, the European South and Greece in particular reveal differences in state traditions and urban development patterns. These become important in identifying the ways in which neoliberalization has developed unevenly in different contexts, what Brenner and Theodore (2002) term ‘actually existing neoliberalism’, often acquiring complex hybrid forms (Larner 2000). In regard to the differences between North and South Europe, Leontidou (1990) stresses that, southern European contexts, although often understood as ‘pre-capitalist’, i.e. destined to converge eventually with western patterns, have been crucial in the ways in which neoliberal capitalism has developed across European cities and more broadly. These key differences mainly relate to developed welfare states and regulated urban planning in the North, as opposed to

weak welfare, informal economies and fast spontaneous urbanization processes in cities of the European South (Leontidou 2010). Historically, cities in Greece have developed through fast, loosely regulated expansion. This mainly resulted from a rapid capitalist modernization process initiated in the early 1950's, as the countryside was dramatically emptied-out and millions moved to cities, especially Athens, in search of employment (Kouvelakis 2011). Further, in order to mitigate the major lack of social housing provision, regulations around housing ownership contributed to an ad hoc individualized, as opposed to collective, reproduction of the middle and working classes living and working in cities (Arampatzi and Nicholls 2012). Also, the loose regulatory framework often resulted in low quality public infrastructure, public space and urban environment (Portaliou 2008).

The case of Athens shows how the 1990's signified a shift in urban governance, towards reconfigurations in line with the EU and Eurozone convergence criteria. As Kouvelakis (2011: 21) notes, "financial deregulation had produced a frenzy of speculative activity, boosting the Athens stock market to unprecedented heights and transferring large quantities of wealth upwards to a newly financialized elite". This neoliberal shift has been evident in several urban development policies introduced in the city, which aimed to promote competitive capital investments, cultural heritage entrepreneurialism and 'place-branding'. Given the tradition of weak urban planning, spontaneous urbanization processes in the post-war period and the development of informal economies in the city of Athens, urban development easily shifted to privatization, for example through public- private partnerships and the involvement of private actors in delivering public services and infrastructure. Hence, these newly introduced policies at the time were easily 'absorbed' by the already highly fragmented urban landscapes (Leontidou 1993, 2010). In this sense, privatization, consumption activities and urban sprawl have interacted to produce a certain type of fast neoliberal development (Arampatzi and Nicholls 2012).

This type of entrepreneurial competitive development became particularly evident in the period leading to the organization of the Olympic Games in 2004. This international mega-event and the transformations taking place in the city of Athens prior to the Olympics became closely intertwined with a public discourse of financial and consumerist 'success story' for Athens and Greece, supposedly

marking a new era of prosperity and worldwide appeal for a peripheral EU country (Afouxenidis 2006, Petropoulou 2010). The transformations taking place through urban development involved large-scale infrastructure, such as stadiums and sports facilities, new retail and cultural development areas, such as shopping malls and office buildings, and, finally, housing redevelopment through real estate. These precipitated urban sprawl and uneven growth phenomena in surrounding suburbs of Athens, which, coupled with the displacement of city center populations due to cultural regeneration, led to rising socio-spatial inequalities and urban environment degradation (Portaliou 2008). In the aftermath of the Olympic Games, the outcomes of this type of fast neoliberal development were intensified, as the fiscal debt grew and, thus, the imposed taxation, and the environmental disruptions started to pose pressures on urban inhabitants. In turn, these generated a series of responses by grassroots groups, which sought to fracture the consensus around neoliberal development and consumerist prosperity ideals established prior to the Olympics (see section 5.3).

In the light of the global financial crisis in 2008 and the Eurozone crisis, neoliberal governance was further intensified through fiscal austerity. As discussed in Chapter 2, the top-down processes through which these policies have been enforced show how austerity politics have displaced the responsibility and devolved financial burdens, or, in other words, made ‘others’, e.g. taxpayers and cities’ populations, pay the price of fiscal retrenchment, through drastic cuts in public infrastructure, services and municipal budgets (Peck 2012: 632). Subsequently, in 2010, the Greek government introduced a structural adjustment programme, through the voting of the first package of austerity policies. Foreign institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Central Bank (ECB) and the European Commission (EC) formed a three-party committee, i.e. the ‘Troika’, which along with the Greek governments introduced a series of austerity measures since. These mainly involved the restructuring of the public and private sectors, in relation to labour rights, major reductions in wages and pensions, cutbacks in social welfare, public spending and the privatization of public services, land and assets. This structural adjustment programme largely drew upon an international ‘fast policy transfer’ (Harvey 2005) and ‘off-the-shelf’ policy development (Peck and Tickell 2002), through the strategic intervention of

international institutions, i.e. the IMF and the EU. Similar programmes applied in the past reveal, as Routledge and Cumbers (2009: 4) stress, that “neoliberalism should be considered a project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and the restoration for class power...neoliberalism is first and foremost a political strategy for class rule... states and international institutions such as the IMF and WB will intervene in economic crises to protect the interests of global financial centers”.

Moreover, the active role that the Greek governments of the past few years assumed within these processes reiterates Harvey’s (2005) account of neoliberalism as ‘a state-aided class project’. Further, a ‘creative destruction’ process (Harvey 2007) pursued, through austerity agendas and simultaneous reconfigurations in policy frameworks for large-scale privatization of public assets to proceed. At the same time, Greek governments actively engaged in managing opposition to austerity through ‘fear tactics’, extended punitive measures and repression i.e. ‘flexible’ and precarious work relations and labour discipline, rising unemployment, policing and surveillance, mass prosecutions of activists, the development of xenophobic, racist public discourses against migrants, and, finally, tolerating and manipulating fascist practices of the Golden Dawn ultra-right party.

Finally, looking into the outcomes of austerity urbanism as they are starting to become evident in cities across the world, local states have been undergoing processes of cuts in social welfare and provision, while at the same time, promoting the privatization of services and, hence, marginalizing already vulnerable social groups. The city of Athens shows similar signs of the severe pressures national austerity enforced. Severe budgetary reductions in public spending and national funds distributed to local municipalities and regions (over 50% in specific cases), the collapse of social welfare and provision, including the dismantling of the public health and educational systems, the privatization of public transportation and the subsequent rise in costs, the increasing unemployment<sup>10</sup> (over 27 % in 2014), precarity and poverty, homelessness, mortgage debt and housing evictions and foreclosures, all show how austerity politics have been manifested in the everyday

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<sup>10</sup> Greece: overall unemployment rate, June 2104: 27,3%, youth unemployment rate (<26 years), June 2014 56,3% (source: Eurostat Unemployment Statistics online)

lives of the city's populations. In regard to these, Peck (2012: 651) notes that "cities become beachheads and staging grounds for fiscal revanchism", as they are faced with the 'trickle-down' effects of austerity economies. At the same time, according to Peck (2012), cities also hold a key role within the emergence of contemporary counter- austerity politics and alternatives to austerity; section 5.3 discusses these through the Athenian context.

### **5.3. Contextualizing Social Movements in Athens, Greece**

After discussing key transformations within the political economy of Greece, neoliberal urban development in Athens and recently introduced austerity politics, this section outlines the movement scene in Greece, so as to further expand in 5.4 on contemporary urban struggles emerging in Athens and the specifics of groups this research has involved. The goal here is to show the transformations within broader social movements in Greece, from post-Olympics urban mobilizations to recent resistance politics and alternatives to austerity urbanism in Athens.

A closer look into the social movements in Greece and their development reveals the continuities and transformations within contentious politics and civil society responses. From post-war spontaneous grassroots squatters in Athens claiming the 'right to housing' (Leontidou 2010), to the student uprising against the dictatorship in 1973 and more recent student movements contesting educational reforms in the 2000's, the past decades have been marked by several waves of mobilizations and a prevalent culture of political activism. Echoing the Seattle 1999 anti-WTO demonstrations, several individual activists and groups joined forces with protesters in Prague 2000 (WB/IMF) and Genoa 2001 (G8) demonstrations, as well as in Brussels 2001 EU summit. As activists and groups developed links with the broader counter/alter-globalization movement and anti-war mobilizations of the early 2000's, the EU leaders' summit in Thessaloniki in 2003 brought together activists from across Europe into massive protests. These connections were later re-activated in order to organize the 2006 closing demonstration of the Athens Social Forum. Meanwhile, government attempts for higher-education reform in 2006 were contested by thousands of students taking to the streets of Athens and protesting

against the privatization of public universities. These student mobilizations were further developed through teachers' union strikes and university occupations, as well as through the active engagement of several left and anarchist groups and organizations. At the same time, the post-Olympics period marks the emergence of a series of urban struggles in Athens, mainly relating to urban development and privatization policies and their repercussions on urban space and the city's populations (Arampatzi and Nicholls 2012).

A turning point in regard to urban struggles has been the massive wave of riots erupting in the city center neighbourhood of Exarcheia, Athens in December 2008 and spreading across Athens and other cities in Greece. While these were triggered by the killing of a teenager by a police officer, they signify a first attempt to politicize the crisis and contribute to our understanding of contentious politics in two ways: firstly, they coincide with the onset of the global financial crisis in 2008 and have been discussed as the first responses to austerity politics, contested by unemployed, migrants and precarious youth alongside traditional left and anarchist groups. Secondly, the character of the riots signified a new period of urban-based struggles which brought forward claims around 'urban justice' (Leontidou 2010), while the city of Athens, apart from being a setting for mobilization, became actively contested, through the re-claiming of public spaces- massive, often violent demonstrations in the streets, occupations of municipal and public buildings, schools and universities (Petropoulou 2010). As Stavrides (2009) stresses, the 'urban justice' discourse the protestors produced initiated a process of relational identity awareness and managed to connect actors across Athenian neighbourhoods and various cities. As a result, several local initiatives, occupations and social centers emerged, contesting the commodification of urban space through practices of self-organization in neighbourhoods (Leontidou 2010). Also, previously existing local groups were transformed, in material and discursive terms, setting up connections to distant actors, circulating resources and sharing organizational 'know-how' across activist networks and geographical space. Finally, the collective action tactics protestors employed, i.e. occupations, demonstrations, barricades, assemblies etc. relate to 'repertoires' of past movements, e.g. student mobilizations, the counter/alter- globalization and anti-war movements (Bratsis 2010).

Further, the occupation of Syntagma (Parliament) square in the summer of 2011 and the massive protests taking place across Greece, mark another transformation in how the crisis is debated and contested (also see Chapter 6.2). If the riots of 2008 planted the seed for future grassroots organizing and practices of ‘urban democracy’, the squares’ movement, through the assembly discussions held at the time, raised issues of politicizing the crisis through everyday practices of ‘direct democracy’. In this regard, Giovanopoulos and Mitropoulos (2012: 19) mention: “what is the new ‘vocabulary’ articulated in the squares of Athens and around the world? The ‘child’ that was born in December 2008 made itself heard through a violent cry, a child’s cry trying to breath while entering the world; this child has been crawling, standing up and falling down, learned how to walk and now is learning how to speak, make up its own words”. The democratic deficit evident in decision-making processes around austerity measures became both a demand for ‘real democracy’ and an everyday practice of ‘direct democracy’ in the occupation. As Kouvelakis (2011: 23- 24) notes, “the people of the squares were a heterogeneous group, consisting of voters alienated from the two major parties and joined by sectors of the population excluded from the traditional representative system”, i.e. precarious workers, unemployed people holding higher education degrees etc. Additionally, the long-lasting tradition of clientelism, co-optation and corruption in Greek politics (Bratsis 2010) was fiercely contested during this occupation.

The transformations underway due to austerity politics point towards an authoritative statecraft, whereby coercive mechanisms, repression and punitive measures against people who choose to resist take over the political space for practicing democratic rights and making demands through elected officials. Also, as austerity deprived state officials of traditional mechanisms for gaining public consent, e.g. redistribution through public services, social welfare and clientele relations, the crisis is being contested as a legitimacy crisis for the ruling elites. In this regard, the crisis signifies a transformation in how contestation is articulated. While historically urban movements (Castells 1977, 1983) articulated collective consumption demands to local and national states and raised issues around the reproduction of urban populations, the case of Athens shows how austerity plays out at the everyday level of a big part of the city’s population, which struggles for

covering basic everyday needs. Hence, contestation during the past decade in Athens follows a shift, from movements challenging urban development in the aftermath of the Olympic Games and collective consumption *demands*, to recent struggles challenging austerity, placing survival tactics and basic social reproduction *needs* at the center of their practices. As practices of resistance and solidarity have been dispersed across the city of Athens, contestation focuses on collective (self-) organization forms *in* and *through* urban space, discussed in detail in Chapters 6 and 7.

To sum up, the above brief outline illustrates some key events and mobilizations, which reveal the two-fold role of the city of Athens in the development of social movements in Greece. On the one hand, in several instances contestation has been articulated around urban issues, while at the same time building on connections to broader neoliberal policies, e.g. post- Olympics urban struggles. On the other hand, the city of Athens has been strategically used as a site for articulating contestation and organizing global forms of action, such as the Social Forum. In this regard, as transnational and local movements merge, overlap and coincide in cities (Leontidou 2006), urban space becomes a key site for both ‘globalized local actions’ and ‘localized global actions’ (Routledge 2003). While the former draw on place-based movements and actors to build on expansive contentious politics, the latter become ‘articulated moments’ of opposition to globalized neoliberalism (Routledge 2003), such as counter/alter-globalization actions. Finally, it is important to stress the relational interdependencies and continuities in the movement scene in Greece and Athens, forms of organizing collective action, solidarities forged through struggles, as well as long-lasting distancing and antagonisms, e.g. among the Left and anarchists etc. Based on the above, contemporary movements contesting austerity have not appeared in a causal or linear way, but rather as complex cross-articulations of political cultures and activism, place-based struggles and broader movements spanning locally to globally. Section 5.4 discusses the context of key groups this research has involved, so as to build in 5.5 on conceptualizations around emerging urban struggles in Athens.



#### **5.4. Grounding Struggle and Solidarity practices in Exarcheia and Athens**

After discussing some key developments within the political economy of Greece and social movements, this section, firstly, addresses urban struggles in Athens and, secondly, looks into how contentious practices are grounded, through the cases of key groups in Exarcheia I collaborated with during fieldwork in Athens (also see Chapter 4.3). As austerity politics have aggravated social reproduction issues of the city's populations, previously existing local groups, i.e. neighbourhood committees, social centers, occupations etc., have shifted their agendas and goals towards organizing solidarity actions and events, e.g. fundraisers, exchange of services and products, food and cooking collectives etc. At the same time, in the post-Syntagma period, popular assemblies formed in several neighbourhoods across Athens were later transformed in many instances to solidarity initiatives and groups dealing with social reproduction needs locally. In this sense, several already existing groups provided resources, know-how and infrastructure for the creation of new projects and initiatives, while remaining actively linked to these through the ongoing participation of activists in assemblies and actions and the sharing of the same spaces for organizing these, such as the residents committee of Exarcheia (see 5.4.1) and the newly formed Time Bank project (see 5.4.2). In other cases, new groups employed resources and activist 'know-how' in similar to the above ways, but, in time, developed independently, e.g. independent decision-making through assemblies, organizing actions and campaigns, having different spatial references etc., such as the Solidarity Network of Exarcheia (see 5.4.2). These processes also reveal an ongoing overlap of participation of activists among various groups, as membership in most grassroots groups is open and based on physical presence in assemblies and actions, specific projects and campaigns. Finally, while some groups sustain their function over time, others cease operating, due to several reasons, for example forced evictions of occupied spaces in the city, internal conflicts or lack of resources and participants etc. Therefore, a complete record of the spatial distribution of urban struggles across Athens and their categorization, in regard to their goals, backgrounds, political orientation, participants etc., becomes problematic, due to the fluidity and complexity underlying the processes of their emergence and development.

Nevertheless, city center areas hold a key role in ongoing interactions among individuals and groups, for example during mass demonstrations, strikes and festivals, social events and informal meetings points, where activists meet, exchange and circulate information (see Figure 5.1). At the same time, in city center neighbourhoods, as well as in several suburban areas of Athens, local struggles become laboratories for activists to build on reciprocal relations and place-based solidarities, organize actions and campaigns and interact on an everyday basis. In other words, struggles across Athens draw on specific places, i.e. communities, neighbourhoods, spatial imaginaries and ‘senses of place’ (see Agnew 1987; Routledge 1993, 1996a) etc., while at the same time often converge and interact in city center areas during mass mobilizations (see Routledge 2010), such as the recent occupation of Syntagma square. Further, city center areas have been historically linked to social movements and activist cultures, such as the student uprising against the military coup in 1973; hence they hold a symbolic role within their development. As discussed in Chapter 4.3, the city center neighbourhood of Exarcheia has been methodologically chosen as an instrumental entry point into contentious practices. This area’s historical and symbolic role in social movements has been crucial in the development of political and activist cultures. Acting both as a geographical node for political mobilizations over the years, as well as forming an activist geography of local groups currently active, Exarcheia has been often portrayed in the media as ‘a neighbourhood of social unrest’ and ‘anarchist stronghold’. However, this place-specific identity attributed through top-down narratives is being contested by local groups, which aim to unravel bounded and enclosed notions of the neighbourhood. While the above will be addressed in detail in Chapter 6, the focus now shifts to a discussion of key groups active in Exarcheia this research has involved, their backgrounds and goals, campaigns and actions they organize and the ways they choose to connect with resisting others in the neighbourhood and beyond.



Figure 5.1. Athens city center activism sites, source: author

#### **5.4.1. The Committee of Residents' Initiative of Exarcheia: Forging Community Bonds through Place-based Organizing**

The committee of the residents' initiative of Exarcheia was formed in 2007, in Exarcheia, Athens. The group currently comprised of approximately 10-15 participants, mainly deals with local issues. Participants are residents of Exarcheia, their age ranging between younger university students, young professionals, unemployed and older pensioners. In regard to gender representation in the group, female participants are in general more than male ones. Participation in the group is based on open assembly attendance, taking place on a weekly basis, i.e. Monday evenings, in the Tsamadou occupation, Exarcheia. Assembly meetings are open for everyone to attend, express opinions and participate in decision-making, through consensus rather than voting. The meetings are based on agendas activists set, i.e. issues, goals, ideas for actions and campaigns etc. One activist is usually responsible for coordinating the discussion, allowing for speech time for participants, questions and keeping meetings minutes. As the residents' committee has been active for a few years, participants that used to be active during the first period, since the group was formed, have left, while others have joined in. However, most participants active now have formed a type of 'core' members, who

through interaction over the past few years, through working together, exchanging ideas, organizing actions etc., have built on in-group solidarity and trust, a certain type of ‘strong-ties’ (see Nicholls 2009) and ‘affinity bonds’ (see Juris 2008, Routledge 2012). Also, as assemblies take place in the same occupied space as other groups’ meetings are held, contacts, acquaintances and connections to others groups using the space have been established over the years, through organizing common actions and events taking place in Tsamadou, through maintenance works carried out in the building, through overlapping participation in these etc.

The type of ‘open membership’ in the residents’ committee, through assembly participation, typical of most of the grassroots groups active in Athens, departs from traditional organizational means of associations or other official groups, i.e. formal memberships, voting, regular fees, hierarchical structures, specific duties and roles etc. Rather, it is based on a common pragmatic goal in order to set up actions with others in the neighbourhood and the sharing of knowledge, skills and resources in specific actions and campaigns. Also characteristic of ‘open membership’ participation and typical among grassroots organizing in Athens, is an ongoing overlap of activists in more than one group, campaigns and projects at the same time. Moreover, the prerequisite of physical presence in assembly meetings aims to empower participants, through horizontal decision-making and egalitarian participation. However, as will be analyzed in Chapters 6 and 7, the informality that characterizes these types of interactions among individuals and groups often creates or perpetuates the uneven distribution of roles and responsibilities (see Routledge and Cumbers 2009), hence power and social/ political capital concentration. Further, the fluid character of participation creates problems in dealing with issues more effectively, for example less participants means more work and responsibilities for less activists and, potentially, less effective results and actions.

In particular, the residents’ committee was formed based on a small group of residents, including already politically active individuals, who decided to place a public meeting call, put up posters and invite residents, local groups and activists to organize actions and contest the decision of a telecommunication company to install mobile phone aerials in several buildings across the neighbourhood. This initially small group organized a protest outside one of these buildings, an event which

managed to bring together more people from the area that became interested in participating in actions that followed. These involved legal appeals made around health and safety threats due to the aerials, as well as direct actions by residents who managed to tear down a few of the aerials. After a month of weekly protests and actions, the legal appeals were accepted as valid, rendering the existence of the aerials illegal and this first attempt to deal with a local issue by a group of residents was successful, bringing in more people who decided to participate and raise a number of other issues as well. A female activist, and one of the first residents who participated in these actions, noted how, on the one hand, the tangible immediate character of this local issue managed to bring together people from the area, interested in participating in similar actions and, on the other hand, how the successful contestation of the aerials opened up ways to raise more issues in the following period:

these first actions caused a commotion... we organized a local demo, gave out leaflets and made it public that we won. As it was going on for more than a month, more and more people got informed... since there were many more issues in the neighbourhood we needed to deal with, after this success, we started discussing on setting up a local committee... The first meetings that followed took place in an NGO space, a former shop, they provided us with this space for a few hours once a week... Many more people joined in and this is how this initiative was born... Our motto was 'we take the neighbourhood in our hands'. Through the first discussions, we set a few main goals and thematic groups to deal with these. For example, how to claim a clean neighbourhood, we are in the city center of Athens and the municipality ignores its responsibilities, also police repression issues, we are surrounded by police forces, which instead of supposedly helping and calming down things, they provoke incidents of violence. Finally, another group of people dealt with open public spaces... (personal interview, Athens, November 2012)

Therefore, the formation of the residents' committee was based on the initiative of a few people, who, based on a pragmatic immediate goal, managed to bring in more residents, activists and groups who joined the protests, develop direct action tactics as well as contest the issue through institutional legal means. As these actions became publicized, more residents joined in and the successful outcomes of these mobilizations legitimized their attempts, gained more support and resonance among the neighbourhood. In turn, this paved the way for opening up a series of other issues that participants decided they needed to deal with, through direct action

as well as addressing the local authorities. For example, the thematic groups that were formed pursued both tactics during a campaign that was launched around public spaces in the neighbourhood, as they made appeals to municipal representatives and at the same time organized days of action, i.e. cleaning, recycling and protesting at the city hall. Further, as the female activist discussed above, they decided to place the neighbourhood level at the center of contestation for issues that, while place-specific, became starting points for addressing broader ones as well, for example police repression incidents, how to deal with these, how to break with bounded notions of the 'local', the spatial imaginary of 'social unrest' etc.

The issue of police repression became particularly crucial for the following period after the formation of the residents' initiative, when a police officer killed a teenager in Exarcheia in December 2008. As this event triggered mass protests that, starting from Exarcheia, spread across Athens and other cities, it also became a contestation issue for the residents and several local actions that followed (see Figure 5.2). The residents committee organized open assemblies to discuss how to deal with similar incidents. Several activists from other local groups, social centers and political organizations participated in these, resulting in the organization of local protests outside the local police station, as well as legal appeals against the use of tear gas and toxic chemicals in the neighbourhood. This event became the starting point for many occupations and self-organization experiments popping up across the city. For groups and activists based in Exarcheia, in particular, this period became a starting point for coordinating actions during the protests as well as in the following period, as the intensity of the protests and police repression incidents became pressing issues, which managed to bring together people and groups from the area, in public events and open assemblies and discussions. As the participation in the residents' committee assemblies rose and new members joined in, issues around public spaces became more and more prevalent among the goals of this group. These also related to discussions taking place in several occupied spaces in the city during the protests, for example how to re-claim commodified public spaces, how to contest the notion of the 'public' vis-à-vis the ongoing commodification of urban space etc.

Therefore, in the period following the riots, the residents' initiative focused mainly around actions involving public spaces in the neighbourhood. Firstly, the long-lasting issue of the central Exarcheia square was raised as immediate and crucial. The 'sinful' square, as a female activist called it during a personal interview, has been a contested public space since the 1980's. Drug trafficking and police repression, as well as groups of youth claiming the square as their own 'turf' have often resulted in violent incidents. As the residents committee decided to raise these issues in the area, for example re-claim the square from drug traffickers or 'anti-social' behaviour, they placed a call for joint action to other local groups of Exarcheia. In particular, activists from the Nosotros social center, the Migrants' Network, the Autonomous social center, locals, non-aligned activists and shop-owners of the area participated in coordinative assemblies held at the Polytechnic school. Contacts were made through participants' personal acquaintances, also through participating in the above groups' weekly meetings and inviting them to join in, through putting up posters in the neighbourhood, streets, meetings points, cafes, bars, restaurants and giving out leaflets. The actions that followed, lasting for approximately 3 months, required the contribution of infrastructure and resources, time, effort, physical presence in the square, writing up texts and sharing organizational 'know-how' by most of the activists participating. More specifically, these involved the daily presence in the square, as means to 're-claim' it from traffickers, using megaphones and organizing local demonstrations in order to inform residents, setting up activities in the square, such as a children's playground and soccer tables, organizing concerts etc.

All these show an increasing interaction between local groups, based on the immediate spatial reference of the neighbourhood. While previously unconnected, this campaign was a step into cooperation tactics among local activists, who, through working with each other, spending time and exchanging ideas managed to organize these actions. However, these did not come without 'friction', arguments that rose during this campaign, ranging from trivial personal dislikes to broader long-lasting divisions among strategies and tactics of various political groups. For example, as some anarchists from the area chose to 'push away' drug addicts from the square, as means to deal with trafficking, the residents' committee distanced themselves from these practices, as exclusionary, and this, in turn, caused

distancing among local activists. Also, as a male activist from the residents' committee stressed, although immediate, the results these actions brought about were only temporary in their effect and this caused arguments around ways forward:

...we knew it was not going to be a permanent solution, as it is a broad social issue [drug trafficking]... in the end the traffickers moved elsewhere for a while... now they are back, small mafia groups, guns, violence as well... some groups call themselves anarchists, but they attack many activists... these practices are fascist, even anarchists oppose them... also residents wanted an immediate solution from the problem, a relief. We did not succeed in unifying the neighbourhood because we did not want to call the police, as they asked; they are part of the problem in this area, not the solution... (personal interview, Athens, January 2013)

This past campaign shows how this specific group, starting from a pragmatic goal, focused on building on bottom-up contestation through proximate relations at the neighbourhood level. The common spatial reference of groups, for example occupations, social centers and rented spaces in the area are often based close to each other, or groups held meetings and actions in the same public spaces, facilitated the initial contacts. Also ongoing interactions provided participants the 'grounds' for creating communication bridges. At the same time, this campaign revealed that networking within the neighbourhood occurs based on specific goals groups pursue. Finally, this campaign became a starting point for building on trust and solidarities among groups that acted as a communicative bridge for actions that followed. In this sense, even conflicts that rose, albeit creating distancing among individuals and groups, also acted as a process of relational identification, of 'getting to know' each of the participant groups' goals and tactics and how to build on further campaigns based on these.

At the same time, in the period following the 2008 protests, and as contestation around public spaces became a focus point for the residents' committee, some of the participants discussed the idea of occupying an empty parking space in Exarcheia and claim it as an open green space for the neighbourhood. The organization of a day-festival at the former parking space was the first action taken so that the committee's intention to transform it into a park would become public. That day, in March 2009, what started as a 'symbolic action' by a few local activists resulted in the participation of a few hundred people from



across the city in manual work activities, drilling and digging, planting trees and flowers etc. This initial support from across Athens and local activists and residents soon formed an independent group assembly, the ‘Navarinou occupied park’ group, which was responsible for further actions. This group is an example of how the residents’ committee served as a resource ‘pool’, contributing infrastructure, know-how and people’s skills for the new group to be formed. Several members of the residents’ group participated in the park’s assembly, while there are still a few overlaps of members in both assemblies. However, in time, conflicts that rose within the park’s assembly, e.g. on ways forward, tactics and political divisions among anarchists and leftists, have created distancing among activists and several of the initial participants have not been active since.



Figure 5.2. Poster calling for a demonstration against police repression in Exarcheia, source: Residents' Committee of Exarcheia

#### **5.4.2. The Exarcheia Time Bank ‘With Time’ and the Solidarity Network of Exarcheia: Building on Place-based Solidarities and Connections across the City**

As austerity impacted on the livelihoods of social groups and the city’s population, it has also contributed to transformations in local groups’ agendas and priorities. Regarding the Exarcheia residents committee, austerity marked a shift in

goals and subsequent actions pursued during the past few years. The thematic groups of this group were integrated into one main group, as some participants left, others joined in and new members became involved in solidarity actions. As it will be elaborated in Chapters 6 and 7, building on place-based solidarities, enhancing inter-personal relations, trust and reciprocity among the neighbourhood, i.e. groups, activists, residents, other local actors etc., has been central in several initiatives emerging across the city after the occupation of Syntagma square in the summer of 2011. These practices involve dealing with reproduction needs of marginalized and vulnerable groups, i.e. people who cannot meet basic needs in food, primary health treatment, clothing etc. Also, solidarities built on everyday proximate interaction aim to forge resistance to the rise of fascist practices of the Golden Dawn party, which often organizes ‘Greeks only’ soup-kitchens and promotes fear and ‘scapegoat’ tactics against immigrants, activists and dissident voices.

Based on this two-fold function of place-based solidarity-building, two groups have been formed in Exarcheia since 2011. Firstly, in September 2011, the local popular assembly of Exarcheia decided to promote civil disobedience tactics and opposed the new housing taxation, which was at the time starting to become implemented through housing ownership (the housing tax has been imposed on house ownership status and is a ‘flat’ tax affecting all Greeks, regardless of their income, hence has been contested as unjust- see Chapter 7.7). This decision led to the formation of a new group, the Solidarity Network of Exarcheia. Secondly, in the autumn of 2012, coinciding with the commencement of my fieldwork in Athens, the residents’ committee, borrowing the idea from a similar experiment organized in the Syntagma occupation, the ‘Time Bank of Syntagma’, decided to launch a new project. In the months that followed, the residents’ committee actively supported this project, as it became the group’s main focus, participants contributed their time and resources, contacts with activists participating in the Syntagma Time Bank were made in order to bring in ‘know-how’ on setting up an online platform for members to sign up and exchange services etc. The Exarcheia Time bank called ‘With Time’ (see Figure 5.3), as a solidarity project, mainly aims to enhance interpersonal relations among residents, through face-to-face interaction and the exchange of services based on time instead of money. This kind of neighbourhood networking besides being a means to overcome barriers that, mainly unemployed,

people face in meeting everyday needs, also strives to strengthen social cohesion and reciprocal bonds among the local community. Further, it serves as a local-level experiment on how to organize a ‘social economy’ (see Chapter 7.5) based on the (professional) skills, resources, expertise, time and knowledge participants contribute, in order to build on a locally- based solidarity economy. These are captured in the mottos the committee used to publicize the project, i.e. “when we do not have money, we have time!” and “No-one alone in the crisis”.



Figure 5.3. 'With Time', Time Bank of Exarcheia logo, source: Residents' Committee of Exarcheia

Even though this project has been set up recently and so far has managed to register more than 150 members, the above create a few problematics often raised in assemblies and noted in my field diary:

In today's Time Bank assembly the discussion mainly revolved around problems and arguments that rose in regard to the specifics of the exchange of services. Several members expressed their doubt and concerns on whether or not to trust people who say they can deliver a service, without however knowing if they actually can i.e. non-professionals. For example, a participant asked whether he could trust someone to fix his plumbing, what would happen if something went wrong, who should he held responsible etc. Another participant mentioned that she found it difficult to let a stranger into her house and be responsible for baby-sitting her child. In trying to address these and ease the tensions that rose, a female member of the administration team and the residents' committee stressed that building on trust among Time Bank participants requires time and the goal is to achieve this through ongoing communication and contact. Also, she mentioned that people who fail to deliver services should be reported (field notes, Time Bank assembly, Athens, February 2013)

In unpacking these points, firstly, although the Time Bank holds its independent monthly assembly meetings in the Tsamadou occupation, the project has yet to develop independently from the residents' committee. The Time Bank administrative team of three members that are obliged to shift over the period of three months heavily relies upon the committee's participants, who are responsible for running the online platform, record services offered and required, exchanges made or due, time slots of registered members, distribute relevant material, publicize services and organize and coordinate the assemblies. Hence, this concentration of roles and responsibilities on specific members becomes a type of centralized capital, which problematizes horizontal decision-making processes. As mentioned in the field notes above, these members hold key roles in coordinating assemblies and interpreting the goals of the project, explaining how things work, reassuring participants etc.

Secondly, the Time bank aims to strengthen community bonds and trusting relations among residents, through face-to-face interactions. This project mainly functions through an online platform, with over 150 registered members, while participants in assemblies often range between 20 and 40. This means that most registered members do not participate in assemblies on a permanent basis, which poses limits to the building of bonds among locals. In other words, as discussed in the field notes above, members who participate often express their doubt in trusting other members without first having established face-to-face contact. Finally, registered members are required to be residents of Exarcheia; hence, since the exchange of services is largely dependent upon the participants' contribution in skills and resources, the limits to the types of services offered are subsequently dependent upon the spatial extent of this neighbourhood-based local economy. In realizing that this issue limited the exchange of services, hence the functions of the Time bank and looking to enhance their resources, the group pursued links to other solidarity groups and initiatives. And in this sense, acknowledging the limits to locally-based resources, the Time bank pursued an expansive 'politics of resourcefulness' (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012).

Looking into connections the Time Bank has developed to other groups, apart from the residents' committee; firstly, individual activists from several local groups, e.g. the Autonomous social center, the Solidarity Network and the

Navarinou park, have been registered as members and actively engage in the exchange of services. Secondly, the collective kitchen hosted at the Autonomous 'hangout' social center also participates in the Time Bank as a group, offering weekly meals in exchange of services for the group or individuals. Several of the above registered members also participate on a regular basis in Time Bank monthly assemblies. As some of them are also part of other local solidarity groups and initiatives, for example the 'El Chef' kitchen also hosted in Tsamadou occupation and the ones hosted in the Autonomous social center, i.e. the 'unemployed' cooking collective and organic products group, the Time Bank assemblies acted as mechanisms for the ongoing circulation of information around actions other groups organize in the neighbourhood. Also, they have opened up ways for activists to communicate their groups' goals and address neighbourhood residents that participate in the exchange of services. This type of interaction towards building on reciprocal relations the Time Bank has promoted has also been a key issue for other local activists, who chose to support this project. As a male activist from the Autonomous collective has mentioned in one of the Time Bank assemblies, announcing his group's intentions to participate in the project:

...having discussed this in our assembly [the Autonomous social center], we and the collective kitchen group would like to be part of the services exchange... Our goal is to try and connect local groups, solidarity structures and initiatives, as a way to start building on contacts and communication and re-build the social fabric of the neighbourhood, as an alternative to the crisis (field notes, Time Bank assembly, Athens, April 2013)

Apart from connections to local groups, which contribute resources and skills, the Time Bank is one of the solidarity structures, initiatives and projects participating in the 'Solidarity for All' Network. This network, set up in 2012 by Syriza party members (the Radical Left Coalition) and non-aligned activists, is also based in Exarcheia and acts as a communication and networking facilitator within solidarity structures, cooperatives and other social economy initiatives that are active across Athens and Greece (see Chapter 7.4). The network's role, is two-fold: firstly, record existing groups on an open access online platform and facilitate the circulation of information and 'know-how' among solidarity structures and cooperatives, for example sharing details on how to set up a group, funds available through EU programmes for 'social cooperative enterprises', problems other groups

have faced so far and how to overcome these etc. Secondly, as it is funded through a political party, which aims for future government administration, the network becomes a key facilitator for organizing a social economy, which can act in the future as a ‘buffer’ for the collapsing social welfare. Hence, the role of this network among coordinative attempts problematizes the function of autonomous solidarity structures vis-à-vis party politics, co-optation tactics and institutional incorporation. Further, other points of criticism often raised among activists focus on whether social economy experiments can actually substitute for social welfare, whether or not they can act as empowering mechanisms for bottom-up organizing etc. (also see Chapter 7).

Moreover, through the ‘Solidarity for All’ network, the Exarcheia Time Bank is often invited to participate in festivals and actions organized in Athens, in order to share knowledge, exchange information with similar groups, contribute to workshops, visit other projects and meet with activists from other areas. For example, in October 2013, the Time Bank participated in the second ‘Alternative Festival for Solidarity and Cooperative Economy’<sup>11</sup>, along with more than 50 groups from across Athens and Greece, i.e. solidarity structures, cooperatives, organic products and ‘without middlemen’ market groups, bartering teams, neighbourhood and residents initiatives, eco-producers and farmers, community cooking collectives, social medical centers, the self-managed factory VioMe (Thessaloniki), human rights’ organizations etc. The festival was held in the former airport area of Helliniko, south of Athens, lasted for 3 days and included discussions, screenings, workshops and social events. In regard to the networking among solidarity and social economy groups, the online platform that the ‘Solidarity for All’ network has set up, acts as a key coordinating mechanism. As these groups are registered online, activists can immediately communicate with other distant groups, place calls for joint actions, circulate information on ‘who organizes what, where and when’ etc. In this sense, the platform becomes both a record and ‘calendar of actions’ and a medium for groups to set up contacts. Finally, as the Time Bank itself operates through an online platform for exchanging services, as well as through an email list, through which Exarcheia residents request

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<sup>11</sup> ‘Festival for Solidarity and Cooperative Economy’, [www.festival4sce.org](http://www.festival4sce.org)

specific services, the email list is also used for circulating information for actions and events, such as the festival for solidarity economy.

Apart from the Time Bank, another group active in Exarcheia mobilizing around solidarity-building in the neighbourhood and beyond in the face of the crisis is the Solidarity Network of Exarcheia. Following the Syntagma occupation in 2011, bottom-up collective forms of organizing were diffused across Athenian neighbourhoods, where local ‘popular assemblies’ were formed. The popular assembly of Exarcheia was formed, comprised of local activists, members of the residents’ committee and new participants originating in the ‘pool’ of people participating at the Syntagma occupation assembly. After the first few meetings of this local assembly at the Navarinou occupied park, participants decided to set up a new local group, in order to oppose the newly introduced at the time housing taxation (see Figure 5.4). Hence the local popular assembly stopped operating and transformed to the Solidarity Network of Exarcheia in September 2011.

Although the solidarity network was initially populated by several participants, it is important to stress that after its first year of function, the group started losing its initial dynamic and assembly numbers dropped to approximately 10 by the end of 2013. In general, participants in this group were residents of Exarcheia, university students, professionals, unemployed people and older residents. Open membership and physical attendance in assemblies were the main mechanisms for consensus-based decision-making, similar to other groups active in the area, e.g. the residents’ committee and the Time Bank. Also, most of the participants are homeowners and have been mobilizing around common housing issues, such as the new taxes, imminent evictions and confiscations at the time etc.



Figure 5.4. "No home in the hands of bankers", Solidarity Network of Exarcheia logo, source: Solidarity Network of Exarcheia

In particular, the formation of the Solidarity Network of Exarcheia has been an attempt to build on solidarity practices and deal at the local level with the outcomes of the new housing tax locally. As several households have been under the threat of having electricity cut off due to their inability to pay this tax, the Solidarity Network launched a campaign, which, on the one hand, contributed to broader mobilizations and legal appeals made by several popular assemblies against the new housing tax and, on the other hand, organized direct action tactics to deal with electricity cut offs in the neighbourhood. Direct action and solidarity practices involved protests organized at the households where technicians attempted to cut off power, through an emergency mobile texting list notifying activists where and when these were about to take place, as well as re-connections of power by skilled activists. This coordinative campaign across local groups in Athens dealing with housing and taxation issues continued in the next two years, through latent periods and renewed rounds of mobilizations (see Chapter 7.7). Additionally, connections to other groups across Athens have been established through the ‘Solidarity for All’ network, similarly to the Time Bank through the online platform of communication. Also, a few of the solidarity network’s participants are involved in the nearby Social Medical center, a space operating in Exarcheia offering on a free volunteer basis primary health treatment for unemployed and uninsured people. Further, the solidarity network of Exarcheia has been organizing solidarity actions for residents, such as the gathering of basic goods, as well as joint solidarity actions organized along with distant groups, such as the local assembly of Perama, a southwest Athens suburb. Finally, the network has been involved in another local campaign, i.e. the ‘Exarcheia in movement’ campaign (see Chapter 6.5) along with the residents’ committee, the Time Bank, the Autonomous collective and individual activists and residents.



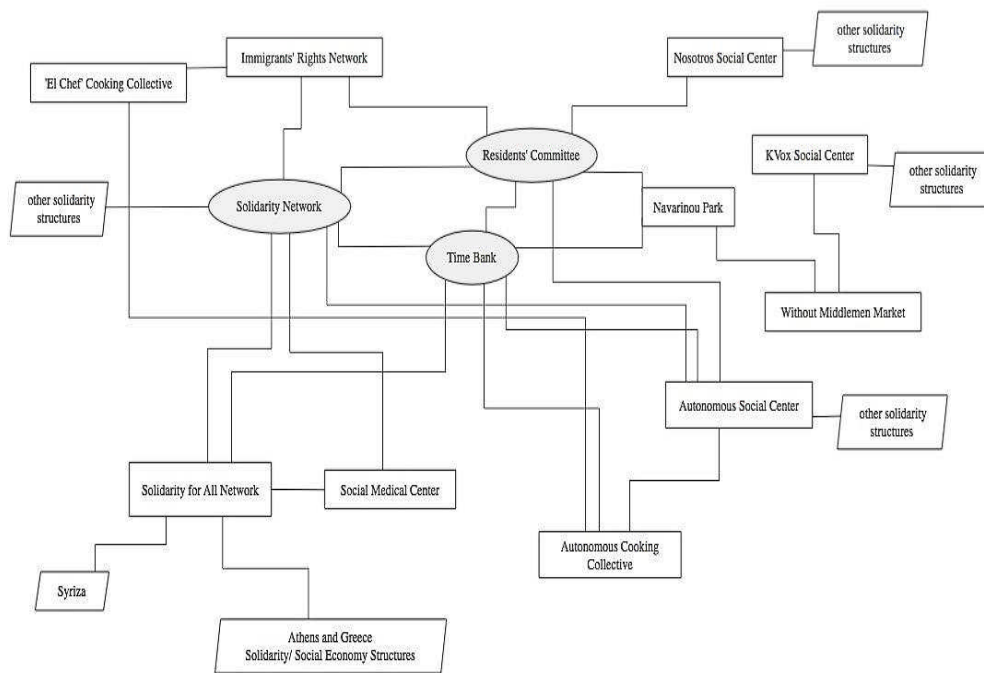


Figure 5.5. Links between local groups, initiatives and non-local actors in Exarcheia, source: author

The above connections (see Figure 5.5) are often made possible due to the multiple overlaps of activists in more than one group, campaign or project at the same time. These key activists are responsible for circulating information in the neighbourhood and across the city and hold a specific type of ‘know-how’ in organizing actions, while others acquire knowledge relating to specific issues. In regard to the latter for example, legal appeals are often made by groups or individual lawyers, such as a male activist participating in the solidarity network, who organized relevant documents, collected information and disseminated to the group’s assembly, while a reverse process followed, by putting together appeals against the housing tax in coordination with other house owners across the city, NGO’s and consumer rights associations and legal advisors. Also, regarding key activists, the solidarity network of Exarcheia is an indicative case of the problematics raised by the concentration of roles and responsibilities on specific individuals in a group and how these affect the group’s function and development. As participants in the group became less and less after the first period of high numbers attending the assembly meetings, more responsibilities and everyday tasks

were concentrated on fewer activists. The dispersal of this activist dynamic to other activities and campaigns led to fewer resources available for the group, such as time, energy, skills, knowledge and people to contribute to a series of crucial tasks. These, coupled with unsuccessful legal appeals and attempts to deal with housing issues through institutional means, led to disappointment and reduced the motivation for people to participate. Further, less participation and the loading of de facto responsibilities placed on fewer activists created tensions in dealing with several issues at the same time, e.g. local campaigns, broader actions, writing texts, putting up posters and distributing material, updating blogs and email list communication etc. In turn, this led to a vicious circle, as the remaining activists often complained about the mounting pressures on them resulting in less time to contribute to menial jobs. Personality traits added to tensions created and a few members stopped participating in the group after a few months, as they found it more and more difficult to establish communication and participate on an egalitarian basis in discussions vis-à-vis other members who had become 'de facto' key activists.

Having participated in assemblies as well as in several actions organized, for example menial tasks of distributing material and publicizing an open event, this type of informal division of labour, yet suggesting a concentration of roles on a specific male activist, became obvious:

After attending last Tuesday's assembly meeting I volunteered to help put up posters in the neighbourhood and distribute material for the upcoming open discussion event on housing 'red mortgages, evictions and foreclosures'. This morning I met with another three activists and we split into groups of two so as to spread out and cover as much ground as possible... as many people became interested and asked us what this event was about, we engaged in several chats with residents who are dealing with housing issues... this task, lasting for approximately two hours, revealed the key role a male activist holds in the group: firstly, this activist, was responsible for writing the texts, preparing print outs and organizing the material. Secondly, knowing the area, i.e. which are the busiest spots and meeting points, visibility of posters on bus stops or in specific cafes, where people would be more interested because they are facing housing problems etc. he chose the routes the rest of us followed. Thirdly, this type of coordinating methodology or division of labour, although involving only a few individuals, revealed a concentrated 'know-how' this activist holds (field notes, Athens, December 2012).

The above is an example of how key activists concentrate specific roles, in this case coordinating an activity through a division of labour (see Routledge and Cumbers 2009). While on the one hand, this type of coordination proved to be more time efficient for completing a specific task, it on the other hand, problematizes the in-group horizontal participation (also see Chapters 6 and 7). As revealed in assembly meetings following the above, the responsibilities this particular activist had concentrated, also due to less participants' contribution, created arguments with other activists, who contested decision-making as being less egalitarian. While these tensions can prove to be creative in other cases, meaning that more people step in and, hence, responsibilities are distributed more equally, in this case tensions led to a few activists leaving the group, hence weakening its effectiveness. Finally, the informality of open membership also reveals that the function of groups largely depends on personal contribution and motivation, the negotiation of personalities, idiosyncrasies and inter-personal relations developed through time among participants. While these are not dependent upon formally attributed roles and control mechanisms, such as voting or formal leadership for example, in horizontally organizing decision-making, they often create certain types of informal or 'hidden' hierarchies (see Freeman 1970).

### **5.5. Concluding Remarks: Towards 'Struggle Communities' and 'Urban Solidarity Spaces'**

This chapter discussed the Greek context, in relation to neoliberal policies introduced in Greece and Athens during the past two decades and more recent austerity politics impacting on the city's population. Following these, I outlined the development of social movements and urban struggles that challenged the above, focusing on recent responses to austerity politics. In particular, I discussed the groups I collaborated with while conducting fieldwork in Athens, namely the Residents' Committee, the Time bank and the Solidarity network of Exarcheia, their goals and agendas, the forms of organization they employ and their links to other neighbourhood groups, as well as their connections to initiatives and campaigns across Athens.

In setting up a conceptual framework for analysing the above and further extending accounts on contentious politics in Athens and Greece in Chapters 6 and 7, I will briefly discuss here the ideas of ‘struggle community’ and ‘urban solidarity space’. Drawing on the cases of groups discussed in section 5.4, I suggest that the spatial grounding of struggle and solidarity at the neighbourhood level becomes mutually constituted to broader articulations of resistance that span across the city and beyond; hence struggle and solidarity are constituted at overlapping territorial, social and material levels. In particular, as shown in the cases of the local Exarcheia groups, i.e. the residents’ committee and the solidarity network, activists choose to organize at the neighbourhood level, based on common local goals, issues and immediate needs. They contribute resources, knowledge, ideas, skills, time etc. to their projects, engage in horizontal, direct democratic participation, develop their agendas and experiment with alternatives to austerity. In acknowledging that dependence upon one group’s capacities and resources often poses limits to effective outcomes, groups choose to reach out, communicate and connect to other groups and actors in the neighbourhood and beyond. For example, as in the cases of the 2 campaigns discussed in Chapters 6 and 7 on, namely the ‘Exarcheia in movement’ campaign in Exarcheia (see Chapter 6.5) and the housing campaign across Athens (see Chapter 7.7), the residents committee and the solidarity network of Exarcheia actively pursued links among local groups in Exarcheia and broader actors across Athens and nationally, e.g. the ‘Solidarity for All’ network spanning across Athens and Greece, trade unions, political organizations etc.

In order to analyse the above, firstly, I employ the notion of ‘struggle communities’ developed in Chapter 6, whereby struggle becomes spatially grounded in the neighbourhood, though community bonds and reciprocal relations, and, at the same time, re-fashioned through connections across the city. Through this account, I suggest that this spatially expansive politics calls for a re-thinking of place, neighbourhood and community as territorially grounded and connected in a relational fashion; hence, not enclosed in self-contained spatial scales, as in accounts of ‘resilient communities’ for example (see MacKinnon and Derickson 2012). Secondly, as solidarity-building becomes a crucial mechanism within survival tactics driven by necessity, as well as a powerful discursive force for broader counter-austerity struggle I suggest an understanding of these through the

idea of ‘urban solidarity spaces’. In particular, this urban solidarity space emerges out of the horizontal connections among locally-based solidarity initiatives and structures across Athens and encompasses multiple tactics and strategies that oppose austerity politics and seek to produce alternatives to these, e.g. social/ solidarity economy. These, while spatially grounded in places across the city, ‘spill out’ of the material space of the city and link to national mobilizations, trade union strikes, broader European anti-austerity movements and alliances etc. Hence, through this account I aim to show the expansive potential of locally-based grassroots responses to austerity, articulated through an internally hybrid and multiple ‘in, against and beyond’ the capitalist state politics.

Finally, the accounts of ‘struggle communities’ and ‘urban solidarity spaces’ are overlapping, complementary interpretations of emerging contentious politics in Athens and Greece in the context of the crisis and austerity. In particular, Chapter 6 discusses in detail the notion of ‘struggle communities’ through the Athens city center neighbourhood of Exarcheia. To this end, I provide for an account of the Syntagma square movement occurring in 2011 and the grounding of bottom-up resistance practices in the following period. Then, I discuss these resistance practices in relation to the role of place, neighbourhood and community, focusing on coordinative campaigns and actions organized in Exarcheia recently. Finally, through the ‘Exarcheia in movement’ campaign I expand on the spatial practices employed by local groups and activists, their connections, networking attempts and problematics raised within such horizontal formations of struggle.

## **6. The Spatialities of Resistance in Athens and Exarcheia: Towards ‘Struggle Communities’**

### **6.1. Introduction**

In identifying emerging forms of struggle and solidarity as responses to austerity politics in Greece, this chapter discusses the spatialities of resistance and solidarity practices in Athens and Exarcheia through the concept of ‘struggle communities’. In doing so, first, I discuss the squares’ movement and the occupation of Syntagma square, occurring in 2011 alongside other global mobilizations, such as the Spanish ‘Indignados’ and the ‘Occupy Wall street’ movements. Through this discussion, I will show how the practices of self-organization, mutual aid and solidarity employed at the occupied Syntagma square were later dispersed across Athens and Greece. Subsequently, in the following period articulations of bottom-up democratic politics became grounded in several neighbourhoods in the city of Athens through the emergence of numerous local initiatives and solidarity groups. Second, in order to analyse these and show how the grounding of struggle and solidarity at the neighbourhood level becomes mutually constituted to broader counter-austerity politics, I employ the notion of ‘struggle communities’. In particular, a ‘struggle community’ refers to the place-based proximate relations built among individuals and collectivities, i.e. activists, local groups, solidarity initiatives and structures, which are constructed in order to contest austerity politics and produce practical alternatives to address social reproduction needs. Third, in unpacking the key role of ‘place’ within the constitution of struggle communities, I analyse the spatialities of resistance and solidarity practices in the city center neighbourhood of Exarcheia, Athens. This area has historically enabled the emergence of political cultures, acting as an ‘incubator’ of activism and, at the same time, as a geographical node of social movements and broader mobilizations. In this regard, I analyse the place-specific activist geography of Exarcheia, the ‘spatialities of resistance’ (see Pile and Keith 1997, Routledge 1997), the ‘senses of place’ and activist narratives (see Agnew 1987, Routledge 1993) developed in order to reveal the possibilities and constraints for these to subvert dominating power and articulate a spatially expansive politics. Finally,

through the example of the ‘Exarcheia in movement’ campaign, I will unpack the constitution of struggle communities, i.e. how the above narratives, resistance practices, place-based solidarities and proximate relations among activists and groups are mobilized so as to promote cooperation tactics in the neighbourhood and links outwards, in spatial terms.

## **6.2. The ‘Squares’ Movement’ and the Occupation of Syntagma square**

In furthering the discussion on the role of urban space in the formation and development of grassroots responses to the crisis in Athens and Greece, this section discusses the ‘squares’ movement’ and, in particular, the occupation of Syntagma square in Athens city center between May and July 2011. As briefly discussed in Chapter 5, this movement managed to bring forward issues of democratic control over decision-making processes (such as the voting of austerity measures) and contest representational politics through demands on ‘real democracy’ and everyday practices of ‘direct democracy’ in the occupied Syntagma square. In this regard, urban space served as the staging ground for articulating broad demands over ‘social and economic justice’ (Leontidou 2010, Routledge 2010), as well as experimenting with participatory politics in the assembly occupation through practices of self-organization, mutual aid, solidarity and collective action e.g. set up tents, collective ‘kitchens’ and first aid areas (Leontidou 2012).

At the same time, the practices and narratives developed within the occupation of Syntagma square revealed a spatial divide, between the ‘upper’ and ‘lower’ square, and reflect broader opposing political imaginaries in relation to responses to austerity and the crisis (Kaika and Karaliotas 2014). The discussion here focuses on the narratives of respondents and their experiences as participants in the occupation and protests in the summer of 2011 for two reasons. Firstly, the goal is to produce critical understandings of the possibilities and constraints the occupation was faced with and, hence, problematize approaches that either celebrate or demonize this movement, as well as other similar mobilizations occurring during that period, e.g. the Occupy movement (see Caffentzis 2012, Merrifield 2013). Secondly, focusing on this movement’s internal dynamics and contradictions, the aim is to further unpack how the spatial convergence of actors and the practices and

narratives developed at the occupation were later diffused in the following period in neighbourhoods across the city and beyond. These are developed through the notion of ‘struggle communities’ (see sections 6.5 and 6.6) that shows how the above practices and narratives of self-organization, mutual aid and solidarity became grounded at the neighbourhood level and simultaneously connected outwards to broader responses to austerity. In this sense, the ‘legacy’ this movement left behind has been crucial for subsequent responses to austerity.

As Syntagma square has historically acted as the symbolic material space of expressing protest and dissent, due to its key location in front of the Greek parliament building, the occupation of 2011 became another key ‘moment’ within the historical sequence of mass mobilizations (Leontidou 2012) (also see section 6.3. for a discussion of the role of Athens city center in social movements). As shown in Chapter 5.3, the riots spreading across Athens and Greece in 2008 acted as a turning point for urban struggles to emerge, which contested issues of ‘urban justice’ and ‘urban democracy’ (Stavrvides 2009, Leontidou 2010). Since then, and as the crisis unfolded through the imposition of austerity politics, the next ‘episode’ of contestation took place through the Syntagma occupation. In regard to this, a young male activist noted that

since the crisis started and before the Syntagma occupation there was nothing but despair; just small-scale demonstrations, lots of confusion... and then it just happened! Spanish activists put up a banner calling for the ‘awakening’ of the Greeks and people started gathering in Syntagma and they stayed there for more than two months! It became a major reference point for everyone (personal interview, Athens, November 2012).

What started out as a spontaneous response to the Spanish activists, i.e. people gathering in front of the parliament building in Athens on May 25<sup>th</sup> 2011, later evolved to mass protests in several squares in cities across the country, e.g. Thessaloniki, Patra, Crete etc. After the first few days of protests organized through social media in front of the Parliament building, the square opposite the building was occupied, as people stayed for several hours during the day, expressing their opposition to austerity measures and setting up an encampment to host thematic groups and organize actions (Leontidou 2012) (see Figure 6.1). As noted in the above quote, during the following period, Syntagma square became a key spatial reference and a ‘convergence space’ (Routledge and Cumbers 2009) for anti-



austerity, anti-neoliberal struggles, as several actors, such as local groups, political organizations and parties, unions, activists and non-affiliated people converged into a heterogeneous crowd of protestors inhabiting the square for more than two months and expressing their opposition to austerity, unemployment, welfare cuts and the corruption of the political system (Giovanopoulos and Mitropoulos 2012). Urban space, in this instance, became a space for practicing a ‘politics of encounter’ (Merrifield 2013), where the newly marginalized social groups by the crisis, namely the unemployed, the precarious, the homeless, the migrants, gained visibility and interacted with each other for the first time . Further, the square became the material space, ‘the piazza’, (Leontidou 2012) where this heterogeneous crowd, previously invisible to each other, gained visibility through articulating voices of dissent, albeit conflicting.



Figure 6.1. “It’s the same old song, never right and always wrong; we’re standing in Syntagma square; the rich are staying rich; each one of us is their b\*\*\*\*; sing for justice and for peace, as they knock out our teeth; to their abuse we’re open wide; standing in Syntagma square”, The Tiger Lillies performing in Syntagma square, 28/06/11, source: photo by Maro Kouri

During these mass mobilizations at Syntagma square and within this heterogeneous crowd, intense emotions of fear, anger, despair and hope became evident through direct actions, clashes with the police, expressions of mistrust in the political system, social events and discussions organized (see Leontidou 2012). As a young female activist from Exarcheia noted,

[Syntagma] was a deep emotional and very new experience for me; people got out of their houses and joined in, participated in the assembly and this alone is of high importance, especially for those not involved in politics before... there was hope that something good was about to finally happen, something not previously experienced or imagined... (personal interview, Athens, January 2013).

In this regard, Syntagma square acted symbolically as an emotional catalyst and motivation for people to engage in the protests and express their indignation and anger against what was perceived as injustice, i.e. the voting of austerity measures. As Routledge (2012) mentions, politically, emotions are powerful triggers that motivate people to initiate political action, as they stimulate profound feelings of injustice. According to Henderson (2008: 35), anger in particular is one of the dominant emotional responses to perceptions of injustice and endures in the struggle for accountability, i.e. 'who is to blame'. Also, participation at the assembly of the Syntagma occupation, especially for individuals not previously involved in similar forms of direct action, generated emotions of hope for effecting change and the experiencing of personal and collective emotions through intense embodied interactions.

For example, on certain days of action against the voting of austerity measures, such as the two-day strike protests on June 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> 2011, thousands of people swarmed Syntagma square, so as to stage their opposition (Kaika and Karaliotas 2014). In discussing the intense emotional experience of these days of action, another young female activist who actively participated in the Syntagma square occupation mentioned that

[Syntagma] was a new experience, even for me who I had previous activist experience. This was the first time a massive open assembly was formed... many interesting things were discussed in the assembly, along with nonsense, but even that was valuable! The two strike days in June 2011 have changed me a lot... it was a lived, embodied experience of state repression and authority violence. They were attacking us for claiming the self-evident, democracy! Only when you experience such a thing you get to realize what the media never mention, that the police chooses to repress protestors. There was no other reason for them to attack us than the fact that they felt threatened! We believed that the government was about to resign! We believed that we could win! There were so many of us; we would not leave the occupation despite the chaos; we could not breathe, some had health issues, but we persevered; the drums kept playing, some were dancing; voices in the microphones urged us to stay put in the

square, to sustain; songs through the speakers... it was one of the few times that I felt that we were there altogether... helping each other... we did not feel alone, even if some people came to participate on their own, they did feel that the person next to them would help them, give them water or a teargas mask. Even the physical contact, grabbing the person next to you provided us with a sense of security within the generalized chaos... The occupation did not belong to anyone, no political party... and this was its strength; it belonged to each one of us, we had to stay there and defend it... People would leave for a while and come back; I felt I belonged there! I didn't care, even though there were moments I could not stand the teargas... I did everything to get well quickly, get fresh air and go back to the square... (personal interview, Athens, February 2013).

The highly confrontational nature of these action days, the intensity of police repression and the entangled emotional responses of anger and fear and determination and commitment to a shared goal, i.e. defend the occupation and stay put, discussed by the activist above reveal how these mass protests became 'pools' of shared emotions that generated common narratives and 'sensuous solidarities' (Routledge 2012). Drawing on Routledge (2012), I suggest that these interactions during the mass actions that took place at the Syntagma square created 'shared emotional templates' that were in turn mobilized to produce motivation and commitment to a common cause and sustained participation at the occupation. Additionally, as Juris (2008) stresses, these emotional resources and 'affective solidarities' are built through the embodied physical co-presence of participants sharing a mutual focus of attention and provide forms of identification among participants upon which activists can draw upon so as to maintain their goals. These intense emotional experiences of anger against injustice and hope for change during these mass mobilizations at Syntagma square also provided motivation for actions in the period following the eviction of the occupation.

Furthermore, this movement can be understood as part of global mobilizations occurring at the time in cities around the world, such as the 'Arab spring' and occupations of public spaces in cities in Spain, Egypt and, later, the US 'Occupy' movement. Employing similar organizational forms and tactics, i.e. occupying a central public space, squares, streets etc. and setting up encampments, the Syntagma square occupation, and the assembly in particular, developed connections to Madrid and Barcelona activists through live skype sessions between the occupied squares, communication established between the multimedia teams

and exchange of information and participation of activists from other occupations, e.g. Spain, Tunisia, Egypt etc., in the Syntagma assemblies.

It is important to note here that, in discussing the Syntagma occupation I am employing the term ‘squares movement’, which was coined by several activists participating in the open popular assembly of the Syntagma square occupation, so as to produce an inclusive framing of protests organized in squares in cities across Greece, as well as link discursively to the occupied Puerta del Sol square in Madrid, Spain and the Tahrir square in Cairo, Egypt (see Giovanopoulos and Mitropoulos 2012). This term followed the ‘indignants’ one, which was initially borrowed from the Spanish occupations and broadly used by mainstream media, and conceptually distinguishes between the expressions of dissent, anger and indignation, articulated mainly in the ‘upper’ Syntagma square, and the ‘lower square’ assembly, which focused more on opening up bottom-up processes of dialogue among participants.

Therefore, in conceptual terms, Syntagma square can be understood as a key site of convergence of both ‘globalized local actions’ and ‘localized global actions’ (Routledge 2003), whereby particular struggles and actors came together to contest austerity measures and, at the same time, became linked to broader struggles articulated in several geographical contexts across the world. As Merrifield (2013) pointed out, the common element among all these mobilizations occurring at the time, from the Spanish ‘Indignados’, to the Greek squares and the US Occupy movement, was that the stakes of organization and protest were not just about the city, but extending beyond urban space, being about both the function (or malfunction) of democracy, e.g. claiming ‘real democracy’ and ‘rights’, and about the ‘practice’ of democracy in times of crisis, e.g. the recurring motto of ‘direct democracy’ among occupiers at Syntagma square. Also, as Merrifield (2013) stressed, these movements represent a new capacity for concentration and dispersal of random encounters of people in and beyond cities, through the extensive use of digital media. This de-territorialised character of mobilizations suggested by Merrifield (2013) pertains to an account of occupied squares as nodes, instead of centers, of contingent overlapping encounters among actors; hence the occupations reflect a simultaneous centrality and dispersal of encounters. In addition to these, this convergence and dispersal of encounters, actions, resistance practices and mobilizations across Athens and Greece during the Syntagma occupation was not

*only* made possible through social media, e.g. facebook events, email lists and blogs, but also through organizational means and actions employed by prior existing local groups and activist networks spanning across the city and nationally (see Arampatzi and Nicholls 2012). For example local groups participated with their own banners in the occupation and activists employed resources and know-how in order to set up the theme groups of the occupation, such as the multimedia/communication group, etc. Hence, as Kaika and Karaliotas (2014: 9) stress, the Syntagma movement, alongside the other global mobilizations occurring at the time, introduced new modes for re- (de) territorializing democratic politics, being spatially grounded in the material space of the square and, at the same time, opening up virtual spaces of communication with an international movement.

Moreover, the occupation of Syntagma square being a space of convergence for diverse actors, became a 'hybrid space' (Leontidou 2012), where 'similarity and difference' (see Routledge and Cumbers 2009) co-existed for more than two months and where political identities and imaginaries were negotiated and contested in the process. Often this movement, as well as other mobilizations occurring at the time, such as the Occupy movement, have been either celebrated as models for practicing democratic politics in times of crisis (see Merrifield 2013) or demonized as apolitical responses. Nevertheless, I suggest that a closer interpretation of the spatialities, practices and narratives that emerged out of the Syntagma occupation can provide for a more critical understanding of this movement's 'entangled geographies' (see Cumbers et al. 2008), meaning the internal contradictions, the conflicting imaginaries and the possibilities and limitations of this movement. In this regard, external limitations involved state repressive tactics, especially during the mass mobilizations of strike days in June 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> and the forced eviction of the occupation by the police at the end of July 2011, as well as the demonization of activists through mainstream media (Kaika and Karaliotas 2014). At the same time, looking into the distinct sets of practices and spatialities developed within the Syntagma square occupation, following the first few days of people gathering and protesting against the voting of austerity measures, the protests were spatially transformed and developed an internal divide between the 'upper' and 'lower' parts of the square, albeit 'porous' and fluid, especially during mass actions. First, the upper part of Syntagma square, having direct visibility to the Parliament building,

became the staging ground for expressions of indignation and dissent, and often verbal abuse, against the ‘failed and corrupt party politics’ and mottos addressed to politicians blaming them for being ‘thieves’ and ‘national traitors’. Soon, small groups holding Greek flags turned against minority groups and immigrants in an attempt to place the blame for the rising unemployment and appropriate the crowd through a nationalistic discourse (Kaika and Karaliotas 2014). Hence, these practices of resistance became entangled with practices of domination (see Routledge 1997, Sharp et al. 2000), whereby this group of protestors reproduced a form of domination and exclusion against minority groups, based on their national identity. Second, the lower part of Syntagma square became a type of ‘agora’ (Leontidou 2012) in hosting an open popular assembly where discussions were held and self-organization became an everyday experiment with alternatives to electoral politics. In discussing this spatial division, a male activist from Exarcheia noted that

I think that the people at the upper square screaming towards the parliament were party clientele... the lower square and the assembly was different though...an open experiment... (personal interview, Athens, March 2013).

Therefore, while protests of the upper square pertained to articulations of discontent against politicians, nationalistic and xenophobic claims, the lower square assembly attempted to move beyond indignation and articulate demands on ‘real, direct democracy’. These distinct spatialities, while originating in the same democratic deficit within electoral politics, can be understood as constitutive of conflicting political imaginaries. As Kaika and Karaliotas (2014) note, the upper square protestors re-claimed national unity and identity in the face of the crisis and party corruption, while the lower square posed the demand for unmediated democracy, ‘here and now’. In addition to these, the lower square assembly also revealed internal contradictions, oppositional imaginaries and ‘entangled practices of domination and resistance’ (see Routledge 1997), particularly regarding political strategies and problematizing the role of state structures. According to a female activist who participated in the occupation, long-lasting divisions between the Left and anarchist/ autonomous political cultures and practices at times posed limitations for this movement to expand its reach and spatially include and transform the indignant voices of the upper square:

What was disappointing was the stance by certain parts of the Left and anarchists who developed phobic attitudes towards people... yes, there were ultra-right wing and nationalists present, but presupposing that all the people in the upper square were enemies I think shows more elitist reflexes than progressive ones. I spent time in-between the lower and the upper square; the assembly felt like an enclosed crowd sometimes, it did not manage to open up to the whole of the society (personal interview, Athens, March 2013).

In the occupied square, self-organization became the primary means of setting up collective action and sustaining the occupation, e.g. solidarity cooking, bartering, hygiene teams, first-aid teams, media groups, coordination teams for actions organized across Athens, Greece and international solidarity actions (Giovanopoulos and Mitropoulos 2012, Leontidou 2012, Kaika and Karaliotas 2014). At the same time, the co-existence of multiple political cultures created tensions, mainly around whether this movement needed a political center, organization or party, to coordinate future actions and represent this dynamic within state structures and electorally, or whether self-organization would become the means to an end towards social empowerment and emancipation. And these tensions, according to another male activist from a social center in Exarcheia who participated in the assembly, often impeded discussions on how to produce alternatives to the crisis based on self-organization:

Many activists from the Left tried to shift the discussion on direct participation and enactment of politics to whether a government of the Left could become the solution to the crisis... this signifies the traditional reflexes [of the Left] of making demands to the state! Even though people were interested in debating alternative ways of doing things, their stance created a deep division of political levels, one which sustains that social movements *can* experiment with new structures, nevertheless state representation is *always* needed, so 'vote for us'! (personal interview, Athens, March 2013).

Further, in establishing an account of the possibilities and dynamics of the squares' movement, especially in relation to the 'legacy' it left behind in the following period, the mass protests and the occupation of Syntagma square managed to introduce alternative ways of collectively 'doing' politics on a mass scale including the participation of thousands of people. In this regard, Caffentzis (2012) discussed the occupations of public spaces occurring worldwide as a call for a 'body politics', one of physical presence, which actively questioned traditional means of representation (electoral or not). The case of Syntagma, according to

another young female activist, revealed how the presence and participation in the occupation of thousands of young unemployed graduates ‘with no future’ (see Mason 2011), older employees who were forced into precarious jobs as well as private sector employees who did not normally join strikes due to fear of losing their jobs, problematized traditional means of working-class representation through unions:

Syntagma occupation had contradictory outcomes. The one certain thing about it is that it signifies a new way into politics, outside the existent paradigm and this is hopeful. Traditional means of movement organization through unions have failed to answer the rising unemployment and precarious work. Hence the unemployed cannot identify with union politics. Syntagma managed to raise questions on political participation and mobilization outside the given boundaries (personal interview, Athens, April 2013).

Also, within the occupation, conflicting imaginaries and practices co-existed and interacted for more than two months, e.g. confrontational tactics with the police and state repression; self-organization and spontaneous organization and demands towards the state. According to a young male activist, this ‘osmosis’ between political practices generated a new political culture among participants, i.e. active participation in decision-making, and initiatives that emerged in the post-Syntagma period:

After Syntagma we cannot think of political practices the way we used to before; especially around organizational means. This movement left behind new elements of spontaneous organization, popular self-organization through assemblies and a new culture of discussion... It was a hopeful experiment in this sense! (personal interview, Athens, April 2013)

In other words, as Kaika and Karaliotas (2014: 9, 10) stress, the Syntagma assembly attempted to institute a form of democratic politics, albeit partial and fragmented, wherein the struggle for emancipation became part and parcel of collectively organizing everyday practices at the occupied square. In this sense, the occupation and the assembly in particular can be understood as a ‘laboratory’ for experimenting with multiple practices and strategies of social empowerment, from prefigurative



politics and ruptural ‘moments’, to challenging established relations of representation within state structures<sup>12</sup> (see Wright 2010).

In turn, these multiple practices, organizational means and strategies were employed by activists in the period following the forced eviction of Syntagma square occupation by the police. The ongoing interactions between Syntagma square, local groups and international mobilizations were diffused in neighbourhoods across the city, where popular assemblies ‘picked up the thread’ of organizing resistance to austerity in local squares. In this regard, the role of already existing local groups and activist networks was crucial in disseminating discussions around the debt, austerity measures and the crisis and linking them to local problems in local contexts. They also acted as a type of activist infrastructure for the organization of several campaigns, road blockades during strikes and occupations of public buildings taking place at the time. Also, the post-Syntagma occupation period was marked by the emergence of several local groups, solidarity structures and initiatives that seek to pose alternatives to austerity and deal with social reproduction needs. According to a male activist from Exarcheia, this dispersal of resistance practices became transformed through local popular assemblies, ‘struggle committees’, residents’ initiative and groups, emerging even in areas of Athens, and other parts of Greece, where activist cultures did not exist before:

After the occupation ended, the [Syntagma] movement was transformed taking other organizational forms in workplaces and neighbourhoods, becoming *an organic force* within these...I think of Syntagma as a seed of struggle for social change; nothing is lost, this was just the beginning! (personal interview, Athens, January 2013)

This pertains to an understanding of the squares’ movement as a process of spatial convergence of actors in the occupation, which, in turn, acted as an organic force within the dispersal of practices and strategies of resistance in neighbourhoods across Athens, e.g. Exarcheia. Further, the Syntagma occupation created a powerful

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<sup>12</sup> Notably, the steep rise of Syriza (Radical Left Coalition) in the national election of 2012 is often discussed as an outcome of the squares’ movement and as a result of mistrust and discontent of prior voters of Pasok (Socialist party) and New Democracy (Right-wing party), the two parties that have alternated in the national governments of Greece during the past 40 years.

collective spatial imaginary of solidarity and resistance and a form of symbolic capital still acting as a generative force for ongoing struggles, as noted by a female activist:

The symbolic capital left behind, even in other cities, involves a shared spirit of saying ‘we will not bow our heads down anymore’ ... this is evident in the multiple resistance cells created after [Syntagma], such as the popular assemblies and local groups active in many neighbourhoods (personal interview, Athens, April 2013).

Finally, what became evident in the post-Syntagma period was the crucial role of the neighbourhood level for articulating forms of bottom-up democratic politics, i.e. participation in local groups and assemblies, direct actions tactics etc., and grounding solidarity and struggle through ongoing continuous everyday efforts, aiming to construct new forms of ‘being and acting’ collectively (Kaika and Karaliotas 2014: 11). These are discussed in section 6.5 through the concept of ‘struggle communities’. However, first I will contextualize this discussion by examining the development of Exarcheia as an incubator for resistance and a node of social movements and, following this, the spatialities of resistance practices within the neighbourhood.

### **6.3. The City Center of Athens and the neighbourhood of Exarcheia: a Geographical Node of Struggles and ‘Incubator’ of Activist Cultures**

The city center of Athens holds a key historical and symbolic role in the movement scene. In particular, city center areas relate to collective memories of several popular uprisings over the years, from the Syntagma (Parliament) square uprising in 1843, to civil war battles in 1944, the re-establishment of democracy in 1974 after the fall of the dictatorship, the widespread riots in December 2008 and, more recently, the occupation of Syntagma square in the summer of 2011, as discussed in section 6.2. In this sense, city center areas, squares, public spaces, streets, parks have acted through the years as the physical sites where contestation was expressed, such as mass public demonstrations and rallies, protests, often violent clashes with police forces, strikes, campaigns and other events organized by social groups, trade unions and political organizations. Given the high concentration and intensity of political activity in Athens city center, especially since austerity

measures were firstly introduced in 2010, as well as the ongoing interactions and exchanges among groups, activists and organizations, city center areas provide several contact opportunities among diverse actors, i.e. local and non-local groups, mobilizing around multiple issues (see Nicholls 2008, Chatterton 2010b, Leontidou 2010, Routledge 2010) and serve as key geographical nodes within contentious practices.

In particular, the city center neighbourhood of Exarcheia holds a central role within the development of struggles in Athens, acting as both a spatial reference of resistance and an ‘incubator’ of political cultures over the past decades. In this sense, political cultures and sub-cultures have flourished in the area, as Exarcheia is linked to the collective imaginary of resistance and political activity present in the area since the Greek Civil War, (between 1946 and 1949) and the student occupation of the Polytechnic school and the subsequent uprising against the military junta in 1973. According to a male artist, resident of Exarcheia, multiple traces of collective memories are visible on the physical settings, the streets, public spaces and walls of the neighbourhood,

Exarcheia is a ‘palimpsest’; multiple layers of memories are still visible on the walls, the ‘skin’ of the neighbourhood... from bullets stuck in walls dating back to the civil war, to political mottos and love notes inscribed on them, like tattoos... (personal interview, Athens, April 2013)

Looking into the social fabric of Exarcheia, the residential character of the area, combined with small-scale retail and alternative entertainment cultural spots provided for the development of vibrant cultures. As noted by a female local activist, the presence of many University Schools such as the Polytechnic as well as the presence of publishing houses, intellectuals and artists rendered this area a ‘fertile ground’ for the development of progressive politics and sub-cultures,

the people that live here are mainly lower middle-class, students, artists, public servants etc. Also due to the presence of the universities, this ‘atmosphere’ has created grounds for progressive thinking and political involvement. Exarcheia is part of the center but it is mostly residential; commercial activities are small-scale here like bars and cafes along with bookshops and publishing houses (personal interview, Athens, April 2013).

The time-spaces of this vibrant social and political activity are revealed through a walk around the neighbourhood. Despite the closing down of several small businesses due to the crisis, local meeting spots such as popular cafes concentrate most of the local social life. For example, the heart of all meeting spots on a Saturday morning is the open-air market on Kallidromiou street, a place where local activists choose to hang out, shop, give out leaflets, promote their campaigns and chat with passers-by on various issues. Surrounding cafes and local hangouts host afternoon discussions, often interrupted by people asking to know the specifics of upcoming social events and political actions. On Saturday evenings the neighbourhood is transformed to an alternative entertainment hub for Athens. The pavements, pedestrian walks and street corners of Exarcheia become meeting points for youth, who seek alternative hangouts and attend fundraiser concerts. Busy, vibrant, often overwhelmingly loud, Exarcheia often contrasts the decaying nearby city center areas, where withdrawal from public spaces due to the displacement of residents or fear of xenophobic racist attacks creates a sense of human absence. At the same time, this vibrant social and political lifestyle and the multiple events occurring on a weekly basis offer the opportunity of ongoing interactions among locals, as well as people who choose to spend time in the neighbourhood, as noted by a male activist from a local social center,

Exarcheia has been a center of resistance and struggle for years now... it is privileged space for political groups to address residents and visitors from across Athens; there are many events going on all the time (personal interview, Athens, April 2013).

The spatial convergence of contentious practices and activist cultures in Exarcheia has produced over the years a distinct geography of local groups currently active in the area (also see Chapter 4.3). As a female resident of Exarcheia and activist stressed, while place-specific, at the same time this activist geography of groups and collectivities reflects the multiplicities of activist cultures and political identities developed through the years in Athens and Greece, i.e. social centers, occupations of buildings, local committees, political organizations, leftist and anarchist political identities etc.

The concentration of groups, collectivities, movements and activism, has been formed over the years in Exarcheia, creating the current political dynamic... the double character of the area, a concentration of political activism and a neighbourhood at the same time, has been

historically sustained and reflects the multiplicities of the broad political dynamic within Greece (personal interview, Athens, April 2013).

Further, in identifying the ‘incubator’ effect of Exarcheia or how this distinct activist geography enabled past and present resistance practices to emerge, locally, across the city and nationally, several respondents mentioned two key events. Firstly, in June 2003- within the redevelopment framework taking place prior to the Olympic games of 2004- the local authorities decided to launch a renewal plan for the central Exarcheia square. This found widespread opposition from locals, i.e. anarchist social centers, residents, activists etc., who organized a series of coordination assemblies to block the plan, as this, according to respondents, aimed to transform the public character of the square to commercial uses and lay the path for real estate development in the area. In this regard, several actions and local demonstrations took place during which people re-claimed the square, organized events and denoted their opposition to the renewal through their physical presence for more than two months. These actions proved successful in the end, as the municipality decided to stop the renewal and the square remained an open public space. In discussing this successful local resistance to a regeneration policy, as opposed to other city center areas, where activist cultures are not prominent, a local Exarcheia activist mentioned that

regeneration policies which aimed to change the neighbourhood and the central square failed because they found resistance, as opposed to other city center areas such as Metaxourgeio [a currently gentrifying city center neighbourhood] (personal interview, Athens, April 2013).

Secondly, another more recent key event for the area was the killing of a teenage-boy by a police-officer in central Exarcheia in December of 2008. The riots that this event triggered not only spread outwards from Exarcheia, in numerous areas across Athens, but also occurred in other cities in Greece and found solidarity responses through protests organized in many countries across Europe, e.g. Germany, Turkey, Spain, Italy etc. As discussed in Chapter 5.3, the period after the riots and violent clashes with the police several local initiatives, occupations and social centers emerged in areas across Athens (Leontidou 2010), following a dispersal of resistance practices and activist know-how. As a female activist from Exarcheia stressed,

given that the boy was randomly killed here, he was not a resident...the intensity of the riots and what these left in the following period, would not have been made possible if the killing took place in another area... there was spontaneity, people took to the streets within a few hours... but the same evening coordination among local groups, students, activist from Athens, happened immediately... we organized open assemblies in Exarcheia, in the nearby university buildings [the Polytechnic and the Law School] (personal interview, Athens, January 2013).

The above reveal the ‘incubator’ character of the area, meaning that place-specific activist cultures developed historically in Athens city center and Exarcheia made possible local and broader resistance practices in the past. In further unpacking the role of ‘place’, i.e. location, locale and ‘sense of place’ (see Agnew 1987, Routledge 1993), within the emergence of resistance practices, section 6.4 addresses the possibilities and constraints these are faced with in Exarcheia.

#### **6.4. The Spatialities of Resistance in Exarcheia**

In further unpacking the role of Exarcheia as a ‘struggle community’, namely an ‘incubator’ of activist cultures and political ideologies and a resistance node for Athens, I will address how this neighbourhood shapes resistance practices and is shaped by these. In particular, I focus here on the role of ‘place’ within activist agency and resistance practices. In doing so, I draw on Routledge (1993) and the notion of ‘terrains of resistance’ to argue for an account of ‘place’ as crucial within the development of resistance practices in Exarcheia. In this sense, place is understood as multidimensional, acquiring the following meanings: first, location, i.e. the distinct geographical area of Exarcheia in relation to the city of Athens (also see section 6.3); second, locale, i.e. the setting where social relations are constituted such as proximate bonds, reciprocal relations and ongoing social interactions among activists and residents; and, third, ‘senses of place’, i.e. the symbols, interpretations, narratives and imaginaries attributed to this area by activists and locals (also see Agnew 1987). Also, I discuss the overlapping and, often conflicting, ‘spatialities of resistance’ (see Pile and Keith 1997, Routledge 1997) in Exarcheia and how these reveal the possibilities and constraints for local groups to pursue an expansive politics, both materially and discursively.

The historical convergence of movements in regard to the key location of city center areas of Athens and Exarcheia in particular, as well as the multiplicities of political ideologies present in the neighbourhood has produced a place-specific geography of local groups, collectivities and activist cultures, i.e. leftists, anarchists, autonomous, black-block anarchists, non-aligned activists etc. (also see section 6.3). Furthermore, the spatialities of these groups and their practices often overlap and intersect in the area, as some groups use the same physical sites and buildings to develop actions and tactics, i.e. social centers, occupations, rented spaces etc., while at the same time, public spaces, such as squares, pedestrian walks and streets are also utilized for the same purposes, e.g. the organization of open assemblies, public social events and local demonstrations and the circulation of information on actions etc. (see Figure 6.2).

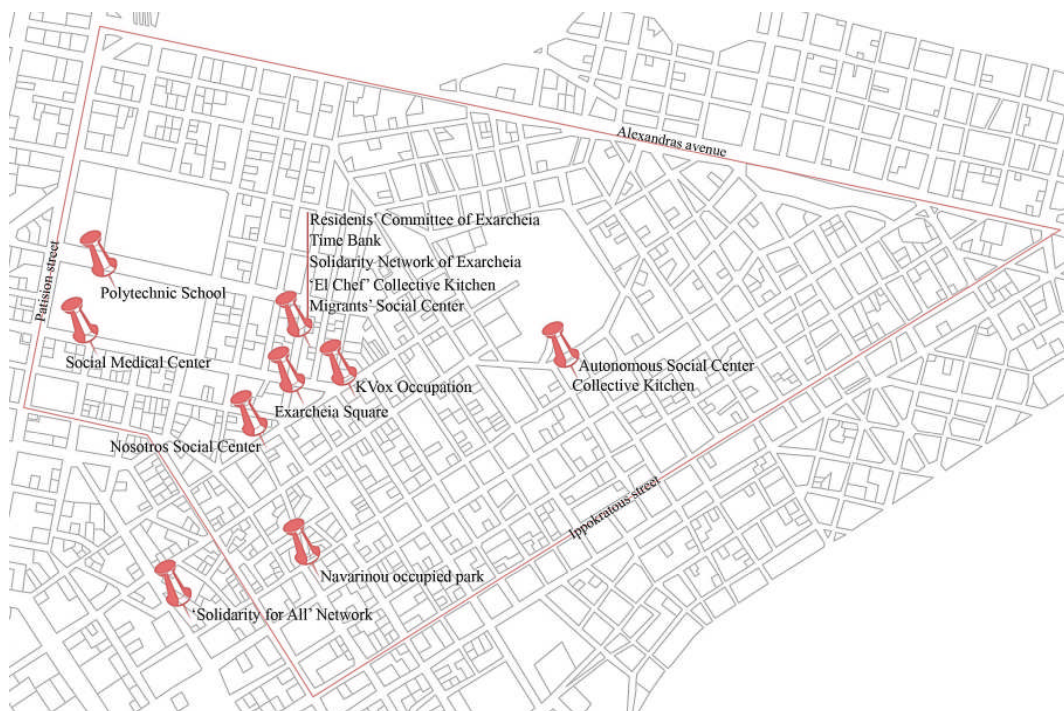


Figure 6.2. Locating activist groups and initiatives in Exarcheia, source: author

Additionally, these co-existing overlapping spatialities of local groups in Exarcheia not only involve the everyday interactions among activists in this locale, but also, in certain instances, the tactical co-operation with activists from across the city. For example, drawing on my field diary notes, in the phase of occupation evictions across city center areas initiated by police forces in January 2013, a local

Exarcheia coordination campaign among groups organized a demonstration in defense of a potential eviction of the KVox occupation, along with the contribution of activists and groups from across Athens:

The evictions of two of the oldest occupations in Athens city center, i.e. 'Villa Amalias' and 'Lela Karagianni' and the mass prosecutions of activists that followed, found responses by local groups and activists in Exarcheia, which raised the issue of showing their solidarity to occupations in their weekly assemblies. In highlighting the strategic role of Exarcheia as a resistance node for Athens and Greece, a female activist from the local residents' committee noted during today's assembly: "this coordination of actions is an opportunity to co-operate with the rest [local Exarcheia groups and activists] and show our solidarity to occupations in general... these actions do not necessarily presuppose political alignment among groups" (field notes, Residents' Committee assembly, Athens, January 2013).

Two coordinative meetings open to everyone from the area to participate took place in the Migrants' and Nosotros social centers and two main actions followed these: firstly a joint press conference, where activists publicly stated the crucial role of occupations and spaces of resistance for articulating anti-austerity politics and strengthening anti-fascist practices in neighbourhoods across Athens and, secondly, a local demonstration around Exarcheia in solidarity to the prosecuted activists and evicted occupations, with the participation of local groups, political parties and organizations of the Left (field diary notes, Athens, February 2013).

As the eviction of the KVox occupation was never attempted in the end and the social center continued operating in the building, the above showed both the central role of place-based everyday practices of local groups, political identities and know-how; as well as the physical sites of the area such as public spaces, and the spaces groups use for their actions in bringing together local activists, in order to coordinate and organize this short-term campaign. Further, as police repression against occupied spaces increased during that period, the coordinative actions among local groups, along with the contribution of individual activists from across Athens and the support by political organizations of the Left, revealed the crucial role activists attribute to Exarcheia, as a key spatial reference for resistance practices in Athens, and Greece.

The above overlapping spatialities of Exarcheia groups reflect the spatial grounding of domination and resistance practices (see Routledge 1996a), which also



generate conflict over uses and meanings of space among locals, groups and visitors from across the city, as well as between activists and police forces. These become particularly evident in the central Exarcheia square, an open public space constantly claimed by locals for everyday use and socializing, groups of young people who inhabit the square mainly during evenings, drug-traffickers and daily ‘visits’ by police forces, which often result in violent confrontations with activists. As a young male activist from Exarcheia noted,

this is not just a neighbourhood; it is also part of a metropolitan center and attracts people from everywhere... the central square is a reference point, a public space constantly ‘under siege’, everyone wants a piece of it! (personal interview, Athens, March 2013)

Subsequently, conflicting interests and identities of groups become evident through their physical presence in the square. For example while locals aim to use it as an everyday public space for socialization, visitors from across Athens alter this local character to entertainment activities in bars, cafes and restaurants surrounding the square. Also, raids by police forces in the square are often anticipated by counter-repressive tactics and violent clashes with activists. In regard to the latter, another young male resident of Exarcheia stressed the dialectic between dominating state power and resistance practices,

authority always imposes itself through repression; wherever there are enquiring minds and active people, there grows resistance... this dialectic between domination and resistance has found its specific expression here in Exarcheia and has created this nice ‘vineyard’ of activism! (personal interview, Athens, April 2013)

Therefore, this place-specific expression of domination and resistance involves, firstly, co-existence and co-operation, whereby contiguity and spatial proximity within this ‘ordered space of vines’ of local groups and activists generates common spaces of bottom-up resistance practices and actions against top-down state enforced oppression. These, according to Routledge (1996a), draw upon and simultaneously transcend place-based relations and ‘senses of place’, such as the campaign in defense of occupations discussed above. Secondly, dominating power, as an act of control and coercion, is not only located within the realm of the state, but also within the civil society and activist practices (see Routledge 1997). This entangled symbiotic relationship of domination and resistance (see Routledge 1997, Sharp et al. 2000) generates conflict among groups with divergent interests and

political identities, e.g. between drug traffickers and local groups claiming the main Exarcheia square.

Furthermore, the above geographies of domination and resistance draw on senses of place and spatial imaginaries and give rise to distinct spatialities and practices of resistance, often conflicting and often internally 'hybrid' (Pile and Keith 1997, Routledge 1997, Sharp et al. 2000). In further unpacking these and looking into the possibilities and constraints these practices hold for creating 'alternative political spaces to the ones defined by dominating power' (Pile and Keith 1997), I distinguish between practices, activist narratives and spatial imaginaries of Exarcheia groups that, on the one hand, seek to create 'liberated zones' from authority and oppressive power, and, on the other hand, aim to enhance community bonds through struggle and solidarity. As Exarcheia has been historically linked to activist cultures and subcultures, it has also been targeted by state repression and top-down rhetorics since the early 1980's. These top-down rhetorics have over the years created a place-specific imaginary of a 'no-go' area and a neighbourhood of constant 'unrest', further developed through mainstream media sensationalism. In discussing police repression tactics in Exarcheia, an old male resident and activist mentioned:

After the massive police raids during the 1980's there was a first attempt by some of us, a few residents to set up a local group and raise these issues... Alternative cultures and politicization always present in Exarcheia, have been twisted into a stereotype of social unrest, while, at the same time, the police have been fuelling a terror atmosphere among locals (personal interview, Athens, April 2013).

Subsequently, and as the state targeted Exarcheia as a space for repression tactics, the place-specific notoriety attributed to the neighbourhood generated a type of bottom-up defensive territorial politics, as police raids found responses by militant activists that often led to violent clashes with police forces. However, as a female member of the local residents committee highlighted,

the notoriety of a 'no-go' area attributed to Exarcheia is totally negative; the police cannot approach the square for example and this creates space for drug traffickers, possibly on purpose, so that in the aftermath, repression against activists, but not traffickers, can be justifiable! (personal interview, Athens, February 2013).

The top-down spatial imaginary of a 'no-go area' has been further perpetuated through bottom-up activist narratives around a 'liberated' or 'free' zone, a neighbourhood where the police are not welcome and where activists, mainly anarchists, created a free niche, a space where to discuss and practice politics outside the reach of the state. This imaginary also generated a certain type of alternative culture, which, according to a young male resident, has been, to an extent, incorporated into youth lifestyle and commercialized through nighttime entertainment:

We need to deconstruct the imaginary of a 'no-go' area, but not through building on another one of a 'liberated zone', which often becomes a lifestyle consumerist approach (personal interview, Athens, April 2013).

What is also stressed in the above quotes is the contradictory character of this imaginary, which reflects a vicious circle of constant reproduction of state repression and bottom-up counter-practices, which seek to establish a 'police-free' zone. However, not only do police raids in the central square and the broader area often occur, but also the area is constantly surrounded by riot police squads, which signify its geographical 'boundaries' and separate the area from the rest of the city center, as often noted down in my field diary:

Walking towards Exarcheia through the city center neighbourhoods, visible barriers of riot police tracks and heavily armed riot police officers surround the neighbourhood and create a feeling of an enclosed, constantly monitored space... This evening, the organized demonstration in memory of Alexandros Grigoropoulos [the teenager shot to death in Exarcheia in 2008 by a police officer] ended in Exarcheia and, soon enough, the riot police started clashing with activists... During the past week, the riot police patrolled through the streets and the central square, performed identity checks, intimidated locals and arrested activists, for no specific reason... The visibility of state power in Exarcheia saturates everyday life, as well as nighttime entertainment in bars and restaurants, with a generalized fear of repression and an imposed spatial enclosure... The locals seem to have exercised their reflexes; they have learnt to be in a constant state of alert; to expect the unexpected incident, which will later become the gossip of the day in local bakeries and convenience stores, cafes and activist hangouts (field notes, Athens, December 2012).

The above contradictions often generate tensions and disputes among local groups and activists, mainly on how to deal with incidents of police violence and repression, as well as drug trafficking problems. Certain activists and groups have at

times employed violent means to oppose repressive tactics, either through clashing with the police or pushing away drug addicts from the central square- the latter revealing a symbiotic relationship between exclusionary dominating practices against a specific group and activism (see Routledge 1997, Sharp et al. 2000). At the same time, other activists and groups chose to maintain a different approach to these issues, treating them as outcomes of broader ones and linking them with broader processes, i.e. the crisis and austerity measures, the democratic deficit in decision-making in local authorities etc. In conceptual terms, these contradictions, tensions and conflicts in Exarcheia can be understood as mutually constituted spatialities of both broader processes and discourses and place-specific practices and narratives (see Routledge 1993, 1996a). In particular, I suggest two conflicting imaginaries: first, the top-down imaginary of social ‘unrest’ that has been attributed to this neighbourhood, which has dominated the public discourse over the years, e.g. how this neighbourhood is discussed as unapproachable by outsiders and the state and has been reproduced by mainstream media and public officials as well as how people from the outside think of this area etc. This has been entwined with a type of ‘spatial enclosure’ imposed on Exarcheia through state repressive and disciplinary tactics, i.e. police forces surrounding and patrolling through the area constantly.

Secondly, this top-down imposed spatial enclosure is constantly contested by bottom-up activist practices, narratives and senses of place. On the one hand, these pertain to a spatial imaginary of a ‘free, liberated’ zone that operates outside the reach of the state. This imaginary generates a defensive politics that seeks to confront repression, often through violent means as discussed above. Also, this defensive politics, as stressed above by activists, often fails to problematize top-down discourses and sensationalist media approaches that depict Exarcheia as a bounded, ‘exceptional’ area, hence perpetuating the imposed spatial enclosure. Nevertheless, activist narratives and practices seek to subvert and overcome these spatial constraints imposed through oppressive power (Pile and Keith 1997) and create new meanings of place (Routledge 1997). These activist practices and narratives, in contrast to a defensive politics, seek to problematize the role of the neighbourhood within broader struggles, e.g. the place-specific outcomes of the crisis and austerity and how these can be contested locally, as well as an expansive

politics of how to open up resistance practices and connect to other groups in the area and beyond. In discussing how local groups seek to enhance community bonds among residents, activists, immigrants and visitors, through everyday practices of solidarity-building and political struggle, a young female activist who resides in Exarcheia mentioned that,

Exarcheia has a strong community character and this managed to keep the locals together in the face of the crisis, as opposed to other city center areas like Metaxourgeio [a gentrifying city center neighbourhood]... for example, the local residents' committee managed to go beyond bounded political identities and created a strong network of communication among residents, keeping things personal, something that goes beyond the typical city center everyday living culture (personal interview, Athens, April 2013).

In conceptual terms, the above shows how the neighbourhood is understood as a 'struggle community', namely a place where proximate social bonds are constructed for contesting austerity politics and producing alternatives e.g. resistance practices against specific policies and solidarity initiatives and structures that aim to address social reproduction needs. Within struggle communities, the spatial grounding of struggle becomes part and parcel of building on reciprocal relations, affinity bonds, place-based 'strong-ties' (Nicholls 2007, 2009) among residents and creating spaces for encounter and interaction among local groups, activists and residents.

### **6.5. Grounding 'Struggle Communities': The 'Exarcheia in movement' campaign**

As discussed in section 6.2, the occupation of Syntagma square acted as a 'moment' of spatial convergence for activists and several struggles in Athens and Greece, as well as an organic force within the development of contentious practices in neighbourhoods across the city in the following period, since 2011. The dispersal of organizational means, such as bottom-up organizing and participation in local assemblies, as well as the emergence of numerous solidarity initiatives across the city after the occupation ended, show how the neighbourhood level acquired a key role in grounding anti-austerity struggles. In unpacking the spatial politics of these struggles, I employ the notion of a 'struggle community' developed here in relation to a local campaign in Exarcheia, namely the 'Exarcheia in movement' campaign.

The notion of a ‘struggle community’ originates in a broader discussion around emerging contentious politics in Greece during the crisis, developed within the Autonomous social center assembly of Exarcheia and debated with activists from other groups in public events and discussions organized in Exarcheia. In particular, the notion of a ‘struggle community’ refers to individuals and collectivities i.e. activist groups, solidarity structures and initiatives, social centers, non-aligned activists and residents etc. that seek to build on place-based collective forms of (self)-organization, co-operation and solidarity relations so as to enhance social ties and effect struggle. Crucial within this conceptualization developed in activist assemblies are the strategic connections pursued among groups at the neighbourhood level, as well as links to distant actors through networking ‘from below’. These cooperation tactics and networking among solidarity structures, local groups and initiatives can be understood through what Chatterton (2005) termed ‘a politics of necessity’, i.e. the spatial practices of self-organization, cooperation, mutual trust and solidarity that serve as means to secure the survival of certain social groups and their social reproduction in the face of the crisis and austerity. In furthering the discussions that took place among activists in Exarcheia, the concept of ‘struggle communities’ is employed and developed in this thesis for two main reasons: First, it is a way to open up a dialogue between academic research and ongoing discussions and alternative knowledge produced *in the field* (also see Chapter 4.5) and to contribute to these ideas through producing constructive critiques and insights. Second, the notion of ‘struggle community’, in conceptual terms, interrogates the processual constitution of the neighbourhood as a community and broader relations and networks of struggle and solidarity that seek to connect to resisting others. In this sense, while grounded territorially, struggle and solidarity are constituted relationally and become connected to broader counter-austerity practices. Hence this concept is in contrast to an essentialist approach of a ‘community *of* struggle’ or a functionalist one of a ‘community *for* struggle’. The ‘struggle community’ notion accounts for the grounding of spatial practices of struggle and solidarity in a particular neighbourhood, i.e. Exarcheia, as well as broader articulations of alternatives to austerity across the city and beyond (what I discuss as an emerging ‘urban solidarity space’ in Chapter 7).

In regard to the above, I employ the example of the ‘Exarcheia in movement’ campaign, which took place in Exarcheia, between the spring and autumn of 2013 and was later transformed through further actions in the spring of 2014<sup>13</sup>. Starting as a local response of re-appropriating public space in the face of aggravating issues of neighbourhood decay, unemployment, social cannibalism, police repression and drug trafficking, ‘Exarcheia in movement’ sought to bring together local groups, non-aligned activists and residents and build on solidarity relations and reciprocal community bonds. Drawing on this campaign, this discussion aims to examine the agency of struggle communities; the processes of the formation of place-based solidarities and affinity bonds; and the co-operation and collective forms of organization among local groups and initiatives, and how these contribute to broader struggles. As the ongoing crisis and austerity is reshaping the city of Athens, homelessness, empty buildings and decaying public spaces in city center areas have become pressing issues for residents of Exarcheia and adjacent neighbourhoods, where the outcomes of austerity have become more intense over the past few years, as opposed to the more affluent areas of Athens, e.g. Kolonaki in the city center and the northern suburbs. In Exarcheia particularly, the issue of decaying public spaces, coupled with police repression and drug trafficking, as well as the growing unemployment, poverty and homelessness among residents, has caused several responses by locals. In the past, these issues have been contested through local campaigns that sought to re-appropriate public spaces, organize and reclaim the central square and pedestrian walks from redevelopment policies, repressive tactics of police raids and trafficking (see section 6.3). These actions involved local groups, social centers activists, residents and a few shop owners of the area, such as the local residents committee, the Nosotros and Autonomous social centers and individual activists from the occupied Navarinou park.

Following these, in March 2013 the local residents’ committee of Exarcheia initiated a new round of in-group discussions which led to the re-launch of a similar

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<sup>13</sup> Participant observation within this campaign involves the first two months of actions and events, between April and May 2013. However, I had the opportunity to acquire feedback and secondary material on actions that followed the end of fieldwork through blogs, email lists and informal contacts with activist-participants.

campaign in April 2013 focusing on reclaiming public spaces of the neighbourhood and re-signifying their use, from exclusionary practices that prevent the gathering, socialization and use of public space to creating and opening up new material and imaginary spaces for collective organizing. For example, open-air markets ‘without middlemen’ organized in the central Exarcheia square, as well as open discussions and social events. For the first actions of the campaign to be launched, initial contacts were made through personal networks of activists, overlapping members in more than one group and established relations to groups and individuals from past actions. This concentrated experience and know-how on setting up actions made possible the first contacts and a small network of groups was initially formed through an open assembly. This network involved the Residents Committee, the Solidarity Network, the Autonomous social center and activists from the Navarinou occupied park assembly. In the following period after the first meeting, open assemblies included new participants, such as residents and several shop-owners of the area, some of whom had participated in similar projects before, members from political organizations and individual activists from other local groups that were not officially involved so far. Most of the actions organized until the end of June 2013 and in autumn 2013 involved local demonstrations, putting up posters, handing out texts and leaflets and organizing outdoor activities e.g. concerts, theatrical plays, bazaars, exhibitions, public discussions etc. (see Figures 6.3 and 6.4). These actions had a two-fold goal: firstly, to reclaim public spaces through physical presence on a daily basis, lasting for a few hours mainly during the evenings; and, secondly, through these embodied interactions and encounters, and in response to the crisis, to strengthen community bonds among residents, activists, local groups and other civil society actors based in the area, such as school teachers’ local union branches, school clubs, local cultural groups etc.





Figure 6.3. Bartering bazaar in Exarcheia, Athens 2013, source: Solidarity Network of Exarcheia

In unpacking this campaign, three main topics were raised in several open assembly discussions among participants, as well as during interviews with activists. Firstly, the production of narratives that problematized the role of the neighbourhood within broader struggles; secondly, the strengthening of community relations and interactions among groups, such as solidarity initiatives, in order to initiate cooperation between projects; and, thirdly, the development of a culture of networking from below and participation in bottom-up initiatives.

First, considering the production of narratives, the main argument raised by several participants and activists was a departure from treating local issues as particular, but rather as outcomes of austerity, such as neighbourhood decay and public spaces degradation, increasing incidents of police repression, unemployment and poverty etc. For example, in discussing the goals of this campaign, a male activist from the residents' committee highlighted that

our task is to treat local issues as outcomes of the crisis and central government policies; for example the degradation of many city center areas, the collapse of several small businesses due to debt, violence, drugs etc. all these do exist in our neighbourhood but are not place-specific necessarily... our [the residents' committee] agenda has changed because we realize how the crisis has affected Exarcheia, as well as other areas. In this sense, new questions rose on how to work with other people in order to overcome the generalized fear and create resistance spaces across the city (personal interview, Athens, March 2013).

In conceptual terms, this spatial imaginary of the neighbourhood and the 'local' as mutually constituted with broader processes (Massey 1994, 2004) became a starting

point for subverting the spatial enclosure imposed on Exarcheia, discussed earlier in this chapter. Also, the above became discursive mechanisms and ‘scalar frames’ (Kaiser and Nikiforova 2008, MacKinnon 2010) that sought to link local issues to broader processes and suggested a potentially extensive politics, through the creation of ‘new meanings of place’ and ‘new resistance spaces’ (Routledge 1997).



Figure 6.4. Local demonstration in Exarcheia, Athens 2014, source: Solidarity Network of Exarcheia

Second, concerning strengthening community bonds and reciprocal relations, this became realized through actions and events organized in public spaces, such as the central Exarcheia square, pedestrian walks, Tsamadou and Themistokleous streets, the Navarinou occupied park etc.:

Earlier this evening, instead of the weekly meeting set up by the ‘Exarcheia in movement’ open assembly, a joint action of re-claiming the public spaces of the neighbourhood was organized by the residents’ committee, the solidarity network, the Autonomous social center and individual activists from the park and the area. For a few hours, the Themistokleous pedestrian walk hosted this social event, where activists and residents shared food, drinks and music, discussed issues of police repression and drug trafficking and sought to re-appropriate this street from drug traffickers in a peaceful way. Notably, as few of the traffickers were already hanging out on the street, they soon left after people started gathering up in small groups, having chats and socializing. During the party, many locals that came to participate were interested in finding out about further actions of this campaign, as they came to realize that this collective means of re-claiming public space actually worked in discouraging drug trafficking. Also, during this event, activists from the participant groups had the opportunity to circulate information on their projects, actions and goals and enlist people in the Exarcheia Time Bank (field notes, ‘Exarcheia in movement’, Athens, April 2013).

These types of spatial practices pursued in the following period of this campaign, such as social events, open discussions, movie screenings, bazaars etc. not only opened new spaces for locals and activists to come together and re-appropriate certain areas of the neighbourhood from fear and repressive tactics (see Figure 6.5), but also further promoted a culture of collective organizing from below. This involved the development of proximate bonds and trusting relations among participants, through the physical presence, ongoing encounters and face-to-face interactions in neighbourhood spaces.



Figure 6.5. 'Exarcheia in movement': Spaces of activism in Exarcheia, source: author

Additionally, these everyday interactions also promoted a growing culture of mutual aid and cooperation, which has been further enhanced through solidarity groups active in the area. As this campaign brought together activists, cooperation and trusting relations among groups developed through joint actions. For example, the participation of the autonomous cooking collective in the Time bank exchange of services, the increasing support of locals and activists towards 'without middlemen markets' organized at the central Exarcheia square, the joint organization of solidarity actions (e.g. the collection of goods and fundraisers, among the solidarity network, the autonomous social center, the residents' committee and individual activists) and the volunteering of time, resources and infrastructure for setting up actions etc. Through these practices, solidarity

structures, such as the Time bank, the solidarity network, cooking collectives and markets, have gained legitimacy among locals and became spaces for practicing a ‘politics of collective organizing and solidarity’ at the community, territorial level (Chatterton 2005).

As solidarity groups currently active in Exarcheia and across Athens and Greece, have been gradually gaining a central role within the development of this politics of mutual aid, reciprocity and cooperation in the face of the crisis, they also become spaces of experimentation with alternatives to austerity. These are not only developed at the territorial level of the neighbourhood and community, but seek to practice an expansive ‘prefigurative politics’ (Graeber 2002), which according to a young female activist from Exarcheia, can serve as a platform for social change beyond the neighbourhood:

Action takes places locally, but the organizational means we propose can act as a model on a broader level. It is a different way of organizing decision-making through horizontal structures, a different way of organizing the economy, food production etc... these are glimpses of another society we want to build. All these aim to cover for our needs but it is also a struggle for emancipation! Local groups popping up across Greece like mushrooms become a hope for the future...The government has declared an unjust war against its people, but at the same time there is another Greece which resists and we choose to resist this way! (personal interview, Athens, November 2012)

Hence, as argued by this activist, prefigurative practices pursued at the neighbourhood level aim to enhance “participatory ways of practicing an effective politics” (Routledge and Cumbers 2009: 93) and respond to immediate everyday needs. In addition to this, the neighbourhood becomes a site of experimenting with alternative means of organizing social and economic relations. In this sense, these practices developed at the ‘territorial’ level become entwined and overlap with the ‘social’ and ‘material’ levels (Chatterton 2005), i.e. collective organizing and the production of alternative knowledge through a social/ solidarity economy that prioritizes social needs over profit-making etc. (see Chapter 7.5). Further, within these overlapping levels, local groups and small initiatives experiment with several issues; for example, cooking collectives address food needs, while at the same time promote community bonds and the distribution of products without intermediaries in order to offer better quality goods, while at the same time bypass profit-making

etc. According to a male activist, the internal multiplicities within groups and initiatives can prove more effective in providing bottom-up constructed solutions to austerity in the long-term:

The crisis has urged transformations to the field of meeting everyday needs. The Autonomous Hangout assembly discusses these and at the moment we experiment with new structures, such as the collective kitchen, the organic products we offer coming straight from producers, the library and 'no-ticket-cinema' events among others. We focus on the neighbourhood as the primary site for promoting socialization through these structures, which try to provide with spaces of involvement for everyone...we try to set up structures and multiply them, a diaspora could create many pathways to social change and there cannot be just one solution. In this sense, I think that many answers to the same question can be more effective (personal interview, Athens, March 2013).

Third, another key issue the 'Exarcheia in movement' campaign brought forward was the engagement with bottom-up participatory politics and horizontal decision-making among groups and activists. This culture of networking 'from below' among the grassroots departs from traditional means of representation, membership and officially attributed roles within hierarchical structures, party and union politics, as highlighted by a female activist:

Horizontal networking, from below, requires the physical presence of the people; not contacts among political offices, leaders, through closed doors and telephone calls (personal interview, Athens, April 2013).

Hence, participation, physical presence, face-to-face interactions, informal and loose networking become the mediating mechanisms for establishing contacts among groups, individuals and actors. Also, digital and social media are often employed in order to invite activists to actions, disseminate information, ideas and material. In this regard, the specific campaign was made possible based on already established contacts among activists in Exarcheia during previous actions, acquaintances, affiliations to non-local groups and overlapping membership of activists within several local groups, projects and actions. For example, previous actions and campaigns organized among the residents' committee, the Autonomous social center, the solidarity network and other local groups have created a network of communication and interaction which permitted contacts, circulated the information on the goals of this campaign, brought in more participants and

enriched social events and open discussions organized in Exarcheia. This type of loose networking, according to a female activist, managed to open up spaces of communication between activists and groups from different backgrounds and political identities, which have been traditionally distanced, i.e. Left, leftists, anarchist, autonomous etc.:

While affiliated activists [to parties and organizations] do participate in local groups here, coordination of actions happened more easily amongst the grassroots, rather than among political organizations or parties (personal interview, Athens, April 2013).

At the same time, networking from below, cooperation among groups and the coordination of joint actions involved a series of debates, disputes and arguments raised during open assemblies of the campaign. Tensions mainly revolved around the suggested collaboration of this campaign with official organizations of the Left and Syriza, as a means to enhance pressure on local authorities to take action on local issues and publicize the campaigners' goals. These suggested a fear of co-optation and 'labelling' of autonomous, independent projects by party politics and official structures, which was mainly expressed by non-aligned activists participating in the assemblies. In the end, activists decided that collaboration with official organizations would become a barrier for people to step in and participate and that bottom-up organization would better serve their goals, as this campaign aimed to include in actions as many locals as possible. This extract from my field diary summarizes this process:

In today's 'Exarcheia in movement' open assembly, the key issue discussed among participants revolved around how to enhance the campaign, bring in more participants and organize effective actions. Activists affiliated to parties and organizations of the Left, i.e. Syriza (radical left coalition party) and Antarsya (extra-parliamentary radical, anti-capitalist left), proposed that the contribution of these political actors into local actions could possibly be helpful in, firstly, bringing in more resources and mobilizing more people and, secondly, opening up the issues of this campaign, i.e. public spaces, police repression etc., through elected members of Syriza and Antarsya, within municipal authorities and official meetings, hence putting pressure on the municipality to take favourable action... Tensions rose when non-aligned activists disagreed with these suggestions, arguing that the contribution of official political actors as such (as opposed to the participation of affiliated individuals which is rather common) would possibly result in the 'labelling' of this campaign under the influence of specific actors, as opposed to

remaining an autonomous, grassroots, independent endeavour among local groups and individual activists. According to a female activist who spoke within the assembly, this labelling could easily become a step towards the adoption of specific interests and agendas, which, in turn, would exclude some people from participating. This discussion revealed once again a generalized mistrust in representational politics, co-optation and manipulation tactics often pursued by elected officials. However, according to other activists, this reluctance to bring in political actors and call for their engagement with local politics has been a controversial issue for a long time and, in instances, has weakened the ability of grassroots movements to render these non-local actors accountable and employ their resources (field notes, 'Exarcheia in movement', Athens, April 2013).

Drawing on the above, these tensions arising within horizontal bottom-up organizing and networking from below attempts can be understood in conceptual terms through what Freeman (1970) called 'the tyranny of structurelessness'. In particular, while horizontal decision-making is pursued as a means to articulate bottom-up democratic politics, at the same time the individuals participating in such endeavours of cooperation and joint actions come from diverse backgrounds and hold various forms of political and cultural capital, e.g. contacts, affiliations, personal resources, knowledge, educational skills, expertise etc. Hence, tensions originate in the uneven positions that actors hold within horizontal formations (see Routledge and Cumbers 2009) and these reveal the informal or 'hidden hierarchies' (Freeman 1970) that lie within these projects (also see Chapter 7.7). However, the engagement in participatory politics and horizontal formations, as a result of the rejection of formal structures, also involves the constant negotiation of the personal as political. For example, activists choose to employ their personal affiliations and political capital to exert influence on groups' decisions, or in other cases, choose to negotiate and challenge their privileged position or political agendas. Therefore, horizontal formations, being dependent upon the specific dynamics and fluidity of participation in groups constantly become sites of struggle and negotiation of external and internal power relations (see Routledge and Cumbers 2009). In this sense, as I will further discuss in Chapter 7.7, these power relations and uneven positions of activists problematize horizontal formations and generate 'messy horizontalities' within networking logics.

To sum up, the 'Exarcheia in movement' campaign adds to our understanding of 'struggle communities' in the following ways: first, activists

produced key narratives that rendered struggle and solidarity practices grounded in the neighbourhood, e.g. dealing with local issues, and at the same time, connected these to broader counter-austerity politics, e.g. producing alternatives. Second, through this campaign activists enhanced and mobilized community relations and reciprocal bonds in order to promote cooperation locally, among groups and structures, as well as links to distant groups. Third, in grounding the bottom-up participatory culture that emerged in the post-Syntagma occupation period, networking ‘from below’ revealed the strengths and failures of horizontal connections among the grassroots, i.e. enhanced interactions based on egalitarian participation but also informal hierarchies that generated ‘messy horizontalities’ in the process.

#### **6.6. Concluding Remarks: Conceptualizing ‘Struggle Communities’**

Drawing on the ‘Exarcheia in movement’ campaign and conceptualizations and discussions held among activists in Exarcheia, I have developed the account of ‘struggle communities’. Firstly, reflecting the new culture of bottom-up articulations of democratic politics that emerged through the Syntagma occupation and worldwide mobilizations at the time, localized initiatives across Athens and Greece became key agents in fostering grassroots collective organizing attempts. In this sense, the neighbourhood level is understood as a key contestation level within contentious politics and responses to austerity. In the case of Exarcheia in particular, the historicity of this area within the development of activist cultures and social movements has rendered the neighbourhood an internally multiple ‘terrain of resistance’ (Routledge 1992, 1993, 1996a) and struggle over the years. In this regard, the role of ‘place’ within activist agency, understood as location, locale and ‘sense of place’ (see Agnew 1987, Routledge 1993) revealed how Exarcheia enabled resistance practices to emerge, acting as an ‘incubator’ of activist cultures, social interactions and community bonds, as well as place-specific narratives and imaginaries attributed to this area. Additionally, in Exarcheia state repression tactics have been confronted by bottom-up resistance practices. These practices, in articulating distinct, often overlapping and, at times conflicting, spatialities reveal on the one hand, the limitations for resistance and struggle to emerge (e.g. the top-



down discourse of a 'no-go' area and the spatial enclosure of Exarcheia and ongoing police repressive tactics) and, on the other hand, the possibilities that resistance practices hold for subverting and creating alternative spaces from those defined by oppressive power (Pile and Keith 1997, Routledge 1997) (e.g. the development of struggle and solidarity in and beyond the neighbourhood).

Secondly, the production of narratives and practices by activists problematize enclosed meanings of 'place' and the 'local' and reveal a move towards the mutual constitution of struggle and solidarity within the neighbourhood and broader attempts to produce alternatives to austerity, i.e. a social/ solidarity economy. Hence, as discussed through the 'Exarcheia in movement' campaign, local issues are treated as outcomes of austerity politics and activists seek to open up new resistance and cooperation spaces so as to practice a more effective politics. This involves the grounding of struggle at the territorial level of the neighbourhood, perceived of as a 'struggle community', and the development of proximate reciprocal community bonds through physical presence and everyday face-to-face interactions. Nevertheless, while struggle and solidarity are grounded in the neighbourhood, this account of 'community' is not conceptually self-enclosed in the spatial scale of the neighbourhood, rather relationally constituted to broader counter-austerity struggle. In discussing the process of constituting struggle communities, a female activist from Exarcheia employed the following metaphor:

Imagine that we are seeds and plants; in order to grow and sustain the wind we need some kind of support, a backbone. If formal unions provide this backbone it is rotten. If a political party imposes it, then it will sustain us up until the party decides so. Hence, the way is to change the ways through which we develop as plants... to throw our twigs at each other and grab, sustain each other. This metaphor, in practicing politics, means creating a collective consciousness... however, this process does not come without arguments; it can become a violation to the next person you reach to... but a sense of self-sufficiency bears pride and prejudice, which is a major threat for all these new radical and vibrant projects (personal interview, Athens, April 2013).

This metaphor makes two key arguments regarding the constitution of struggle communities. First, the urgency of practicing a politics of solidarity, mutual aid and cooperation in the face of austerity and in response to meeting everyday social reproduction needs within the neighbourhood. In turn, this 'politics of necessity'

(Chatterton 2005) and survival tactics generate a 'politics of resourcefulness' (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012), whereby activists and groups overcome political distancing and senses of self-sufficiency and purposefully engage in a process of cooperation, sharing and circulation of resources in order to effect their goals and meet social reproduction needs. Second, the rejection of traditional means of representation, i.e. union and party politics, as either corrupt, or hierarchically structured, hence less democratic, and the pursuit of collective organizing through bottom-up horizontal formations. As the activist noted, however, this is not necessarily an easy process, rather it becomes a site of struggle in itself as it involves a type of 'violation', challenge and negotiation of individual identities, which is often expressed through tensions and arguments.

Third, in discussing the practices employed in the process of constituting struggle communities in an open discussion organized in the Autonomous social center, in March 2013, in Exarcheia, several activists stressed the key role of the territorial, physical terrain, i.e. the neighbourhood, for promoting self-organization and struggle through local groups, solidarity structures and initiatives. In this sense, the territorial level of struggle becomes entwined with the broader social level (see Chatterton 2005), i.e. new ways of socialization, mutual trust, solidarity-building and shared decision-making that focus on collective forms of organizing the community and serve as alternatives in the face of austerity politics that produce precarity, hopelessness and 'self-reliant' individuals. Also, as austerity politics have precipitated survival issues for vulnerable social groups, the material level of social reproduction was discussed as highly important in producing practical solutions in 'the here and now', i.e. solidarity structures, aiming to bring together broader social and political groups on the basis of 'necessity', rather than political ideology. Regarding these overlapping practices at the territorial, social and material levels, a female activist mentioned that:

the constitution of struggle communities needs a terrain but also a political space for building on common material interests... within this [space] our practices are both the medium and the outcomes through which we fulfill our existence...these practices create a new agency, which is not an individualistic or a narcissistic one, but a collective agency instead... one that encompasses a creative relation between *my* needs and *our* needs...one that originates in the needs of

a community and serves these needs (personal interview, Athens, April 2013).

What is stressed above is an account of struggle and solidarity practices as both the means and ends to social empowerment and emancipation, through a participatory 'prefigurative politics' (Graeber 2002). For example, the practices of a community cooking collective, not only aim to serve the needs of food for the people involved, but also suggest a critique and a different approach to this basic need, i.e. they also problematize the quality of food, how it is produced, the potential exploitative relations within these means of production and distribution, and address issues of 'who is the expert' in this process, thereby negotiating the 'client-employee' relationship in the food consumption industry etc.

Therefore, conceptually, the relations built through these practices, through proximate embodied interactions, are mobilized in pursuit of struggle and alternatives or new paradigms. Regarding these alternatives, the practices and tactics of activists pertain to an autonomous politics, outside capitalist state structures and power; in other cases, activists strategically engage with state power so as to effect social empowerment and change. These divergent ideological positions have produced different experiments with solidarity structures and initiatives. However, the co-existence of these political stances within grassroots groups and the occasional co-operation between them on a pragmatic tactical basis reveals how such strategies are not necessarily mutually exclusive and can act complementary to each other in pursuit of social empowerment and change (see Wright 2010). Additionally, within the agency of 'struggle communities' what is key is the processual constitution of structures and initiatives, at the neighbourhood level, and the social and material relations built among them that are mobilized so as to circulate ideas, knowledge, material resources and means of reproduction. This understanding pertains to Zibeche's (2010) account of 'communities in movement', i.e. the dense reciprocal bonds and relations that are mobilized so as to disperse state power and generate new radical imaginaries. However, while Zibeche (2010) argues for an overarching paradigm that operates outside state structures and capitalist relations, I suggest here an understanding of 'autonomy as a process' (Bohm et al. 2010), rather than an end-state, which accounts for the multiple, 'porous' and co-existing alternatives that often employ self-organization practices

while at the same time directly or indirectly engaging with state institutions, e.g. solidarity structures operating through self-organization in neighbourhoods often contribute participants and resources to union general strikes and workplace struggles.

Finally, this type of ‘in, against and beyond the state’ politics is understood, not as a monolithic response to austerity, but as multiple practices grounded in ‘struggle communities’, through e.g. solidarity initiatives, local groups, alternative economy experiments etc. As these produce immediate responses to social reproductions needs, they also seek to create alternatives to austerity, through formations of a social/ solidarity economy. At the same time, these locally- based groups and initiatives connect to national mobilizations and broader anti-austerity movements, through the organization of joint actions and campaigns and the multiple positions of key activists that facilitate networking. These are unpacked through the notion of an ‘urban solidarity space’ in Chapter 7.

## **7. Survival Tactics, Alternatives to Austerity and Strategies of Social Empowerment in Athens, Greece: Constituting an ‘Urban Solidarity Space’**

### **7.1. Introduction**

Complementary to the discussion on ‘struggle communities’ developed in Chapter 6, this chapter focuses on the constitution of place-based solidarities and alternatives to austerity, as well as broader strategies of social empowerment and change. These are conceptualized through the notion of an ‘urban solidarity space’, whereby self-organization, mutual aid and solidarity practices grounded in Athenian neighbourhoods become entwined with survival and cooperation tactics that expand horizontally across the city of Athens and beyond. This expansive ‘urban solidarity space’ also encompasses alternatives to austerity, through the formation of a social/ solidarity economy, as well as links to broader counter-austerity politics. In extending our understandings of the operation of grassroots globalization networks, perceived of as ‘convergence spaces’ by Routledge and Cumbers (2009), I suggest that the constitution of an urban solidarity space in Athens reveals an inverted account of the spatial politics of these: first, as bottom-up articulations of contestation and networking ‘from below’ unfolding across the city; and second, as an inversion of the scalar imaginary of grassroots networks, articulated in a bottom-up fashion and diffused across horizontal formations of struggle and solidarity.

In unpacking the above processes, first, I draw on Featherstone (2012) to unpack the role of solidarity- as a relation forged ‘from below’ and through political struggle - in generating social and political relations and spaces that challenge austerity politics; this also involves the development of counter-narratives or ‘collective visions’ (see Routledge and Cumbers 2009) of solidarity vis-a-vis dominant interpretations and practices of ‘charity’. Second, I focus on solidarity practices employed within spaces such as solidarity initiatives and structures and their contribution to survival and cooperation tactics among local groups and activists, perceived of as a ‘politics of necessity’ (Chatterton 2005), in the face of austerity. Third, I discuss how solidarity structures become spaces for experimenting with alternative economic and social relations and the formation of a social/ solidarity economy. As an ‘urban solidarity space’ emerges at the

intersecting levels of the neighbourhood, social relations and alternative economies, it becomes linked to broader ‘strategies of social empowerment and change’ that contest state power and institutions (see Wright 2010). Fourth, through a coordination campaign around housing taxes, I show how these cooperation tactics and networking from below unfolds across Athens and develops links to broader actors and anti-austerity movements. Finally, through these, I discuss the possibilities and limitations for the development of spatially extensive political action (see Routledge and Cumbers 2009) in the face of austerity politics and uneven configurations of power among actors involved.

## **7.2. Grassroots Responses to the Crisis: From Austerity to Urban Solidarity**

Looking into the continuities of urban struggles unfolding in Athens and Greece, post-Olympic games mobilizations opposed redevelopment policies implemented across areas in Athens, while the widespread riots that erupted in Exarcheia in 2008 and spread across the city initiated contestation around issues of ‘urban justice’ and ‘urban democracy’ (see Chapter 5.3). At the same time, recent transformations in grassroots responses that austerity politics have triggered can be traced back to the occupation of Syntagma square in 2011 and the squares’ movement unfolding across cities in Greece, alongside worldwide mobilizations and occupations of squares occurring at the time, e.g. the ‘Occupy’ movement (see Chapter 6.2). In particular, the Syntagma occupation assembly managed to politicize the crisis and austerity politics, as it contested representational politics and decision-making, (e.g. the voting of austerity ‘packages’) through demanding ‘real democracy’ and, at the same time, practicing ‘direct democracy’ at the occupation. After the forced eviction of the occupation, this new culture of articulating bottom-up democratic politics was dispersed in the following period across neighbourhoods in Athens, where numerous local popular assemblies and initiatives emerged.

Alongside older local groups existing for the past decade, the spatial distribution of new initiatives across areas in Athens is rather dynamic, as new groups are constantly being formed, while others stop being active. In general, these range from residents’ committees; social centers; occupations of buildings;

solidarity initiatives and structures, such as community cooking collectives; Time banks; barter and exchange markets; and social medical and pharmacy centers etc. An indicative record of local groups currently active provided through the ‘Solidarity for All’ networks’ platform, a national networking initiative by Syriza, shows more than 300 solidarity initiatives and structures operating across Athens, suburban areas of Athens and Greece (see Figure 7.1). Especially in regard to the city center areas of Athens, where there is a significant concentration of solidarity initiatives, local groups draw on the neighbourhood level so as to organize collective forms of resistance and solidarity to the newly marginalized by austerity politics (e.g. the unemployed and precarious workers, the homeless, immigrants etc.) while at the same time experimenting with alternatives to austerity, such as a social/ solidarity economy. In conceptual terms, this ‘politics of necessity’ (Chatterton 2005) is practiced at the territorial, social and material levels of the social reproduction of large parts of the city’s population and strives to produce alternatives to precarity, guilt, humiliation, hopelessness and individualization, through collective forms of organization and socialization, acting as a means for social empowerment.

Based on the above, the transformations within urban struggles that ‘austerity politics’ (Peck 2012) have precipitated can be understood as a move beyond articulating ‘collective consumption demands’, around issues of the social reproduction of urban populations in housing, public services and infrastructure, as in the cases of past ‘urban social movements’ (Castells 1977, 1983), to dealing with social reproductions needs, through survival tactics. The national governments of the past few years in Greece have strategically re-directed funds from welfare, public services, infrastructure and assets to banks’ bailouts, in order to meet the needs of loaning agreements enshrined in ‘memoranda’ signed with the European Union, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. This qualitative transformation of welfare and social provision has created a ‘void’ of social reproduction, within which emerging forms of collective organizing, struggle and solidarity strive to cover people’s immediate needs, acting as a ‘buffer’ for precarity and marginalization and at the same time proposing alternative ways of organizing the economy and social relations. Conceptualizing these as they unfold spatially, I employ the idea of an emerging ‘urban solidarity space’ that develops at

the intersecting levels of the neighbourhood, social relations and alternative economies, while at the same time linking to national anti-austerity mobilizations (e.g. defensive workplace struggles) and actors (e.g. political organizations and parties of the Left) as well as emerging European movement alliances.

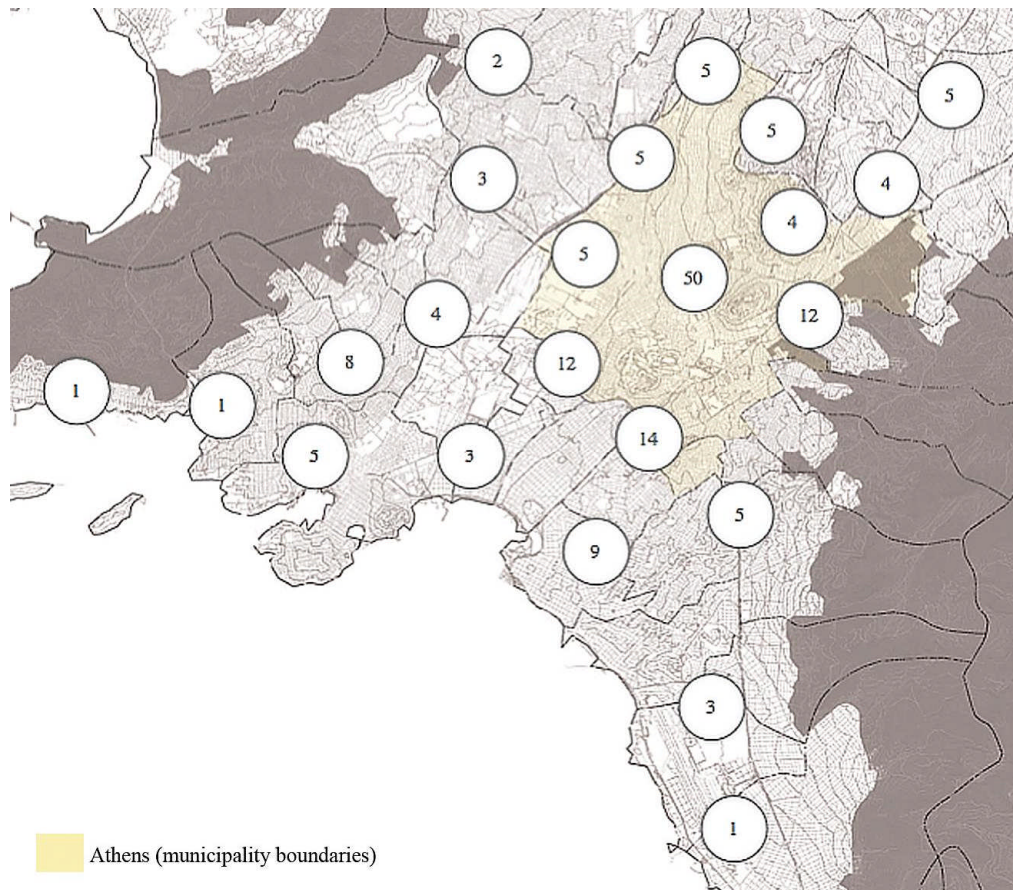


Figure 7.1. Solidarity structures and initiatives across Athens and Attica, 2014  
source: author (record of groups: Solidarity for All Network)

### 7.3. Solidarity Narratives and Solidarity Practices ‘From Below’

In unpacking the socio-spatial relations that constitute and are constituted through ‘urban solidarities’, this section discusses the meanings activists attribute to their practices of ‘solidarity’. The articulation of such narratives through bottom-up initiatives is considered important in serving as a means for producing alternative knowledges that challenges dominant austerity and charity discourses. As debated throughout Chapter 6, the emergent culture of bottom-up organizing within neighbourhoods, or ‘struggle communities’, involves the forging of proximate relations of mutual trust and aid based on ongoing interactions. As several activists



noted during a Time bank social event in Exarcheia, “bottom-up grassroots solidarity is about support, exchange and participation” (field notes, Time bank assembly, Athens, December 2012). This conceptualization interprets solidarity as a relation forged ‘from below’ and a practice of support and sharing, ‘*from the grassroots to the grassroots*’, or, as a female activist from the Solidarity network of Exarcheia noted:

Solidarity is about understanding the other, getting them activated and involved; it is also about relating to others and their needs, to feel able to give support and receive support (personal interview, Athens, February 2013).

These resonate with Featherstone’s (2012: 5) account of solidarity as “a relation forged through political struggle which seeks to challenge forms of oppression”. The type of solidarity discussed above involves a ‘politics of necessity’ (Chatterton 2005), based on pragmatic survival tactics, which aims to ‘activate’ people and mobilize them and includes the potential of becoming a ‘transformative relation’ (Featherstone 2012) and a powerful motivation for political struggle.

Further, activists in Athens define ‘solidarity’ as commonality, or in other words the mutual sharing of common problems and goals entwined with the development of reciprocal bonds. These narratives create common goals in dealing with common issues, through common practices. According to Routledge and Cumbers (2009: 93), these narratives are understood as ‘collective visions’ (i.e. solidarity versus charity) able to generate ‘mutual solidarities’ among activists and movements. Regarding these, a young female activist from the Solidarity network of Exarcheia stressed that,

through the ways we practice solidarity we want to emphasize our common destiny, being together against a common enemy... ‘Solidarity’ is also used by mainstream state institutions, as charity performed through the church, media, supermarkets, companies etc. This is a twisted perception but we won’t stop practicing solidarity just because they are using it for their own purposes! (personal interview, Athens, January 2013).

Additionally, the key distinction between ‘solidarity’ and ‘charity’ evident in the quote above aims to politicize and empower activists in challenging oppressive relations. Conceptually, ‘solidarity’ as practice and relation forged from below aims to motivate and activate people in order to participate in political struggle, while

‘charity’, or ‘philanthropy’, signifies ‘a disembodied caring from a distance’ and support to ‘exoticized’, or ‘distant others’ (Featherstone 2012: 36, 37). As the activist stressed, the production of alternative narratives and practices to the dominant ones (i.e. charity currently performed in Athens by the church, media and corporate organizations, see Figure 7.2) is crucial for deconstructing the de-politicized normative perceptions of charity and the perpetuation of stigma and victimization that are attributed to the recipients of support.



Figure 7.2. "All together, we can! ... fill this basket", Charity poster (signed by retail, media and church organizations), Athens 2013, source: author

Moreover, charity targets ‘vulnerable’ individuals and social groups and perpetuates power relations; for example the donor of charity assumes a position of power and reaffirms this through the very practice of donating, whereas the recipient of charity assumes the role of the ‘weaker’ person, ‘in need of support’. Hence, charity practices perpetuate uneven power relations, in that they disempower recipients of support from challenging oppressive relations. Indeed, while also ‘mutual solidarities’ can be constructed through uneven power relations (Routledge and Cumbers 2009, Featherstone 2012), their transformative power also lies in their potential to challenge, subvert and destabilize them. According to a young female activist from the Time bank of Exarcheia, contesting power relations

means transforming the ‘passive’ recipient of support into an ‘active’ participant of struggle:

Solidarity is about building relations among equals; we strive to mobilize people as active participants, not as mere recipients of services (personal interview, Athens, November 2012).

In the case of the Time bank of Exarcheia and the exchange of services among participants, even though the people involved are not necessarily ‘equals’, in terms of social, political or cultural capital, framing their practices through commonalities, common destinies and goals, they seek to contest power relations and assume more egalitarian positions for all participants (see Figure 7.3).



Figure 7.3. "No home to the state-banks, housing–electricity–water for all", Solidarity campaign poster (signed by the coordination of groups across Attica), Athens 2013, source: Solidarity Network of Exarcheia

However, the solidarity and support they provide to precarious, marginalized and vulnerable groups aiming to activate and mobilize them, often falls short due to a lack of material resources, as well as the intervention of powerful actors that perform charity, aiming to incorporate voters or promote their agendas (e.g. ‘Greeks-only’ soup kitchens and aid often provided by the far-right Golden Dawn party). Concerning these, a male activist from the Solidarity network of Exarcheia stressed that,

solidarity is about accepting the other as equal, in the sense of acknowledging that any minute I could be in an even worse position than theirs. Material help is crucial for people to escape depression;

many have given up trying... we have to activate them, otherwise... we have placed action at the forefront, we believe that through action we can overcome this situation... without taking action what is surrounding us at the moment will inhabit us and, if this happens, we will die inside... In practical terms, we re-connect electricity, gather food and clothes... A family we dealt with recently, the mother had given up... she suffers from depression and has two young kids. We tried to support her materially and psychologically too... but we can help up to a certain point unfortunately... To my shock, I have witnessed many cases like this one. Sometimes I think, we are not capable of dealing with all of them... Right now, it is really intense; the crisis is more than evident in our lives... What is sad is that some of the people in need become victims to charity and controlled in this way by the authority. The woman I mentioned before has been also approached by Golden Dawn members... They go after people who have given up, the same victims of their own policies, seeking to get their vote! We want to help people stand back on their feet and resist this victimization by the authority and its thugs (personal interview, Athens, January 2013).

At the same time, in other cases of people that receive practical support for the first time, such as direct action tactics of reconnecting the electricity in poor households, this type of solidarity practices are able to generate new perceptions, especially for participants not previously involved in political action, as a female activist, member of the Solidarity network of Exarcheia noted:

For people who have received support by practical strangers, as in cases of electricity power reconnections we have pursued, I think it was decisive in changing their perception on solidarity practices during the crisis ever since (personal interview, Athens, February 2013).

This suggests that these practices actively contribute to the creation of 'new ways of relating' (Featherstone 2012: 5) to others and the world and become transformative relations for participants, both donors and recipients of support. And, in this sense, solidarity does not necessarily presuppose likeness or similar political identities among participants. Rather it can be understood as constitutive of a 'relational identity formation', in the process of struggle (Featherstone 2012). Additionally, looking into how this is made possible, solidarity-building as a practice from below heavily relies on contributing time, effort and resources on campaigns and actions. These time-consuming experiences contribute to the building of mutual trust, through repeated frequent interactions and the sharing of demanding tasks, e.g. manual labour. These processes depend on spatial proximity e.g. everyday contact,

weekly meetings, activities that bring together people and their conceptual tools and involve the solving of practical issues. Regarding this ongoing processual construction and negotiation of activist identities within solidarity practices and collective work, a male activist from Exarcheia noted that:

Working together with someone is different than debating in an audience. Common actions are amazingly challenging and demanding; they create common grounds for communication and, at the end of the day, political identities i.e. anarchist, leftist do not even matter as such (personal interview, Athens, February 2013).

Finally, solidarity practices among individuals, groups and communities potentially serve as both material and discursive mechanisms for re-configuring social relations and generating spaces for emancipatory struggle. According to a female activist from the Time bank of Exarcheia, solidarity can act as a powerful driving force towards struggle for social change:

We choose to define solidarity as intertwined with resistance and struggle for social change and we want this notion of social change to spread... Solidarity is not the solution to the crisis; the solution is the collapse of capitalism, but in the meantime we need to get people to the streets, to occupy workplaces and join our struggle for political emancipation till the end! (personal interview, Athens, November 2012)

In this sense, solidarity practices that aim to ‘activate’ and ‘mobilize’ participants can produce active political agents of broader struggles for social change, e.g. anti-austerity, anti-capitalist, anti-neoliberal movements. Hence, solidarity, as argued by Featherstone (2012), in shaping contestation and being a mechanism in the process of politicization, acts as a ‘generative’, ‘inventive’ force of political relations and articulations of struggle. In order to look into the various solidarity practices employed by activists, the next section discusses these through different types of local initiatives and structures currently active in Exarcheia and Athens.

#### **7.4. Solidarity Initiatives and Structures: Building on Survival Tactics and Alternatives to Austerity**

In identifying solidarity practices, this section discusses these through a categorization of the various groups and initiatives currently active across

neighbourhoods in Athens. Within the discussion developed in the previous section, activist narratives developed around such practices revealed a key conceptual distinction between ‘solidarity’ and charity’. In addition to this notion of solidarity, defined as a way of relating to others based on common needs and aspirations of social change, solidarity is also employed in order to frame activity developing around alternative economic practices. This type of activity is organized through what activists term ‘solidarity structures’, including groups that experiment with non-monetary or alternative currency exchanges, such as Time banks and barter markets; initiatives that seek to bypass the role of intermediaries in processes of distribution of goods, such as the ‘without middlemen’ producers/ farmers markets; community cooking collectives that organize food consumption collectively; and co-operatives mainly organized around services, such as bars, cafes and restaurants, that seek to prioritize collective needs over profit-making. In discussing the role of newly formed solidarity groups across Athens in promoting alternatives to austerity and opening up new political spaces, a male activist from Exarcheia stressed:

Each structure, given the small scale of the neighbourhood, creates a model, an example of encounter and solidarity *in practice*. Solidarity initiatives emerging in Athens at the moment open up new political spaces, towards possibilities beyond the traditional party and union politics (personal interview, Athens, March 2013).

Therefore, we can distinguish between, firstly, local initiatives that employ survival tactics and mutual aid, or in other words a ‘politics of necessity’ (Chatterton 2005) in order to deal with everyday basic needs of impoverished groups, e.g. the gathering and distribution of food, clothing and basic goods; the provision of primary health treatment for the unemployed, uninsured and immigrants through social medical and pharmacy centers etc.; and, secondly, groups and structures that experiment with alternatives to austerity, at the social and economic levels, seeking to form a ‘social/ solidarity/ co-operative’ economy. Within both of these broadly defined categories of groups, we can also identify ‘multiple overlapping contentious practices’ (Leitner et al. 2007) including direct action and participation in protests, rallies and strikes; legal action and links to civil rights advocacy groups; the production of alternative knowledge and narratives; and the experimentation with alternative means of organizing social and economic relations (also see Chapter 4.3).

At the same time, another distinction among solidarity initiatives and groups is made on the basis of their politics and broader strategies they pursue for social change (see Wright 2010). These adhere to the various political imperatives, ideologies and traditions developed historically within social movements and broader political actors in Greece, i.e. parliamentary Left, revolutionary Left, anarchist, autonomous etc. These political cultures, while not necessarily strictly defined within grassroots groups, as participants come from various backgrounds and ideologies, broadly define the goals of solidarity initiatives and structures. In this regard, several of these groups employ self-organization and autonomy from party politics and, at the same time, develop working relations with political actors, such as the party of Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left). These relations and links vary and include direct funding through party members, communication and exchange of information and joint actions, such as solidarity economy festivals and open discussions.

For example, in cases of social medical and pharmacy centers, such as the one based in Exarcheia, medical treatment is provided through volunteering, while Syriza party members directly provide funding. Also, in many cases of co-operatives, participants combine self-organization and self-management along with making use of recently voted legislation around setting up ‘social enterprises’, as part of a ‘social economy’ EU framework. The ‘Solidarity for All’ network based in Exarcheia and set up by Syriza has been actively contributing expertise on how to employ this legislation in setting up a solidarity structure, while at the same time operating as a facilitator for communication among solidarity groups active across Athens and Greece. Further, other groups, mostly of anarchist and anti-authoritarian background, reject the engagement with formal state institutions, government and EU funds and party politics. These groups, in seeking to retain autonomy vis-à-vis the state, perceive the expansion of solidarity structures, often termed ‘anti-structures’, as a process of gradual replacement of state institutions. In discussing the rejection of formal state institutions, funds and connections to party politics, a young male activist from the anarchist KVox occupation in Exarcheia mentioned:

We do not receive funding and this is integral to our political stance, but it does make it more difficult to sustain such projects in practical terms... we think of anti-structures as the means to effect social change; they are not the goal per se... At the moment, solidarity

groups have different tactics, strategies and political orientations. They need to connect and create a broad social front based on common political goals (personal interview, Athens, April 2013).

Therefore, without seeking to set up permanent bureaucratic structures, the issue of promoting a cooperation strategy ‘from below’ among grassroots initiatives, so that they become more effective and sustainable, becomes central. In particular, the example of the Time bank of Exarcheia (see Chapter 5.4.2), a solidarity project recently set up by the residents’ committee of Exarcheia, shows how self-organization is employed at the neighbourhood level, along with the contribution of participants’ material and non-material resources, to create a type of local social economy. In this regard, the Time bank serves as a resource ‘pool’ of skills, (professional) expertise, knowledge, time and effort, through which participants exchange services without money, but rather based on time taken to perform tasks. This project, which mainly operates through an online platform, where exchanges among participants are recorded and credited, mainly aims to provide for a local alternative to rising unemployment. Hence, people with expertise and skills on various issues are able to put these into circulation, creating a form of local economy which bypasses the use of money. Also, apart from addressing pragmatic needs and acting as an immediate relief for unemployed people with no income yet plenty of time on their hands, the Time bank promotes an inclusive space of self-empowerment and mutual trust, as opposed to widespread fear and helplessness that are often channeled through xenophobic or racist practices in city center areas of Athens. In discussing this two-fold role of the Time bank as a locally based solidarity structure and part of a broader social economy strategy, a female activist and member of the group noted that,

the Time Bank acts as a way to overcome fear and ‘divide and rule’ tactics which make people hate the others... we do not want helpless people to address the Golden Dawn and ask for favours. Through the Time Bank everyone can ask for support on specific issues and this aims to contribute to building on trust and solidarity among locals (personal interview, Athens, November 2012).

Further, this type of local economy that mobilizes resources in order to produce survival tactics and, at the same time, contribute to broader alternatives, i.e. social/ solidarity economy, involves the cooperation with several other local and non-local actors. For example, the Time bank exchange of services local network



involves a range of groups and activists, e.g. the Autonomous social center, the Solidarity network of Exarcheia, the Navarinou occupied park etc. These groups hold their own activities and actions that often intersect with each other. For example the community cooking collective operating in the autonomous social center contributes to the Time bank, while members of the Solidarity network participate in both projects. Also, a more recently formed 'Food bank', through a collaborative initiative between the solidarity network and the autonomous social center, also acts towards supporting this local economy, through the gathering and distribution of food among impoverished locals. As a female member of the autonomous cooking collective stressed, collaborative tactics among structures are based on shared needs, rather commonly agreed political imperatives:

Multiple structures that have emerged due to the crisis have raised questions on how to practice politics in a new way... it is not enough anymore to merely produce political imperatives; rather focus on our needs that meet other people's needs (personal interview, Athens, April 2013).

At the same time, the Time bank, apart from pursuing to build on this certain type of cooperative tactics that create a form of local economy, also connects to non-local actors, being one of the solidarity initiatives and structures that participate in the 'Solidarity for All' network. This group was formed in 2012 as an initiative from Syriza members and individual activists, based on the principles of 'Solidarity, Resistance and Self-organization'. The members of the group have produced an online platform along with a policy framework on 'social and cooperative enterprises' so as to record online and put into communication solidarity initiatives that have been created since the onset of the crisis, as a young male member of this network mentioned:

Our website is the main tool, used as a platform for recording all existing structures. We provide this space and we bring them in contact. There is an action agenda available for everyone to know what is going on and where and, in this way, we circulate information. We have the role of a node within these structures. However, coordination can be difficult among groups with diverse starting points and goals. Our role is also to ease these tensions through promoting 'solidarity for all', which is *from* everyone *to* everyone... The sharing of experience and know-how on solving problems is another major goal in regard to establishing effective communication among groups (personal interview, Athens, April 2013).

Therefore, the online platform of this network serves as a virtual space of communication among solidarity groups that have been formed across Athens and Greece. It also serves as a 'pool' of information for people who want to set up such groups, as members provide for guidelines that relate to the relevant legislation; bring participants in contact so as to share their experiences and problems that relate to the operation of a solidarity structure; access products; distribute goods and track down actions etc. The core members are divided into five theme groups, each one being responsible for concentrating expertise on issues of social economy, health, culture, education and food production and distribution. In discussing the goals and function of these core groups within the Solidarity for all network, a female activist and member of a recently formed social convenience store in Exarcheia explained that,

the Solidarity for All network was set up in order to strengthen social cohesion and solidarity as a milestone for societal organization in the face of a major crisis and also to support a future political change. The goal is two-fold: first, to set up networking, record solidarity groups and circulate information across Greece and second, to code problems people face and provide a framework of 'good conduct' for solidarity structures, so that groups know which producers to get products from, their quality, the prices and where to find what exactly... We set limits to what we do here; we are not a coordinative [formal] structure giving directives to the groups we fund... What we do is circulate know-how so that groups are put into communication with each other... Also, there are criteria in order to provide for financial support, because if people do not take initiatives the logic underlying these projects, which is essentially one of empowering agency, goes out of the window... What happens is that we accept applications for funding, then these are forwarded to Syriza and they decide where they allocate the money the Parliament members donate... These are the rules; we fund structures, hence groups, not individuals; also, we do not cover for rent, bills or wages, but only for partial infrastructure (personal interview, Athens, April 2013).

Regarding the role of core members within this network of solidarity structures, what is evident here is that the goal is to facilitate communication and interaction among participant groups, so that know-how and material resources are distributed and diffused, hence empowering participants. In addition, several of the core members that are responsible for mediating this communication are affiliated to the political party of Syriza, which also provides for financial support to groups, aiming to enhance its power among the grassroots and gain parliamentary support.

Hence, a creative tension arises in the process of empowering initiatives formed from below and, at the same time, mediating broader strategies for social change. This tension resonates with Routledge and Cumbers (2009) and Featherstone (2012), who stress that the construction of solidarities among networked actors draws upon ‘uneven power relations’, which can be contested or perpetuated in the process. Concerning the ‘Solidarity for All’ network, key members concentrate knowledge and expertise on how to set up and operate solidarity structures and distribute this know-how and material resources through the network. These members, as well as the party of Syriza responsible for choosing which groups receive funding, act as key mediating mechanisms, or in other words ‘imagineers’ (Routledge and Cumbers 2009) or ‘brokers’ (Tarrow 2005, Nicholls 2009), that are crucial for bringing together the various participant groups, breaking down legal frameworks, producing solutions to tensions arising etc. However, these mediating actors problematize the egalitarian participation of groups and activists, as well as the desired horizontal network formation. In other words, since party members concentrate power and legitimacy in decision-making regarding access to material resources, actors within this network are ‘unevenly positioned’ (Routledge and Cumbers 2009). Also, issues of party co-optation arise, as this solidarity group aims to gain more public support in favour of parliamentary votes. In conceptual terms, these reveal the ‘messy horizontalities’ within coordination and networking among grassroots groups (see section 7.8).

To sum up, solidarity initiatives and structures play a key role in producing survival tactics that aim to provide for immediate social reproduction needs of a large part of the city’ population. At the same time, these groups become ‘laboratories’ for alternatives to austerity and broader strategies of social empowerment and change that involve the formation of a social/ solidarity economy, discussed in the following section.

## **7.5. Forming a Social/ Solidarity Economy and Articulating Strategies of Social Empowerment**

Following the previous discussion on the various tactics and strategies pursued through solidarity structures and initiatives, this section will further

elaborate on their role within articulations of broader alternatives to austerity and the formation of a social/ solidarity economy. These strategies are often differentiated based on the politics participants pursue, within which the role of state power and state institutions becomes a crucial differentiating factor. However, solidarity practices from below and cooperative tactics among local groups that are constitutive of these broad strategies reveal that these often co-exist, overlap, intersect and create tensions. For example, activists from various backgrounds strategically choose to pursue bottom-up solidarity practices and cooperation tactics that bring together diverse groups and individuals which do not necessarily share political ideologies, e.g. joint actions; participation in solidarity economy festivals; the sharing of information and the shared contribution of resources and infrastructure etc. Hence, conceptually, this emerging ‘urban solidarity space’ becomes a site for experimenting with multiple broader strategies for social empowerment and alternatives to austerity and for challenging the function of the state under austerity.

In looking into these strategies, the example of the ‘Solidarity for All’ network acts as a virtual node of communication and facilitator for information sharing among grassroots solidarity structures and initiatives. At the same time, the core members of the group responsible for operating the online platform and bringing into contact the various groups involved, have produced a guide to the formation of a social economy, entitled ‘Building a new Cooperative Movement’ (2013). Through this, solidarity structures and cooperatives formed through self-organization are invited to participate and utilize the basic principles of social economy, as recently legislated through the framework on ‘social cooperative enterprises’. In this guide, it is stressed that this institutional framework has been voted as part of the austerity agenda of the previous governments, as a means to mitigate rising social inequalities. However, despite the critique produced concerning voting for such legislation, the ‘Solidarity for All’ guide suggests the use of the existing legislation in order to set the basis for building on a social economy. This type of social economy is framed as an attempt to organize collective action through redefining and resignifying societal organization. In this respect, a social enterprise and its underlying principles can be summarized as “the creation of a collective, democratic project which aims to offer solutions to

pragmatic needs, in the interest of both the employees and the local and regional society” (‘Solidarity for All’ 2013).

Among the goals stated in the published guide, what is stressed firstly is the acknowledgment of how this new framework on social enterprises was incorporated within the recent austerity politics, so as to blunt contestation and provide for governmental leverage and justification for the collapse of social welfare and rising unemployment. In other words, the interpretation and critique activists produced around the policy on ‘social enterprises’ aims to contest this type of devolution of responsibility from state institutions to civil society actors that austerity has brought forward. This resonates with MacKinnon and Derickson’s (2012) argument on how, in contexts of austerity, policy-making often aims to maintain and legitimize the redistribution of public resources and forms of oppressive power and control, through placing the responsibility on social actors, e.g. voluntarism, charity etc. (also see Featherstone et al. 2012, Tonkiss 2013). Secondly, as the employment of the existing framework is suggested so as to set up new groups, the contestation of this policy as part of austerity measures occurs in symbiosis with, or ‘within’, the same institutional framework. In this sense, activists from the ‘Solidarity for All’ network perceive state institutions and state power as sets of relations that can be challenged, re-worked and strategically employed so as to serve the interests of the people involved within solidarity groups. This pertains to Wright’s (2010: 322) account of ‘symbiotic’ strategies of social transformation and change, whereby the systematic and instrumental use of state institutions aims for the enlargement of social empowerment spaces. Also, as suggested by a female member of this network in one of the theme group discussions around ‘social economy’, this strategy is understood as part and parcel of a broader economic and social policy framework of the party of Syriza:

We aim for self-organization, as opposed to voluntarism, to acquire social roots, become socially grounded at the local level, so as to contribute to the formation of a new public space; this socially grounded culture of ‘cooperativism’ can serve as the basis for building on a social economy linked to the economic policy and political culture of Syriza (field notes, ‘Solidarity for All’, ‘Social Economy’ group meeting, Athens, November 2012).

In conceptual terms, building on a culture of solidarity and cooperativism mentioned above suggests the challenging of social and economic relations in three

ways. First, at the material level of the economy, the activities of collectives and cooperatives abide by a new paradigm, which prioritizes collective interests over the maximizing of profits. In turn, this paradigm challenges the dominant capitalist production mode, based on accumulation and surplus profit investment. As a female member of a local cooperative in Exarcheia noted, once a cooperative becomes financially sustainable and produces profit, this is re-distributed in the interest of the local economy, e.g. food production to food distribution to service cooperatives etc.:

The profit is re-invested as financial support to other complementary structures, or for infrastructure and rental costs, hence differs from the capitalist re-investment of profit (personal interview, Athens, April 2013).

Hence, this approach aims to prioritize social needs over the expansion of the market economy and, in this way, can serve as a broader social empowerment strategy. In defining this function of a social economy, Wright (2010: 193, 194) explains that it broadly includes “economic activity that is directly organized and controlled through the exercise of some form of social power... rooted in the voluntary association of people in civil society and is based on the capacity to organize people for collective action of various sorts. The social economy involves the production and distribution of goods and services- economic activity- organized through the use of such social power”.

Second, at the social level, solidarity structures and cooperatives serve as educational mechanisms, within which workplace and broader relations are negotiated. According to a male member of the ‘Solidarity for All’ network, this negotiation not only involves the egalitarian decision-making and collective responsibility over the enterprise, but also the challenging of broader relations of production, distribution and consumption of products:

New social relations are cultivated through these structures and new ways of educating people are developed towards a radical perspective. An employee in a co-operative is also the boss and actively participates in decision-making... also, new relations with farmers and producers are developed; the ways in which a product is produced are challenged in relation to environmental destruction and the exploitation of workers and migrants that work in food production; we problematize the relation between the quality and

price of a product and the role of middlemen in making profit etc. (personal interview, Athens, April 2013).

Third, the grounding of these social relations at the territorial level of the neighbourhood, perceived of as ‘struggle community’ (see Chapter 6), involves the experimentation with new ways of collective organizing and everyday practices that ‘prefigure’ social change (see Graeber 2002). Regarding the two-fold role of solidarity structures within a social economy, i.e. as responses to tangible needs and a way to prefigure change ‘in the here and now’ (Chatterton 2005), a male activist from the Solidarity network of Exarcheia stressed:

Solidarity structures respond to immediate needs but there is much more to them; they can help people realize that there is another world possible, one of cooperation and solidarity... Solidarity is not just about the relief of starving people, homeless or those who cannot pay for electricity bills and taxes... It is a way of foreseeing the future, a promise of a different me and you and we can experiment with this through everyday practices (personal interview, Athens, January 2013).

However, as Wright (2010) points out, besides the potential benefits for social empowerment that these types of experiments with social economy can offer, they also face significant problems. These mainly relate to the “involvement in the social economy of inegalitarian, exclusionary associations in civil society, and the problem of the potential distortion of the social economy by capitalist market relations” (Wright 2010: 212). In other words, on the one hand, power relations within the social economy and, on the other hand, institutional incorporation and systemic cooptation are crucial issues that solidarity structures are faced with.

Moreover, the above three-fold function of the emerging culture of solidarity and cooperativism also applies to the grassroots organizing of autonomous politics and political cultures, i.e. anarchist, autonomous etc., that traditionally position themselves ‘against’ state power and institutions. Concerning this approach to building up alternative structures that address unemployment and social reproduction issues, several activists from across Athens discussed the issue of a cooperative/ solidarity economy in an open event organized at the Autonomous social center in Exarcheia:

In today’s event held at the autonomous social center in Exarcheia, activists from local groups, as well as from other social centers,

political organizations and collectives from across Athens debated their stances towards the emerging solidarity economy. The key subject of this event was how to expand on emerging alternatives, i.e. solidarity structures and cooperatives that in the light of the collapse of social welfare, aim to introduce new ways of collective organizing and constitute new workplace and social relations that challenge the existing capitalist paradigm. In this sense, the discussion focused around, firstly, how to enhance the newly formed spaces of reproduction for the unemployed, e.g. service cooperatives such as cafes and bars and, secondly, how to promote a broader alternative paradigm, which will remain autonomous from state institutions...As stressed by several participants the goal is to “multiply solidarity structures, while at the same time retaining small scale cooperative enterprises” (field notes, Autonomous social center, ‘Cooperative/ Solidarity economy’ public event, Athens, March 2013).

Therefore, drawing on the above, broader strategies involve a politics of acting ‘against’ the capitalist state, while at the same time moving ‘beyond’ state structures in constructing alternatives through self-organization and self-management (see Holloway 2002). This account pertains to what Wright (2010: 321) termed ‘interstitial strategies’ of social transformation, which involve the modification and re-constitution of autonomous spaces of social empowerment, understood as ‘incremental cumulative steps’ that will eventually contribute to overall social transformation.

However, the case of Athens shows how in several instances bottom-up organizing and self-organization becomes entangled with ‘ruptural’ moments of contestation and institutional or ‘symbiotic’ contestation (see Wright 2010). In this respect, activists engage in multiple strategies and struggles, which also include the active participation in workplace organizing; the contribution to union strikes; massive protests and direct action tactics and occupations of key public and government buildings. These often go along with defensive demands and legal actions against changes that have occurred in labour rights, employees on layoffs, the privatizations of public services and assets etc. An example of these simultaneous struggles are the solidarity structures that provide for free medical treatment to the unemployed, homeless, uninsured and immigrants, e.g. social medical and pharmacy centers, such as the one operating in Exarcheia. Since the resources and infrastructure of such structures cannot replace national health services, activists and medical staff volunteers that are involved in these, also contribute to and support broader demands for free access to public health services,



opposing the current reductions in public spending and the outsourcing of these services to private actors. In discussing this example, a young male activist from the ‘Solidarity for All’ network noted that,

building on solidarity structures means simultaneously building on a broader contestation framework. For example, health solidarity structures [social medical and pharmacy centers] converge into the demand for ‘free public health for all’, including the unemployed and the migrants... there are currently attempts to organize actions in public hospitals and coordinate these along with strikes organized by medical staff unions; and all these act *complementary* to the local organizing of movements (personal interview, Athens, April 2013).

Also, as noted by a young female activist from Exarcheia, solidarity structures occasionally act as linking mechanisms between broader strategies and actors:

The goal is to provide a link among people who are in precarious jobs, employees, unemployed and people who are disappointed by traditional union politics... In this sense, solidarity acts, on the one hand, as a pool of practical support for struggles and, on the other hand, as a social node of coordination for broader movements opposing the government, austerity and the memoranda (personal interview, Athens, April 2013).

Hence, drawing on the above quotes, broader strategies of social transformation, although pursued through diverse political traditions, can actually generate spaces of contestation, such as solidarity structures and collective organizing in neighbourhoods, that co-exist and become ‘complementary’ and ‘co-dependent’ in pursuit of social transformation and change (Wright 2010).

Finally, the various solidarity groups currently active across Athens provide for crucial insights into the grounded practices in neighbourhoods that seek to provide for immediate social reproductions needs (such as everyday needs in goods and cooperatives set up by unemployed people) and the broader strategies pursued that aim to empower participants and bring about social change. As these originate in diverse political traditions, i.e. left, anarchist etc., they contest the role of state power, either employing institutional means for producing alternatives and effecting change, i.e. ‘symbiotic’ strategies, or attempting to produce alternatives that act ‘against’ and ‘beyond’ the state, i.e. ‘ruptural’ and ‘interstitial’ strategies (see Wright 2010). These practices that generate broader spaces of contestation are constitutive of an emerging ‘urban solidarity space’, albeit internally multiple,

which becomes the site for experimenting with a politics of ‘in, against and beyond’ austerity neoliberalism and the capitalist state. The following section discusses in detail the cooperation tactics and networking processes among groups in Athens and links to broader actors, in order to produce an understanding of the possibilities and limitations these are faced in pursuing a spatially extensive politics.

### **7.6. The spatial politics of ‘Urban Solidarity Spaces’: Networking ‘from below’, across Athens and beyond**

In furthering the previous discussion on how solidarity structures and initiatives become spaces for experimenting with survival tactics and broader contestation, constituting an ‘urban solidarity space’, this section focuses on the interactions, communication, cooperation tactics and networking logics developed among these. Hence, in order to show the horizontally expansive logics of urban solidarity spaces, I will interrogate the networking processes unfolding across neighbourhoods in Athens and beyond (also see section 7.7). This is considered particularly useful for looking into the possibilities and limitations that these local initiatives are faced in pursuing an expansive politics. Hence, this discussion considers the grounds and key mechanisms, e.g. solidarity, goals, issues and key places etc. that enable geographically extensive action.

In general, communication, cooperation tactics and networking processes among local groups and initiatives occurs based on tangible issues and immediate goals, but broader issues also play a crucial role in bringing together actors. As discussed in Chapter 6.5, local issues coupled with broader outcomes of austerity managed to bring together activists and groups in Exarcheia into a local campaign. Also, solidarity structures and initiatives often cooperate and coordinate actions, aiming to form broader alternatives to austerity, such as a social/ solidarity economy. These cooperation tactics not only originate in a ‘politics of necessity’ (Chatterton 2005), meaning that they combine material and non-material resources in order to address everyday needs, but also seek to build on proximate bonds and solidarities ‘from below’ among participants and groups. As the crisis has precipitated social reproduction concerns for a large part of the city’s population, this culture of bottom-up organizing and networking ‘from below’ has gained

prominence, not only as means to practice an ‘egalitarian participatory politics that departs from formal structures and representation’ (Cumbers et al. 2008) but also as a need to effect useful communication and practical exchanges among local groups that empowers participants and brings about meaningful outcomes. Concerning the empowering potential that lies within cooperation and exchanges among solidarity groups, a male activist from Exarcheia and member of the ‘Solidarity for All’ network mentioned that,

at the moment there is no group alone that can provide with complete answers or solutions to the crisis... the important thing, in this sense, is to acknowledge that within the variety of existing groups and initiatives multiple ways in dealing with the same issue have emerged... hence we can be more effective when we enhance cooperation (personal interview, Athens, March 2013).

An example of exchange, communication and sharing of ‘know-how’ on setting up solidarity groups is the Time bank of Exarcheia. As this project originated in the local residents’ committee, activists from this group that participated in the Syntagma occupation in the summer of 2011 became familiar with the people that set up the Syntagma Time bank. When the residents’ committee decided to launch a local Time bank, in order to set up a local network of exchange of services without money, a key young female activist and member of the committee brought in the required knowledge on how to set up and operate this project, i.e. how the exchange of services work, how an online record of exchanges and ‘time credits’ is set up etc. These ideas were discussed and reworked in the group’s weekly assemblies and, once the Exarcheia Time bank started operating, activists from another city center neighbourhood became interested in acquiring similar knowledge so as to form a Time bank in their own neighbourhood. In discussing this sharing of knowledge among the grassroots, the above female activist explained:

Recently, we were asked to share our knowledge on how to set up and organize a time bank with activists from Petralona [a city center neighbourhood], who want to start a similar local group there... This circulation of know-how is important in establishing connections, which can make our projects sustainable and enduring in the future... Each group has members with various kinds of know-how, contacts and affiliations and everyone is important in this way in contributing these to our efforts (personal interview, Athens, November 2012).

This type of circulation of crucial ‘know-how’ and ‘skill-sharing’ among the grassroots is a key mechanism that facilitates the development of networking ‘from below’. In this sense, the contribution of ideas, knowledge, material and non-material resources by individuals that participate in such groups becomes the means to get involved and, also, an informal mechanism of networking, as opposed to formal membership in organizations. Additionally, while, the ongoing face-to-face interactions among participants are crucial, the use of digital media serves as a means for rapidly circulating information and facilitating the sharing of knowledge. For example, the discussion on how to set up these projects occurs within weekly assemblies, where participants debate, share information and contribute ideas. At the same time, the use of blogs and online platforms facilitate the visibility of groups in virtual spaces; their ongoing actions; the texts they produce; the recording of experiences; and the instrumental use of software in order to register activities, such as the exchange of services. These resonate with two key arguments made by Routledge and Cumbers (2009: 53, 54) regarding recent developments within social movements: firstly, a departure from formal organizational structures and actions organized based on specific issues, projects and goals and, secondly, the role of digital media in promoting such horizontal formations, egalitarian decision-making and access to crucial information, especially by distant activists and groups.

Moreover, networking from below relates to a process of making connections, often short-term, fluid and informal among grassroots groups and activists over a specific issue or goal. This can be ‘defensive’, as in calls for joint actions in order to prevent or act against a particular policy (e.g. the housing tax and the joint campaign organized by several popular assemblies, solidarity initiatives and base unions- see section 7.7); or these can share ‘know-how’ on setting up projects that function in a similar way, such as a Time bank as discussed above. In order to maintain the horizontality within decision-making, activists employ informal contacts, i.e. personal networks, acquaintances and affiliations to other groups, collectives, political organizations etc. These connections are also based on prior collaborations and established contacts among activists (see Arampatzi and Nicholls 2012) that generated flexible relays of communication and are activated when a group’s assembly decides to pursue cooperation tactics. For example, subsequent rounds of joint campaigns pursued by popular assemblies and solidarity

initiatives relating to new housing taxes were initiated by different groups, which have established contacts during their formation in the post-Syntagma period and have since been organizing joint actions. As a male activist from the Solidarity network of Exarcheia, one of the participant groups in these common actions, described in regard to the above:

Common actions start when a group decides through its assembly to take the initiative to place a call for action to other groups... this group is responsible for giving an outline of the issue at stake and for suggesting where and when the meetings and common actions will take place (personal interview, Athens, January 2013).

Furthermore, apart from the use of digital media (such as online platforms, email lists, blogs etc. that facilitate contacts and communication) key sites within the city of Athens provide a series of opportunities for activists to establish contacts. In particular, city center areas, such as Exarcheia and the Syntagma square, hold a prominent role, historically and symbolically, within the development of social movements (see Chapter 6.3). Hence, these areas of prominent activist cultures are understood as key nodes of communication, circulation of information and face-to-face interactions among activists. These take place in various informal meeting spots (such as cafes, bars, 'hangouts', social events and open discussions held in local squares in neighbourhoods, occupations and social centers) as well as during mass protests and demonstrations taking place in public spaces in the city, such as squares, streets, pedestrian walks and public buildings. Regarding the latter, the convergence of activism at the Syntagma square occupation that was later dispersed across Athenian neighbourhoods, acted as a key 'moment' within grassroots processes of networking and accelerated contacts among diverse individuals, groups and political cultures that participated in the protests organized in the summer of 2011 (see Chapter 6.2.). During the occupation, participants became actively engaged in exchanging ideas and sharing knowledge on how to organize actions, contribute valuable information and circulate resources and infrastructure. Further, the occupation of Syntagma square, not only enhanced communication among activists, but these processes also generated 'mutual solidarities' (Routledge and Cumbers 2009) among participants that served as an 'organic force' of bottom-up organizing in the following period.

Hence, Syntagma square, as well as local squares and public spaces in neighbourhoods, can be understood as crucial physical sites where interactions and networking among the grassroots occur. In this respect, public spaces become spaces for manifesting broader contestation, e.g. against the voting of austerity measures in the case of Syntagma square. Also, public spaces targeted by urban policy or state repressive tactics, such as the Exarcheia local square (see Chapter 6.4.) become the sites of contestation and serve as symbolic spaces for politicizing the notion of the ‘public’ under austerity, which is faced with increasing repression, commodification and privatization. As a male activist from Exarcheia stressed, public spaces are strategically chosen as sites where joint meetings, coordination assemblies and exchanges among groups happen, so as to highlight their ‘public’ character as open and accessible to everyone who wants to participate:

Usually coordinative assemblies and joint actions take place in the Polytechnic, Law and Chemistry Schools and other universities in the city center... For example, in 2012, a series of coordinative meetings among popular assemblies from areas across Attica took place in Panteio University... Also, occupations, social centers and solidarity ‘hangouts’ host similar events... Public places are symbolic within these actions; they signify an ‘open call’ for everyone to join in and participate (personal interview, Athens, January 2013).

In this sense, public spaces in the city play a key role within cooperation tactics and joint actions organized by groups, as physical spaces of encounter (see Merrifield 2013) and as symbolic spaces that are re-signified and reclaimed and hence become political spaces.

### **7.7. Cooperation Tactics and Networking Logics: The ‘Housing Tax’ campaign**

An example of networking from below initiated in the post-Syntagma period through multiple resistance spaces created across the city, was the ‘housing tax’ campaign. As popular assemblies and several solidarity initiatives and groups emerged in neighbourhoods in the summer of 2011, these formed a loose network of communication through email lists, social media and joint open meetings held at the time in public university buildings, as noted above. Also, popular assemblies at the time had developed communication to other groups mobilizing against the steep rise in national motorway tolls across Greece and in surrounding areas of Athens.

These groups, active even before the squares' movement, had formed the 'I won't pay' movement that promoted civil disobedience tactics and road blockades in contesting the public-private policy around the highways' network that triggered the rise in toll fees.

As a new taxation policy on housing ownership was introduced in the fall of 2011, the existing loose network of communication among popular assemblies and the 'I won't pay' groups was re-activated in order to launch a campaign in the beginning of 2012, which, not only contested the legal base of this policy, but also prompted direct action tactics in neighbourhoods, discussed below. Additionally, as the Syntagma occupation assembly had hosted a series of open discussions that debated and problematized the fiscal austerity imposed and the imminent privatization of public assets, e.g. land, water, electricity and rail public organizations etc., this campaign acquired broader contestation elements, captured in the main motto 'we don't owe, we won't sell, we won't pay'. In this sense, activists aimed to politicize the strategic decisions made by the Greek government and the Troika to 'turn' the national debt into a 'fiscal' debt, which placed the financial burdens on individual taxation, such as the one on housing, while at the same time withdrawing funds previously directed to public services and launching the privatization of public assets. In the meantime, between 2011 and 2012, several of the popular assemblies have stopped operating as such, e.g. some transformed to solidarity initiatives, such as the Solidarity network of Exarcheia which originates in the local popular assembly of the neighbourhood, while new solidarity groups were formed. Further, collective organizing in workplaces and intersectoral 'base' unions formed during the past few years as an attempt to articulate bottom-up labour struggles and include the unemployed who cannot be formally represented through unions and syndicates have formed a loose communication network. Activists from the coordinative assembly of 'base' unions that simultaneously participated in local popular assemblies, brought the issue of the housing tax within their groups and the decision was made to contribute to this broad campaign launched in early 2012 was made. According to a male activist who participates in the base union coordination and in a local solidarity group active in the southern suburb of Glyfada, Athens, the main goal of this communication was to promote and expand the culture of bottom-up organizing that emerged after the mass

mobilizations at Syntagma square and create links and ‘mutual solidarities’ (Routledge and Cumbers 2009) between local and working-class struggles:

After Syntagma, which was a turning point for collective organizing, and as the main assembly [of Syntagma square occupation] and actions were decentralized in neighbourhoods, the goal was to strengthen the connections between local assemblies and groups and emerging working-class struggles (personal interview, Athens, March 2013).

In particular, the new housing tax has been imposed on home-ownership and collected through electricity bills, cutting across all population groups, regardless of income and employment status, hence being a ‘flat tax’. Inability to pay the tax leads to electricity power cut-off, tax evasion prosecution and confiscation of private property and income. It is important to note that the coordination campaign initially formed in 2012 among solidarity groups, base unions and individual activists strategically chose to term this tax ‘haratsi’<sup>14</sup>, so as to symbolically contest the inherently unjust character of this tax. Given the fact that housing has always been a key mechanism for social reproduction (and Greeks hold high rates of home ownership) as well as a ‘safety net’ and secondary source of income within ‘family networks’, the new housing tax, coupled with rapidly rising unemployment, has triggered widespread discontent and opposition among people. The actions that followed the first coordination meetings among groups involved, firstly, legal actions, so as to contest the legitimacy of this law through legal means; secondly, the diffusion of information across neighbourhoods, through texts, blogs, social media and open events, so as to de-legitimize this tax in the public sphere; and thirdly, direct action which involved protests organized outside tax offices, as well as reconnections of electricity in poor households that could not meet their debts.

In the following months, as the above actions were taking place mainly locally and coordination weakened, some of the local groups, such as the Solidarity network of Exarcheia, took the initiative to call for another round of joint actions.

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<sup>14</sup> The popular term ‘haratsi’ originates in the ‘head tax’ imposed on citizens of the Ottoman Empire, providing them with their right to live and ‘bear their heads upon their shoulders’. Similarly, the ‘poll tax’, re-introduced in the UK in 1987 by the Thatcher government, was a ‘flat’ tax imposed on all citizens, regardless of their income and employment status, hence aggravating inequalities.



Hence, in January 2013<sup>15</sup>, 16 solidarity initiatives and local assemblies from across Athens, along with ‘base’ unions (i.e. bottom-up forms of organizing in workplaces) and individual activists, gathered together in an open meeting at the central offices of the teachers’ national union. By the end of February, coordination had managed to bring in more groups and civil society organizations from other cities across Greece, such as Thessaloniki and Patra, their number reaching up to 25. The meetings, taking place at the Polytechnic school in Athens city center, set the goal for launching a campaign for April 2013 being the month of denying making payments to tax offices, as a means to ‘freeze’ state income from taxation. In discussing this goal and the broad civil disobedience framework the coordination has produced, a male activist from the Solidarity network of Exarcheia, responsible for representing this group in the coordination process noted that,

the inability of people to pay taxes, i.e. ‘cannot pay’, has to be transformed to a politically meaningful will, i.e. ‘won’t pay’. In this sense, the passive acceptance becomes disobedience, through the active engagement in our campaign (activist quote, field notes, Solidarity network of Exarcheia weekly assembly, Athens, February 2013).

Hence, this campaign involved an attempt to politicize the issue, i.e. stress the ‘injustice’ of the ‘flat tax’ imposed regardless of income across the population; and mobilize people so as to actively engage in contestation, i.e. refuse to pay the tax and engage in direct action in order to block power disconnections and reconnect electricity. Further, what is evident concerning the coordination process among participant groups is that key activists, such as the ones above, initiated contacts and interactions among groups, participated in open events and joint assemblies, disseminated information around legal actions and ‘translated’ the broader narratives and goals of this campaign within group assemblies. The role of these key activists within networking processes resonates with what Routledge and Cumbers (2009) termed ‘imagineers’, i.e. people who are responsible for disseminating the broader ‘imaginary’ of struggles, meaning specific concepts, goals, narratives, strategies etc. In this way, these key activists become enabling

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<sup>15</sup> Participant observation within this campaign involves this round of joint actions, between January and April 2013. The rest of the material originates in retrospective discussions with activists and secondary material gathered through texts, pamphlets, blogs etc.

mechanisms, or ‘brokers’ (Tarrow 2005) and mediate contacts and interactions among groups, as they possess certain forms of political and social capital, knowledge, contacts and mobility.

Additionally, the key coordinative mechanism employed within this campaign was the assembly, an open meeting of all participant groups and individual activists. Each of these assemblies, that took place once a month during the new round of joint actions, were organized by two local assemblies, responsible for setting up the specifics of each meeting, i.e. setting out the action agenda; circulating this through email lists to other participants; choosing the place and time of the meeting (usually held in organization offices, such as the teachers’ union or public university buildings in Athens city center, e.g. the Polytechnic school in Exarcheia); circulating feedback after the meetings etc. Accordingly, each participant group was represented through 2 members that expressed their in-group discussions, ideas, arguments and suggestions. These were decided in the individual groups’ assemblies and decisions were made based on consensus, rather than voting. In discussing the reasons why activists in this campaign decided to employ the specific form of organization to coordinate actions and disseminate goals, a male activist from the coordinative assembly suggested that,

the coordinative assembly of the campaign, the rotation of each group’s representatives, the roles of facilitator groups that also shift around periodically... all these are chosen so as to secure the circulation of responsibilities around groups and individuals... also the vibrant ongoing interactions and exchanges of experiences among participants... they also discourage the creation of leadership roles and the bureaucratization of our coordination (personal interview, Athens, March 2013).

Hence, this specific form of organizing a campaign, through the circulation of roles, responsibilities and information among participants reveals a two-fold goal. Firstly, decision-making became a means for practicing direct democracy. Based on the various ideas and in-group discussions that representatives brought in, a synthesis of the proposals followed, aiming to reflect a broader consensus. Secondly, the sharing of the responsibility for organizing coordinative assemblies and the dissemination of information were employed in order to enhance interactions and build on solidarities among participant groups that cut across local assemblies, solidarity initiatives and workplace struggles. These forms of

organization pertain to the ones employed by grassroots globalization networks, such as those used to organize mass actions such as the ones in Seattle in 1999 and Prague in 2000 (see Graeber 2002, Routledge 2003, Routledge and Cumbers 2009). In this regard, the processual constitution of these grassroots networks across space, what Routledge (2003) termed ‘process geographies’, and the links and common action repertoires developed between distant allies contributed to building on mutual solidarities and common cultures of practicing direct democracy. As Graeber (2002: 71) notes, these new organizational means that grassroots movements create, from ‘spokes’ or groups’ representatives, empowered to express the group’s opinion such as in the campaign above, to consensus building based on commonly acceptable opinions, provide the spaces where “initiatives rise from below and attain maximum effective solidarity, without stifling dissenting voices or creating leadership positions”. However, although these horizontal organizational means do not involve official leadership or formally privileged actors, they suggest an uneven access to resources, mobilities, numbers of participants and affiliations to distant groups and organizations (see Routledge and Cumbers 2009). Also, within these horizontal formations, specific interests of groups as well as diverse political ideologies do exist. Furthermore, the informally attributed roles do raise tensions and produce ‘hidden hierarchies’ (see Freeman 1970). In this sense, the above problematize the egalitarian participation of groups and individuals in networking processes and generate ‘messy horizontalities’ (also see section 7.8).

As coordination proceeded, the main goal of this campaign at the time was to block payments to tax offices during April 2013, as part of civil disobedience tactics. Hence, action was diffused into neighbourhoods, where each of the participant groups organized local dissemination open events. In Exarcheia, the Solidarity network organized two information rallies, one at the central local square, where texts were handed out to locals and discussions around the newly introduced taxes were held and another similar one outside the local tax office branch. While overall, the goal of this round of the campaign was not met, as legal action failed and the taxes remained, direct action of power reconnections and communication among participant groups remained active. In the following period, between the fall of 2013 and up until the winter of 2014, this dynamic contributed to yet another round of mobilizations around imminent evictions and confiscations of houses, due

to the increasing individual debt imposed on house-ownership (see Figure 7.4). These included protests outside bank offices, so as to contest mortgages and subsequent foreclosures, as well as the development of communication with other grassroots movements across Europe, e.g. the participation of activists from Athens in a European action day for housing in October 2013, organized by the ‘European Action Coalition for the Right to Housing’<sup>16</sup>.



Figure 7.4. Demonstration in Athens city center against the housing property tax (local groups holding banners from the areas of Exarcheia, Nea Smyrni, Glyfada and Peristeri), Athens 2014, source: Solidarity Network of Exarcheia

## 7.8. Concluding Remarks: Conceptualizing ‘Urban Solidarity Spaces’

Drawing on the key discussions raised throughout this chapter, I outline here a conceptualization of ‘urban solidarity spaces’ that aims to bring forward an understanding of the multiple responses to austerity politics currently unfolding in Athens and Greece. As these develop spatially, an urban solidarity space emerges at the intersecting levels of the neighbourhood, the society and alternative economies, while, at the same time, it links to broader struggles and actors, i.e. labour struggles, national and European anti-austerity movements and coalitions etc.

Firstly, crucial within these are the solidarities forged ‘from below’, among the grassroots, which become ‘generative’ forces and mechanisms that activate and mobilize activists, transform relations among participants and create new spaces of

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<sup>16</sup> European action day for housing: <http://housing-action.tk>

contestation (see Featherstone 2012). The narratives produced by activists around ‘solidarity’ also aim to problematize dominant notions and practices of ‘charity’, as disembodied and de-politicized ‘caring from a distance’, and stress solidarity as a means to relate to others, based on common needs and interests and as a means to perform struggle. Solidarity practices and narratives are grounded through recently formed initiatives and structures in neighbourhoods across Athens and Greece. In producing a differentiation among these on the basis of their goals and practices, local initiatives focus on survival tactics and pursue a ‘politics of necessity’ (Chatterton 2005) in dealing with immediate social reproduction needs of impoverished people (such as the gathering and the distribution of goods, the provision in primary medical treatment etc.). At the same time, solidarity structures also experiment with alternative economic activity, such as cooperatives, producer-farmers markets, time banks etc.

Secondly, in respect to solidarity structures, alternative economic and social activities contribute to broader challenges and alternatives to austerity, forming a ‘social/ solidarity/ co-operative’ economy. In general, these are developed through economic activity, which prioritizes social needs over capitalist relations and profit-making, through re-introduced social relations in examples of cooperatives and, also, at the territorial level of the neighbourhood and community, through self-organization and new ways of collective organizing social relations. Another key differentiation within social/solidarity economy practices is based on their role within broader goals and strategies of social change, which involves the contestation of state power and institutions and originates in diverse political traditions, i.e. left, anarchist, autonomous etc. In this sense, these, either seek to use state institutions in order to effect change, hence producing ‘symbiotic’ to the state strategies, or produce ‘interstitial’ alternatives and ‘ruptural’ moments that act ‘against’ and ‘beyond’ state power (see Wright 2010). These, while often creating tensions and conflicts, co-exist spatially and temporally and occasionally produce inter-dependent cooperation tactics. Therefore, solidarity practices that are constitutive of an emerging ‘urban solidarity space’ generate spaces of contestation and social empowerment and, in this way, urban solidarity spaces become sites of experimenting with a politics of ‘in, against and beyond’ austerity neoliberalism and the capitalist state.

Thirdly, cooperation tactics among solidarity groups and networking logics across Athens develop based on a process of ongoing face-to-face interactions in material spaces, as well as virtual communication through digital media. These types of interactions during key events, such as mass protests and demonstrations prominent in city center areas, in public spaces and buildings and in social centers and occupations across neighbourhoods etc. contribute to the construction of collective visions (such as narratives developed around solidarity vis-à-vis charity discussed in section 7.3) and ‘a politics of mutual solidarity’ (Routledge and Cumbers 2009) among participants. According to a young female activist who participates in the Time bank of Exarcheia, these ongoing interactions and the co-shaping of ideas and goals require attentiveness and strong levels of motivation and commitment, so as to sustain such grassroots projects:

When I decided to participate in a grassroots group, I was aware that the ‘rules’ are not given, I had to create them along with the rest of the participants and accept their personalities... This process is difficult; takes a lot of personal work and requires the overcoming of self-absorption... but, in the end, it is pleasant and necessary, as it opens up new ways of thinking and doing with others (personal interview, Athens, January 2013).

Accordingly, as Juris (2008) and Routledge (2012) noted, these non-traditional modes of organization, i.e. grassroots, bottom-up, do-it-yourself etc., become collective experiences of collaborative association with activist others and generate high levels of personal and collective emotions that signify their sustainability over time.

Fourth, the organizational means of networking ‘from below’ pertain to an egalitarian participatory politics employed in groups’ and coordination assemblies (so as to ‘co-create the rules’ as noted in the above quote), form horizontal connections and establish communication among groups, as opposed to formal membership and structures of traditional party politics and trade unions. As individual activists often participate in several groups, projects and campaigns simultaneously, they acquire multiple affiliations and positions within networking, certain social and political capital, knowledge and access to information; and hence become enabling mechanisms for future connections among groups. These key activists, ‘brokers’ (Tarrow 2005) or ‘imagineers’ (Routledge and Cumbers 2009) become responsible for disseminating information and circulating material and non-

material resources crucial for the development of communication, key ‘imaginaries’ and activist narratives. However, as connections among participants become part of ongoing everyday face-to-face interactions, grounded in multiple time-spaces of activism across the city, they signify a bottom-up ‘process’ of networking, rather than ‘moments’ of the spatial convergence of networks of movements, discussed through the notion of ‘convergence spaces’ in Routledge and Cumbers (2009). Also, key activists that circulate imaginaries, resources and information do not hold permanent ‘delegate’ roles; rather it is through the process of rotation of these roles and the overlapping participation of activists in multiple groups that this diffusion is made possible across space, in horizontal terms (as discussed through the coordination campaign on the housing tax in section 7.7).

In this sense, the case of Athens pertains to an inverted account of the spatial politics of ‘convergence spaces’ (Routledge and Cumbers 2009) and articulations of global networks of movements in two ways. First, networking ‘from below’, through ongoing interactions among the grassroots, reveals a process, rather than particular ‘moments’ of exchange and communication and networking ‘from beyond’ among place-based movements, as in accounts of ‘convergence spaces’ (see Routledge and Cumbers 2009). Second, key activists that overlap in groups, distribute information and facilitate communication operate across space, horizontally. Hence, this process inverts the scalar imaginary of convergence spaces, as the process of ‘grassrooting’ narratives, goals, strategies and network imaginaries (Routledge et al. 2007, Routledge and Cumbers 2009) unfolds in a bottom-up fashion, expanding outwards in spatial terms.

Fifth, in discussing the above process of the diffusion of information and knowledge and the circulation of roles and responsibilities among participants, a young female activist from the Time bank of Exarcheia stressed that,

the contribution of members is equal, everyone is invited to participate; we do not have experts... All decisions are taken through the assembly, through horizontality; knowledge is shared and collectivized in this way... We need to circulate know-how in order to destabilize the creation of power centers; for good or worse, knowledge creates power, even in cases when people do not aim for that... we have decided and are obliged to rotate roles and circulate responsibilities (personal interview, Athens, November 2012).

What is evident above is that activists acknowledge that roles and responsibilities, or ‘divisions of labour’ among individuals, can potentially create ‘centers of power’, albeit informal. According to a female activist from Exarcheia, the diffusion of roles and responsibilities and the informal divisions of labour also suggest the creation of ‘informal hierarchies’:

Networking based on informal hierarchy reveals the worst kind of hierarchy, the one that cannot be controlled... Formal hierarchies do have control mechanisms i.e. voting and change of positions through this... the informal ones are more diffused, more ‘masked’ (personal interview, Athens, April 2013).

Therefore, as horizontal formations are not structured around official mechanisms of control, informal or ‘hidden hierarchies’ (see Freeman 1970) created within networking and cooperation among groups and activists are even more complex and difficult to trace and deal with. Regarding the notion of ‘structurelessness’ and the hidden hierarchies created within horizontal formations, Freeman (1970: 1, 2) argued that “the structure may be flexible, it may vary over time, it may evenly or unevenly distribute tasks, power and resources over the members of the group. But it will be formed regardless of the abilities, personalities and intentions of the people involved. The very fact that we are individuals with different talents, predisposition’s and backgrounds makes this inevitable... Thus ‘structurelessness’ becomes a way of masking power” (also see Routledge and Cumbers 2009). In this sense, these informal hierarchies problematize horizontal formations within networking processes and produce incomplete, ‘messy horizontalities’.

Sixth, the operation of key actors within networking among grassroots groups, such as the ‘Solidarity for All’ network (see section 7.4), as well as the diverse broader strategies and political interests pursued, e.g. the instrumental use of state institutions, affiliations to political parties and organizations and autonomous politics etc. (see section 7.5), often create tensions that reveal the contested social and power relations of this urban solidarity space. As a young male activist from Exarcheia noted, all these can be understood as barriers posed by diverse ‘political methodologies’:

What can become a major barrier is the different prioritization of issues and tools for analysing reality, meaning the political methodologies that activists and groups employ (personal interview, Athens, March 2013).



Hence, such tensions originate in historical distancing among diverse political ideologies, e.g. among the Left and anarchists, various goals and strategies concerning ‘social empowerment and change’ (see Wright 2010); action repertoires and means of protest, e.g. confrontational tactics, direct action, institutional demands etc. (Routledge and Cumbers 2009); and contestation of co-optation tactics by party or union politics with divergent interests and agendas etc.

Finally, the above remarks and the key findings discussed throughout Chapters 5-7 are pulled together and discussed in Chapter 8 that concludes this thesis. In particular, Chapter 8 outlines the key issues this thesis raised in regard to emerging forms of contentious politics in Athens, Greece in the context of austerity and crisis; responds to the research questions through the empirical findings; discusses the methodological insights gained through the conduct of fieldwork in Athens; examines my contribution to broader debates on contentious politics and social movements through the notions of ‘struggle communities’ and ‘urban solidarity spaces’; and outlines some implications for future research into social change processes in an era of austerity.

## **8. Conclusions**

### **8.1. Introduction**

This thesis has examined emerging forms of contentious politics in response to the crisis and austerity in Greece and Athens. In this regard, I analysed the spatial politics of struggle and solidarity unfolding in Athens through the conceptualizations of ‘struggle communities’ and ‘urban solidarity spaces’. In brief, these showed how resistance and solidarity practices become grounded in local contexts and how they expand across the city and beyond, through horizontal networking and cooperation tactics among local activist groups. In this chapter, firstly, I situate my research on Athens and Greece within broad debates on cities and social movements; secondly, I outline the key research insights gained through my methodological positioning as a scholar-activist engaged in struggle in Athens; thirdly, I address the research questions and develop the key conclusions this thesis contributes to social theory through the notions of ‘struggle communities’ and ‘urban solidarity spaces’; fourth, I draft some key implications of my findings for counter-austerity politics; and, finally, I discuss possible ways forward for building on these.

### **8.2. Situating my Research and Contributions to Theory**

Mass mobilizations and protests occurring in cities worldwide during the past few years have articulated opposition to the ways in which the current crisis of neoliberal globalization has been manifested in diverse geographical contexts since 2008. From Spanish protestors occupying public squares in Madrid and Barcelona, to the occupation of Syntagma square in Athens city center in Greece and the Occupy movement in the US, these rounds of mobilizations occurred in various cities worldwide in response to the ways in which the crisis has been managed by national governments and supranational institutions, such as the European Union (EU). Concerning the role of the EU in the bailing out of European banks and global financial interests, the Eurozone crisis was managed through the enforcement of extreme fiscal austerity in countries such as Greece, Spain and Portugal etc. In

Greece in particular, austerity politics introduced since 2010 have been anticipated with widespread public discontent and controversy, often leading to mass protests and violent confrontations in the streets of Athens. As Athens and, in particular city center areas such as the Syntagma square located in front of the Parliament building, have served as key sites for the manifestation of contestation, the recent anti-austerity mobilizations have assumed a key role within the development of social movements in Greece, in geographical and historical terms. Following the renewed interest expressed by critical scholars in recent rounds of mass mobilizations occurring in cities worldwide and debates around cities and social movements, this thesis examined the central role of Athens in emerging grassroots responses to the crisis and austerity. In arguing that so far little attention has been paid in such debates to the underlying processes of the emergence and development of contentious politics in contexts of crisis and austerity, I examined the spatial politics of solidarity and struggle unfolding in Athens, Greece. In this regard, drawing on debates that stressed the crucial role of geography in social movements (see Chapter 3), I suggested that context-sensitive approaches to contentious politics emerging in response to the crisis are able to generate understandings of: why and how these appear *in* places; the ways in which they shape new political spaces and broader processes; how they are shaped by broader relations and socio-political processes; and how they produce alternative imaginaries and knowledges etc.

To this end, I looked into debates on cities and social movements; I analysed the urban politics of Greece and Athens in particular; I discussed the antecedents to current struggles and their development since the 1990's; and I examined in detail contemporary grassroots responses to the crisis and austerity unfolding in Athens. In particular, the above involved an examination of neoliberalization processes and their outcomes in various urban contexts over the past decades. Through this discussion, I showed how neoliberalism has been a 'spatial project' (Purcell 2008) that rendered cities key laboratories of entrepreneurial growth policies and disciplinary governance techniques (see for example Harvey 1989, Peck and Tickell 2002, Peck 2003, Nicholls 2006). In the case of Athens in particular, the 1990's marked a fast transition in urban development towards privatization of public services and infrastructure, consumption, retail and leisure. More recently, austerity politics have brought forward a new round of market-driven state initiatives and

disciplinary tactics aimed at the city's population, coupled with the re-distribution of public resources to meet the national economy's debt.

Further, as previous rounds of neoliberal governance impacted on urban politics in western European contexts, it also introduced transformations in contentious practices, leading to the co-option and fragmentation of 'urban social movements' that articulated demands around the reproductive role of the city for working and middle-class populations (see Castells 1977, 1983; Mayer 2000). However, drawing on more recent critical debates and studies (see Nicholls 2009, Leontidou 2010, Routledge 2010), I argued for a renewed understanding of the role of urban space within social movements, which also involved the relational qualities that render cities important for the development and expansion of contentious politics. Looking into the ways in which the antecedents to current struggles as well as emerging contentious politics have been unfolding *in* Athens (e.g. social movements, labour and urban struggles etc.) these are not necessarily restricted *to* urban space, materially and discursively; rather, they are mutually constituted to broader struggles (e.g. anti-neoliberal, anti-capitalist, social and economic justice etc.) extending across geographical space. Subsequently, I shifted to social movement accounts to argue for the relevance of geography for producing context-sensitive interpretations of contentious politics (see Routledge 1993, 1997; Miller 2000) and the possibilities and limitations for these to emerge, develop and expand in spatial terms.

As such, in contributing to recent theoretical debates on emerging forms of contentious politics unfolding in cities in contexts of the crisis and austerity, this thesis examined the spatial politics of resistance to austerity through the case of Athens, Greece. As noted above, an analysis of these provided for crucial understandings into why and how responses to the crisis emerge *where* they do, as well as accounts of their spatially extensive political action. In particular, through the key notions of 'struggle communities' and 'urban solidarity spaces', I looked into the role of 'place' and local context in the constitution of activist agency; produced understandings of resistance and solidarity practices grounded in places; analysed the cooperation tactics and networking among the grassroots across the city; and discussed the broader strategies of contemporary counter-austerity struggles in Athens, Greece.

The key questions this thesis addressed were the following:

- What is the role of ‘place’ in the constitution of resistance and solidarity practices?
- What are the material and discursive means activists employ so as to pursue cooperation tactics in, across and beyond urban space?
- What forms and organizational means are employed in order to establish communication and connections among struggles?
- What are the operational logics of cooperation and networking among activist groups?
- How do cooperation tactics contribute to broader strategies of social change and what are their possibilities and limitations?

In order to address the above questions I employed a qualitative approach that involved interviews with activists in Athens, participant observation in activist groups and engaged scholar-activism in struggles. Before elaborating on the conclusions this thesis offers for social movement studies and counter-austerity politics, I will highlight here some key research insights gained through my methodological positioning within struggles in Athens. Firstly, my engagement in struggles in Athens became a process of extending participant observation and ethnography, through the construction of solidarity and trusting relations with resisting others. Secondly, these relations were built through ongoing interactions with activists, the contribution of manual labour, as well as ideas and knowledge in projects and actions. Thirdly, embodied interactions in the field generated shared senses of responsibility, mutual support and commitment, as well as collective emotions of hope, enthusiasm and disappointment. Fourth, the process of critical engagement became a means for acquiring key insights, ideas and interpretations by activists; engaging in the co-production of grounded experiences and knowledge during actions and open discussions; developing this knowledge and producing critical interpretations in dialogue with broader theoretical debates on cities and social movements. In this sense, I suggest that critical engagement in the field and scholar-activist approaches proved meaningful in methodological, ethical and political terms for gaining grounded deeper insights into activist practices and contributing to ongoing struggles in Athens.

### **8.3. Conclusions: Conceptualizing the Spatial Politics of Solidarity and Struggle in Athens, Greece**

This section addresses the key research questions and discusses the conclusions of this thesis. In making new sense of resistance to the crisis and contributing to theoretical debates on contentious politics and social movement studies, I provide for an account of emerging responses to austerity in Athens and Greece through the notions of ‘struggle communities’ and ‘urban solidarity spaces’. These concepts are complementary and reveal the ways in which the spatial practices of solidarity and resistance emerge and develop in Athens and the possibilities and limitations for a spatially expansive politics across the city and beyond, i.e. links across Greece and to broader European anti-austerity movements etc. Hence, in conceptual terms, ‘struggle communities’ and ‘urban solidarity spaces’ contribute to theoretical debates on: firstly, social movements that unfold in cities as not necessarily restricted to urban space; secondly, the spatial practices of resistance and solidarity emerging *in* places as not necessarily place-restricted; and, thirdly, the relational mechanisms that enable networking processes among movements *in* and *across* space. And in this sense, these notions are able to contribute to broader understandings of emerging contentious politics and social change processes in an era of austerity.

#### **8.3.1. Towards ‘Struggle Communities’**

The concept of ‘struggle community’ responds to the constitution of resistance and solidarity practices among activist groups, as well as the means they employ so as to cooperate and produce practical alternatives to austerity. In this sense, a struggle community refers to the reciprocal bonds and place-based solidarities among groups and individuals forged at the territorial level of the neighbourhood in order to contest austerity and address wider social reproduction needs. Additionally, it reflects the spatial dispersal of a democratic bottom-up politics articulated during the occupation of Syntagma square in 2011 and the process of the grounding of a growing culture of self-organization, mutual aid and solidarity in neighbourhoods across Athens and Greece in the following period in the context of austerity. Hence, the neighbourhood, i.e. place and community, is

understood as a key level for building on contestation to austerity and survival tactics. Nevertheless, as resistance and solidarity practices become mutually constituted to broader articulations of struggle, grounded in and extending beyond the local and the particular in spatial terms, the notion of a struggle community suggests a relational understanding of place and community in two ways. First, place as an open spatial entity that encompasses distinct spatialities of resistance; multiple activist practices, identities, narratives and ‘senses of place’; and constituted through broad relations and processes (see Agnew 1987, Routledge 1993, Massey 1994, Routledge 1997). Second, community as grounded territorially and forged through proximate reciprocal relations at the neighbourhood level and connected outwards; hence not self-enclosed in its spatial scale (see MacKinnon and Derickson 2012).

In unpacking the above, firstly, I suggest that austerity politics have triggered grassroots responses and contentious practices in Athens and Greece that expand understandings of ‘urban social movements’ (see Castells 1977, 1983; Mayer 2000) and the ‘right to the city’ (Lefebvre 1996, original 1968). As austerity has precipitated social reproduction needs for large parts of the city’s population, locally-based activist groups and initiatives in neighbourhoods and new ones that were created over the past few years have shifted their goals, priorities and action agendas towards resistance and solidarity practices so as to contest austerity and generate alternatives, i.e. solidarity structures and initiatives and a social/ solidarity economy. In this sense, emerging contentious practices in Athens move beyond the articulation of collective consumption demands around the reproductive function of the city (e.g. public services and infrastructure), as in cases of ‘urban social movements’ of previous decades (Castells 1977, 1983), and adopt self-organization, mutual aid and solidarity as survival tactics in the face of austerity. For example, the mobilization and coordination of several local groups and solidarity initiatives that opposed a recent housing property tax (see Chapter 7.7) showed how groups and activists gathered and mobilized people and resources; organized open discussions and assemblies to disseminate tactics; prompted direct action to impede electricity power disconnections and support poor households; distributed practical aid; developed connections to non-local actors; and coalesced with unions to effect their goals. The expansive character of such practices across city space and the links they

develop to national mobilizations and broader anti-austerity struggles problematize accounts that interpret struggles unfolding *in* cities as spatially trapped and restricted *to* the city; for example, the tension of the ‘local trap’ that arises from discussions around the ‘right to the city’ (see Purcell 2006). The case of Athens in this regard shows how local and non-local actors deploy and mobilize participants, available resources, knowledges and counter-austerity narratives so as to pursue struggle. In this sense, struggles are not understood as self-enclosed within the material limits of urban space (see Merrifield 2013); rather the city becomes a key site where contentious practices unfold and develop spatially in multiple and complex ways.

Secondly, as discussed through the case of Exarcheia, Athens, the role of place in activist agency, understood through Agnew’s (1987) and Routledge’s (1993) conception as location, locale and ‘sense of place’, enables multiple resistance practices, activist cultures, identities, narratives and symbolic meanings to emerge and processually constitute struggle communities. In this sense, place matters in material and discursive terms in how, for example, activists set out agendas; organize joint actions around shared goals and common interests; engage and motivate participation; gather and make use of available resources; produce ideas and knowledge; develop narratives around their practices; and create spaces for collective action. Thinking of the neighbourhood as a ‘terrain of resistance’ (Routledge 1993, 1996a), as the ground upon which resistance and conflict take place at the intersection of broader social, political and economic forces, then the above spatial imaginaries, meanings, interpretations and practices activists produce become useful tools for unpacking collective action. In turn, resistance practices constitute distinct spatialities, often overlapping and conflicting, which reveal the possibilities and limitations for struggle to overcome and subvert top-down dominating power and generate alternative narratives, knowledges and spaces of contestation. In Exarcheia, for example, state disciplinary means, repressive tactics and discourses that rendered this area a notorious stronghold of ‘social unrest’ have created diverse bottom-up responses that have, in some instances, confronted state power through local defensive tactics and the production of narratives on ‘liberated zones’. In other cases, as shown through the ‘Exarcheia in movement’ campaign, bottom-up responses sought to break with such bounded notions of the local and



develop struggle and solidarity in and beyond the neighbourhood. This was made possible through specific relational mechanisms, such as key activists that facilitated the distribution of information and resources, and available contact points in Exarcheia and Athens city center with other local and non-local actors.

Thirdly, in doing so, activists developed reciprocal bonds and solidarities through their physical presence in actions and face-to-face interactions. Looking into how these were forged, proximity and ongoing interactions in the neighbourhood on a frequent basis (e.g. participation in weekly assemblies, open discussions, events and frequent actions organized) provided for common understandings of shared problems and the building on common ideas, goals, tactics, aspirations and narratives, or ‘collective visions’ (see Routledge and Cumbers 2009). For example, counter-narratives developed around solidarity and its role in shaping political relations and spaces vis-à-vis dominant charity discourses. Also, the contribution of time and effort and the collaboration among individuals and groups enabled proximate bonds, trusting relations and ‘mutual solidarities’ to develop ‘from below’ (see Routledge and Cumbers 2009, Featherstone 2012). Additionally, given the informal and ‘open’ character of participation in activist groups, projects and campaigns, their sustainability largely depended upon the creation of intense personal and collective emotions through the embodied engagement of participants (e.g. hope, enthusiasm, disappointment and anger etc.); in turn, these emotions generated high levels of commitment and motivation (see Juris 2008, Routledge 2012). Therefore, common visions and narratives, reciprocal bonds and solidarities forged from below play a key role in how activists understand their practices vis-à-vis the world, negotiate their identities and subvert dominant meanings (e.g. solidarity vis-à-vis charity). These pertain to Featherstone’s (2012) account of solidarities as generative and transformative forces in the production of political relations and spaces. In this sense, in the case of Athens, place-based solidarities acquired an organic role in articulating spatially extensive political action. In other words, the building of reciprocity and solidarity in the neighbourhood generated spaces of contestation and alternatives to austerity across the city, i.e. solidarity structures and initiatives and a social/ solidarity economy, discussed through the notion of ‘urban solidarity space’ (see section 8.3.2.).

Fourth, the above show how a 'struggle community' becomes mutually constituted and connected outwards to broader counter-austerity struggles in a relational fashion. The solidarities forged through proximate relations at the territorial level of the neighbourhood and the mutual aid, self-organization and cooperation tactics activists pursue through joint projects and campaigns can be understood as survival tactics that constitute 'a politics of necessity' (Chatterton 2005). This necessity that originates in austerity and lack of means of social reproduction for vulnerable social groups also generates 'a politics of resourcefulness' (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012), whereby activists choose to reach, communicate, share and circulate resources in pursuit of more effective solutions. For example, local solidarity structures and initiatives become spaces where the local economy is mobilized so as to deal with everyday needs in a practical way (e.g. material resources, skills, expertise and manual labour etc.). The connections these local groups develop to non-local actors and networks of communication enhance the circulation of resources and know-how across the city and beyond (e.g. the Solidarity for All network and its role as a facilitator of connections among local solidarity groups, see Chapter 7).

Finally, the social and material relations activists mobilize so as to circulate resources and means of reproduction, as well as ideas, alternative knowledges and narratives signify what Zibechi (2010) termed a 'community in movement'. Zibechi's account of communities in movement pertains to the mobilization of non-state, non-capitalist relations that leads to the creation of new radical imaginaries outside state structures. Nevertheless, in the case of Athens, activists choose to collectively self-organize, while at the same time directly or indirectly engaging with and contesting state institutions. For example, local groups and initiatives are not financially dependent upon state structures and rely on their own material and non-material resources, i.e. contributions of participants in money, time, effort, manual labour, expertise, skills etc. At the same time, such groups and activists often engage in legal actions and defensive tactics against recent cuts in welfare and public spending as well as workplace organizing and strikes. In this sense, within struggle communities, small tactics pursued on a pragmatic basis and autonomous practices co-exist with defensive demands and claims towards the local and central state structures. This complementary relationship between autonomous practices,

survival tactics and broader strategies for social empowerment and change is further developed through the notion of ‘urban solidarity spaces’ (see section 8.3.2).

### **8.3.2. Constituting ‘Urban Solidarity Spaces’**

The notion of ‘urban solidarity space’ responds to the spatially expansive politics activists pursue in Athens and Greece and the possibilities and limitations this spatial politics of resistance and solidarity is faced with. In particular, solidarity serves as a counter-austerity narrative and ‘collective vision’ (see Routledge and Cumbers 2009), i.e. solidarity as a relation forged for political struggle vis-à-vis charity (see Featherstone 2012); and as a practice forged ‘from below’ through proximate community bonds. These grounded practices of resistance and solidarity in ‘struggle communities’ promote self-organization, mutual aid, cooperation and survival tactics that seek to expand horizontally across the city and beyond. At the same time, connections and communication among solidarity structures and initiatives, as well as to non-local actors, such as trade unions and political organizations, contribute to the formation of a social/ solidarity economy. Furthermore, this expansive politics involves multiple tactics and broader strategies that co-exist spatially and temporally. For example, the autonomous practices of local groups often overlap with defensive demands and legal actions made towards the local and central state structures. Also, while often critical of formal political structures, several activists from local groups contribute to trade union strikes and workplace organizing; while at the same time other participants are affiliated to political parties and organizations. These connections pursued in regard to broader strategies of social empowerment and change reveal the long-lasting tensions between autonomous practices and state-centered politics. Drawing on Bohm et al. (2010) who argue for the impossibility of autonomy, i.e. not fully realized through such autonomous practices, I suggest for an account of autonomy as a process, rather than an end-state. For example, autonomous practices of local groups and ‘interstitial’ strategies pursued, i.e. bypassing state structures and creating autonomous ones (see Wright 2010), often become sites of struggle themselves vis-à-vis party co-optation and systemic incorporation; or, in other instances, these autonomous practices become entwined with state institutions as they contest

policy, articulate alternatives and pursue legal actions etc. At the same time, these overlap with and co-exist with strategies that are developed in ‘symbiosis’ to state structures (see Wright 2010), e.g. the instrumental use of state institutions and the contestation of policy frameworks etc. Therefore, these signify a type of ‘in, against and beyond’ the capitalist state politics, which is not articulated as a single set of responses to austerity, rather through multiple, ‘hybrid’ practices and strategies of resistance and solidarity (see Routledge 1997).

Moreover, the concept of ‘urban solidarity space’ encompasses the expansive politics of resistance and solidarity across space in horizontal terms. In this regard, it also involves the forms and means of organization activists employ (such as in-group and coordinative assemblies among groups); the role of key activists that enable communication and contacts among groups across the city; the implications of these for the horizontal operational logics of networking; as well as broader power relations, diverse strategies and interests that block the expansion of collective action. Firstly, the forms and means of organization that activists and groups employ to set up actions and campaigns pertain to ‘horizontal’ participation in decision-making, as well as the complementary use of the Internet. This networking ‘from below’ involves a process of ongoing face-to-face interactions in material spaces as well as the simultaneous opening of virtual spaces of communication, through websites, blogs and social media. These types of interactions contribute to the construction of a ‘mutual solidarity’ (Routledge and Cumbers 2009) among participants, i.e. mutual aid practices, reciprocal bonds, common identification of goals and interests, narratives and cognitive frames etc.

Networking ‘from below’ as a culture of bottom-up collective organizing reveals a move towards egalitarian participatory ways of practicing politics, as opposed to formal, centralized or hierarchical structures used by political parties and trade unions for example. This culture has developed as a response to the democratic deficit evident within official politics, especially since the imposed austerity and the subsequent squares’ movement, which have prompted renewed criticisms of formal state structures. This participation is understood as open, fluid membership in groups, campaigns and projects, based on the physical presence of participants in decision-making in assemblies and actions, as opposed to formal membership and pre-attributed roles and responsibilities. Further, communication,

cooperation and networking among groups involve flexible connections that crystallize into joint actions and campaigns, in spatial and temporal terms, such as the housing tax campaign discussed in Chapter 7.7. These cooperation tactics are purposefully pursued so as to effect specific outcomes, e.g. to oppose or produce alternatives to a specific policy; deal with a tangible issue; or in other cases among groups with similar interests and functions the circulation of ‘know-how’ and ‘skill-sharing’ on particular projects (see Routledge and Cumbers 2009), such the operation of a time bank or a collective kitchen etc. In this sense, fluid connections can be understood as open-ended communication, which becomes ‘partly resolved’ into specific joint actions, depending on the issues at stake, and ‘partly left open for future projects’ (Routledge and Cumbers 2009: 94).

Secondly, the organizational means and key mechanisms that enable and facilitate communication and connections, as well the building of ‘collective visions’, (e.g. solidarity versus charity discussed in section 7.3) and ‘mutual solidarities’ (Routledge and Cumbers 2009) among local groups across Athens mainly involve: distant communication between groups and individuals through the use of the internet; key events such as mass protests, demonstrations, festivals and open meetings among groups and activists; in-group and coordinative assemblies; and key activists that participate in multiple groups, projects and campaigns simultaneously, hence acquiring particular qualities that render them ‘pools’ of information, contacts, affiliations and mobility across the city. The importance of these relational mechanisms lies in their ability to make possible contacts among groups and advance their spatial reach across the city and beyond (e.g. contacts to groups and campaigns taking place in other areas in Greece and Europe). In conceptual terms, these mechanisms signify the spatial reach of networking processes and can be understood through what Routledge and Cumbers (2009) termed ‘networking vectors’, i.e. key events, such as conferences, action days, caravans etc. and individual activists, or ‘imagineers’ that are responsible for circulating and grounding, or ‘grassrooting’, the networks’ narratives, discourses, resources, information etc. (also see Routledge et al. 2007).

In expanding these theoretical accounts, key events are often organized in city center areas, which are understood as ‘geographical nodes’ within mobilizations. In particular, the Syntagma square holds a symbolic role within such

mobilizations, e.g. mass protests, strike days etc., due to its location in front of the Parliament building. Also, ongoing contacts and frequent interactions take place in multiple spaces of activism in Athens city center, such as occupations, social centers, in-group assemblies etc. This spatial convergence of activism in Athens city center areas provides for multiple opportunities for activists and groups to meet, exchange ideas and knowledge, share action repertoires and build on future goals and actions. In this sense, and as these contacts also become part of everyday face-to-face interactions, networking and communication among groups is not only facilitated by key events, or ‘moments of network translation and interaction’ (Routledge and Cumbers 2009), but becomes an ongoing process, grounded in the multiple time-spaces of activism. For example, the operation of frequent in-group and coordination assemblies, where participants engage in dialogue, set out agendas and goals, articulate ideas, produce and diffuse knowledge, ‘translate’ and re-work narratives and build on solidarities and proximate bonds etc., signifies a grassroots bottom-up ‘process’ of building on interactions and solidarities, rather than ‘particular moments’ within the development of networks discussed in Routledge and Cumbers (2009). In this sense, conceptually, ‘networking vectors’ that signify the spatial reach of actors and movements’ narratives, as well as the concentration of resources and information, do not develop in a linear, one-directional way, rather they become dispersed in and out of multiple spaces of activism and develop processually towards particular issues, i.e. campaigns and projects dealing with specific issues.

Thirdly, in respect to the key individuals, ‘imagineers’ (Routledge and Cumbers 2009) that facilitate contacts among actors and enable the circulation of crucial information, ‘know-how’, resources etc., these are key activists who participate in multiple groups, campaigns and projects simultaneously, hence acquiring multiple affiliations and multiple positions within networking processes. In this sense, it is through this overlapping participation that these key individuals acquire certain political capital, mobility and access to information and, in turn, distribute these in groups and projects. This rotation of ‘spokes’ (see Graeber 2002) or representatives of groups aims to circulate roles and responsibilities among participants, so that everyone has equal access to decision-making, information and knowledge. This process is indicative of the horizontal diffusion of the campaign’s

‘imaginary’, narratives and goals, as opposed to the ‘grassrooting’ process noted in Routledge et al. (2007) or the ‘delegate roles’ of key activists in decision-making processes among grassroots globalization networks (also see Routledge and Cumbers 2009). However, given the informal, open membership in groups and campaigns, participation becomes dependent upon high levels of commitment, motivation and the contribution of material and non-material resources, i.e. time, effort etc. Although the increasing use of digital media has accelerated the circulation of information among groups and activists, the prerequisite of physical presence in decision-making processes in assemblies often acts as a barrier for people who are unable to attend. In practical terms, this means that in times of less participation, fewer members acquire more responsibilities, hence become ‘de facto’ imagineers or brokers. Also, the operation of key individuals in overlapping positions in groups and campaigns, shows how these activists, being more committed, mobile and having available resources and time to devote to these projects, acquire key roles, as they become familiar with the specifics of organizing actions and events, e.g. how to realize campaigns and which other groups and individuals to address. Hence, even though informal, ‘divisions of labour’, roles and responsibilities do appear. These problematize the notion of ‘horizontality’, egalitarian participation in decision-making and access to knowledge and information. In this sense, the operation of key activists and informal divisions of labour among participants create informal or ‘hidden hierarchies’ (Freeman 1970) and ‘messy horizontalities’. In turn, these reveal that urban solidarity spaces are sites of contested power relations (see Routledge and Cumbers 2009).

Fourth, as cooperation and networking among groups through horizontal connections reveal potentially uneven power relations and informal hierarchies among participants, they also show how broader power relations and the ‘uneven positioning’ of participating groups, in terms of access to resources, mobility, representation in campaigns etc., can potentially limit the development of networking (see Routledge and Cumbers 2009). Hence networking and spatially expansive links largely depend on: (i) the numbers of participants, which vary among groups (e.g. less participants in groups often leads to the concentration of roles and responsibilities to fewer activists, hence these become ‘de facto’ key pools of political capital and know-how); (ii) specific key activists with multiple

affiliations, resources and expertise they contribute to projects (e.g. activists overlapping in multiple groups, projects and campaigns simultaneously, hence hold multiple roles that provide them with enhanced access to information); (iii) the geographical reach of local groups (e.g. groups active in city center areas that are crucial nodes of information and mobilizations hold more privileged positions in regard to access to these as opposed to distant ones operating in areas surrounding Athens); and (iv) state repressive tactics that block politically extensive action (e.g. state tolerance tactics towards xenophobic practices against activists by the extreme-right and drug trafficking, frequent prosecutions of activists and repression of mass protests and strikes etc.)

Finally, the above account of ‘urban solidarity space’ suggests an inverted understanding of grassroots networks that articulate challenges to neoliberal globalization, perceived of as ‘convergence spaces’ by Routledge and Cumbers (2009), in two ways. First, the spatial politics of ‘urban solidarity spaces’ pertain to bottom-up contentious practices that expand across the city, through a process of networking ‘from below’, rather than ‘moments’ of communication and networking among place-based movements. Second, the bottom-up operation of key activists that distribute information, narratives, goals and strategies across horizontal formations in spatial terms inverts the process of ‘grassrooting’ Routledge and Cumbers (2009) attribute to ‘imagineers’, or key activists, that are responsible for disseminating these among place-based movements. In this sense, while ‘convergence spaces’ provide for a conceptual account of the ‘grassrooting’ of networks of movements in places, through a ‘top-down’ process, ‘urban solidarity spaces’ emphasize how networking and connections among the grassroots emerge *in* and *out of* place and expand outwards through a ‘bottom-up’ process.

To sum up, the above key notions this thesis introduces, namely ‘struggle communities’ and ‘urban solidarity spaces’ provide renewed insights into emergent forms of contentious politics in cities. These conceptualizations move beyond ‘the local trap’ tension underlying discussions on the ‘right *to* the city’ (see Purcell 2006) and examine the processes and the relational mechanisms through which the spatial practices of resistance to austerity and solidarity networks emerge *in* places and expand outwards across space. Finally, they also provide insights into the limits



these are faced with in pursuing alternatives to austerity and broader strategies of social empowerment and change.

#### **8.4. Wider Implications for Social Change Processes in an era of Austerity**

As discussed in the conclusions above (see section 8.3), the conceptualizations of struggle and solidarity in Athens, Greece through ‘struggle communities’ and ‘urban solidarity spaces’ revealed how resistance and solidarity practices emerge and develop contextually, as well as the possibilities and limitations of these to expand across city space and beyond, horizontally. Drawing on these discussions and the arguments raised throughout this thesis, I will outline here key implications of these findings for social change processes in an era of austerity. In furthering the debates on counter-austerity politics, I focus on the potential of contentious politics and emerging bottom-up responses to the crisis to articulate challenges to austerity politics, as these have been designed and implemented by supranational institutions, such as the EU and the IMF and national governments across European contexts.

In respect to broader uneven power relations that limit extensive political action and the pursuit of a spatially expansive politics, ‘symbiotic’ practices and strategies (Wright 2010) that contest austerity politics within state institutions become largely dependent upon configurations of power and interests that define national and EU policy. For example, the EU policy around ‘social enterprises’ legislated by the national government in Greece provides for certain benefits, e.g. funding and tax reductions for setting up social economy structures. However, potential withdrawal of these benefits and changes in this policy may impede the expansion of a social economy and disrupt the sustainability of such projects. Also, given the political conjuncture, a broader austerity framework employed by transnational institutions, i.e. the EU, the ECB and the IMF, and implemented by the Greek governments of the past few years creates a democratic deficit in decision-making and policy design. Recent examples of grassroots communication among EU anti-austerity movements that seek to build on ‘transnational solidarities’ (Routledge and Cumbers 2009) (such as solidarity campaigns and international social economy festivals held in Athens) as well as alliances formed between

national parties and actors from European countries (e.g. the anti-austerity discourse among the European Left articulated in the European Parliament elections in 2014) have initiated broader contestation of the above EU austerity framework. Nevertheless, these still remain loosely connected and have not yet crystallized into powerful actors.

At the same time, self-organization in neighbourhoods is gradually becoming, not only a means for survival, but also a form of organization that appeals to more and more people given the mistrust in national politics and decision-making that often fails to address the interests of large parts of the Greek population. However, direct action and ‘ruptural’ moments (Wright 2010) that disrupt the function of the state, e.g. working-class struggles, occupations of public buildings etc., are increasingly faced with state repressive tactics, e.g. police brutality, demonization of activists and dissent groups by mainstream media and extensive prosecutions of activists etc. Also, ‘interstitial’ practices (Wright 2010) and strategies that build on autonomous spaces are also faced with obstacles to their expansion, as activists rely on their own limited material and non-material resources in order to set up solidarity structures.

To sum up, the above reveal the possibilities, as well as key pragmatic issues and problematics activists are faced with in their attempts to challenge austerity politics in Athens and Greece. These resonate with Bohm et al. (2010), who argue for the possibilities of autonomous practices to open up new political spaces of social empowerment and to broaden existing paradigms through collective modes of self-organization and mutual support (also see Chatterton 2005). Nevertheless, they also reveal the limitations, or impossibility of autonomy (see Bohm et al. 2010) as a fully realized political project outside existing state structures. In this sense, autonomous practices become sites of struggle themselves, as activists need to a certain extent engage with and contest state power as well as supranational institutions involved (e.g. the EU and IMF). In this sense, the possibilities and limitations of resistance and solidarity practices and broader strategies that contest the role of the state and challenge austerity pertain to Wright’s (2010) argument on the necessity of pursuing simultaneous strategies of contestation that make use of and contest existing state structures, i.e. ‘symbiotic’ or

‘ruptural’, and at the same time ‘interstitial’ strategies that generate new spaces for social empowerment.

### **8.5. Possible ways forward for Research on Counter-Austerity Politics**

This thesis offered grounded insights into emerging grassroots responses to the ongoing crisis of neoliberalism and subsequent austerity politics manifested in Athens and Greece. According to EU and national government officials, austerity politics have been adopted across European countries as a temporary and ‘emergency’ solution to the crisis. Nevertheless, the severe impact of austerity on people’s livelihoods (e.g. working and middle-classes, immigrants and young educated etc.) reveals a permanent state of growing inequalities, precarious labour, unemployment and dispossession across various contexts. As these have not been new in how the neoliberal project has developed over the past few decades, austerity has further aggravated these in introducing a state of fiscal discipline and ‘extreme economy’ (see Peck 2012). In acknowledging the hegemonic role of neoliberal capitalism and, more recently, austerity agendas and, at the same time, treating dominating power relationally, i.e. as interdependent with contestation (see Leitner et al. 2007), this thesis brought forward the agency of contestation to the latest phase of neoliberal restructuring and austerity politics implemented in Athens, Greece. By conceptualising on emerging counter-austerity politics, through ‘struggle communities’ and ‘urban solidarity spaces’, I attempted to show how dissident voices seek to destabilize and contest austerity and produce practical alternatives to address social reproduction needs.

Therefore, through an analysis of such grassroots responses, the goal is to provide for hopeful insights into the possibilities as well as the pragmatic limitations they are faced with in articulating contestation to austerity. Concerning these, grassroots groups, local projects, joint actions and coordination campaigns this thesis analysed, often arise out of particular issues; they become dependent upon certain resources and participation; they are faced with practical problems; and become entwined to broader power relations and extensive state repression tactics that occasionally impede their actions and goals. As these reveal their limits to practicing an effective politics, they also signify their dynamic character,

transformations and expansive potential in spatial and temporal terms. For example, even though the Solidarity network of Exarcheia (see Chapter 5.4.2) was being faced with less participation and resources by the time I was completing my fieldwork in Athens, in 2014 activists from this group organized a new initiative and set up a Food bank, in collaboration with other local groups and activists from the Autonomous social center. Also, another transformation that occurred in the spring of 2014 was within the ‘Exarcheia in movement’ campaign (see Chapter 6.5), which acquired broader characteristics and formed the current local popular assembly of Exarcheia. Within this, more activists and local groups joined forces, organized open discussions, actions and events, in order to deal with intensified state repressive tactics against resistance practices developing in Exarcheia.

In the meantime, several other struggles have erupted as responses to policies introduced by the Greek government. For example, in northern Greece, the ongoing struggle against the gold- mining activity developed in the forest of Skouries that impacted on the livelihoods of residents and the local economy of the area has gained the support and practical solidarity of several activist groups active in Exarcheia, political groups and environmental organizations from Athens, across Greece and beyond. This struggle for social and environmental justice, or ‘for land and freedom’ as locals chose to publicize it, draws on community bonds forged among the rural areas surrounding the forest that were mobilized in order to build on resistance practices and confront the destructive mining development and the extensive police repression against local activists. In this sense, this particular struggle reveals the spatially expansive potential of resistance and solidarity practices, their links to distant actors and their dispersal across activist networks; as well as the grounding of ‘struggle communities’ beyond the city of Athens and ‘the urban’ in conceptual terms. Additionally, the ongoing communication of solidarity groups active in Athens with activists and anti-austerity initiatives and grassroots movements emerging across Europe (e.g. Spain, Portugal and the UK etc.) suggest the expansion of inter-local and transnational solidarities in the face of austerity, as well as the distribution of crucial know-how in building on alternatives.

The above transformations and developments within grassroots initiatives, as well as new struggles that emerge and contest austerity reveal possible avenues forward on building on the findings of this thesis. Additionally, they signify

potential ways into future research and comparative approaches to emerging contentious politics in austerity-driven contexts across Europe and beyond. For example, critical engaged research into new struggles that emerge in cities, examination of emergent forms of exchange and distant collaboration between Greek and Spanish activists and movements, insights into counter-austerity politics in the UK and investigation into the recent anti-austerity initiatives and coalitions at the EU political level by grassroots movements and the European Left etc.

Finally, this thesis offered insights into how ‘struggle communities’ and ‘urban solidarity spaces’ can be utilized as conceptual tools to interpret emergent forms of contentious politics in Athens, Greece (e.g. how these emerge in places, how they develop links and expand across space, accounts of their spatial practices and their limitations etc.). At the same time, these empirically grounded conceptualizations potentially provide for further understandings of other austerity-driven contexts, spatial practices of resistance and networks of solidarity etc. In turn, I suggest that these necessitate further context-sensitive approaches and scholar-activist ethnographies that would seek not only to interpret counter-austerity politics, but also develop an ethical commitment to make contributions to struggles. This ethical responsibility of politically engaged research and scholar-activism would not only enhance academic input and produce grounded insights into contemporary contentious politics, but also enlarge the spaces of communication between academia and the actual world and generate constructive critiques aiming to empower struggles.

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## **Appendix**

### **Interview Guide: Themes/ Sample Questions**

#### 1) Background of groups/ Past and current goals in relation to the crisis:

When and how did your group come into existence/ Background of participants (age, gender, profession, place of residence etc.)

What kinds of organizational means you use and why? (e.g. assembly, internet etc.)

Have your goals changed in the current conjuncture?

What are the motivations/ benefits of participation?

How do you relate to/ identify with other people from your group/ other groups in the area?

Do you participate in other groups/ organizations/ projects as well?

What types of actions do you organize, where, how often?

What kinds of resources do these require (commitment, skills, expertise, time, effort etc.)

#### 2) Collective visions and shared solidarities (discursive and embodied means of connections to activist others)- Focusing on personal narratives and experiences:

Identify shared goals and aspirations with others, activists and groups

How and where are these manifested/ embodied/ practiced? (common campaigns, joint actions, festivals etc.)

Solidarity/ Social economy initiatives and structures

#### 3) Place-based struggles and politically extensive action:

Do you collaborate with other local or non-local groups, organizations etc.?

What are the goals/ benefits of organizing common campaigns/ events/ actions?

How are these made possible?

Specific factors/ people that enable connections to other groups?

Any obstacles you have come across from your experience?

Key spots of activist practices in the area/ Social meeting points

4) Forms of spatially extensive action:

In what ways do you seek to expand your actions?

Identify important events/ key places where this is made possible and why?

How is communication/ coordination of actions achieved? (meetings, events, social media, blogs, email-lists etc.)

Any particular factors that enable or block these?

5) The squares movement and the Syntagma occupation:

Did you participate in the Syntagma occupation? Experiences, narratives etc.

What was the role of this movement in challenging austerity politics?

What happened after the eviction of the occupation?

6) Disputes/ antagonisms in and among groups (roles and responsibilities, political ideological distancing etc.):

Do disputes arise?

If yes, why do you think these occur?

How do you deal with/ overcome these?

Are there any cases of unresolved dispute and how do you think these affect your group?