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Title:

Creative ecosystems and new commons in the crisis-ridden Athenian urban factory.

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Abstract:

The subject matter of this paper is to identify, survey and correlate examples of new commons and emerging creative ecosystems in selected urban areas of Athens, in the so-called “post-2010 economic crisis” framework.

Being a city where more than half of the Greek population resides, Athens finds itself at the epicentre of the ongoing crisis. The consequences of the crisis in the urban and social fabric are severe and more evident in already underprivileged central neighborhoods of Athens, but are dramatically spread across the center of the city, like: the broad social destitution, the increased feeling of fear and insecurity, the abandonment of building stock and the desolation and continuing de-industrialisation of the city center. At the same time, a new urban milieu is being established, in which new forms of creativity and entrepreneurship appear to flourish again. The idea that vibrancy, creativity and innovation have the ability to boom in hard times is being explored and questioned in this paper.

More specifically, the paper attempts to reveal examples of social creativity and innovation as well as acts of solidarity and claims of new commons, beyond the dominant theories of the Creative City and Talent City Indexes. The argument is based on the concept that a new branding identity for the city of Athens is being constructed, which is strongly linked to the crisis. This brand fuels the communities of creatives, start-uppers and micro-entrepreneurs with a new sense of cultural identity and purpose. Concludingly, the spatial imprint of the above networks and clusters in the Athenian city center and its public spaces is also being addressed, being of great importance, since it points towards an alternative direction, beyond facelifts and investments in urban infrastructure.

Keywords:

creative ecosystems, new commons, Athens in crisis, place branding, creativity and entrepreneurship

1. Introduction

Following the crisis' breakthrough, still well within its confines, yet in a context described as a so-called "post-2010 economic crisis" there is a trend of a new ecosystem arising in Athens, consisting of: a type production based on the notion of creativity; self-employed productive subjects, forming networks, loose yet constitutive interrelations and operational groups; flexible and precarious working conditions and status.

This paper is attempting an initial demonstration of its preconditions, its constitutive parts, focusing on the specificities of its spatial clustering of its activities in the athenian downtown, by presenting examples of new co-working spaces of production, collective or individual. On top of that, it is highlighting an inherent tendency of this ecosystem's operating principles, according to the demands of capitalistic production, distribution and circulation of goods, appropriating the affects of the "general intellect" to notions of efficiency and valorization. Opposed to that, it is positing an underlying dynamic: if it is to survive and attempt an exodus from the existing asphyxiating framework, that lies in the collaboration and peer-appropriation of its own production, also referred to as "social creativity", based on the establishment of a "new commons" apprehension.

2. Athens in Crisis: Context and Remarks

2.1. Crisis: a Short Description in Numbers

Five years after the first bailout was issued, Greece remains in crisis. Back in 2010, fears of a possible default on Greece's debts, lead to an agreement, between the greek government and Troika (European Commission, International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank), for a rescue package. The bailout deal included a new round of even tougher austerity measures -following the ones imposed the previous year- such as large budget cuts, thousands of dismissals in the public sector, an extensive privatisation programme of public property and assets, as well as the over-taxation of income and property.

Unfortunately, it is almost evident that most of the measures followed, did not treat any of the actual problems in Greece. On the contrary, they have deepened the financial crisis, which has also acquired further social and political aspects. Some indicative numbers illustrate how critical the situation remains. Nowadays, unemployment rate is calculated around 25,4%, 71% of whom are long-term unemployed (EL.STAT, 2015) and they receive no unemployment benefits after 12 months of unemployment. Minimum salaries fell from 751.5€ in 2009, to 586.1€ (before tax) in 2013 (and 510.9€ for people under 25 years of age). On the other hand, prices of everyday items remain high, as a result of privatisations and VAT increases (from 9 to 23%). In addition, practices of downsizing the state, reflect on diminution and deregulation of social security, pension systems, public health and education, as well as public and municipal services for children, the elderly, the disabled, the homeless etc. Unemployment, salary and pension cuts, tax increases as well as shrinkage of the already weak welfare state, have inevitably increased inequality, poverty and social exclusions. The population at risk of poverty has raised from 21,1% in 2010 to 23,1% in 2013 (EL.STAT 2013). The number of homeless, although can not be accurately measured, is approximately calculated, by various NGOs¹ in 20.000 in Greece, out of whom 11.000 live in Athens.

¹ Data is mainly taken by Klimaka NGO. For further info pl. see: < <http://www.klimaka.org.gr/js/index.php/> > [last accessed 31/05/2015].

In conclusion, the current situation in Greece may be described as a humanitarian crisis. Before the recent legislative election in Greece (January 2015) and the prevalence of the left-wing party, several proclamations, to face mainly the humanitarian aspect, were made. However, no critical measures have been established so far, because of the ongoing negotiations between the greek government and the involved financial institutions.

2.2. Observations and Implications

There could be numerous aspects potentially identifiable as immense crisis' implications mentioned, not meant as direct consequences, rather than intertwined phenomena that seem to be amplified. They are covering an extremely wide range, from individual depression to new collective imaginary representations of reality, based on emerging ideological schemes, bearing, inescapably social, political and economical consequences. On top of their appearance, as presuppositions for the overcoming of the crisis' discharges, they are associatively obtaining a new status, regaining solid institutional and legislatively established underpinnings.

Two are specifically important for this research's analysis, whose bifurcations lead to a third one, acting as a "necessity" or a "chance" for the creation of a new image for Athens. They are being presented below, following this layout.

2.2.1. Changes in the Realm of Work

Passing through the various stages of post-fordist condition, from the establishment of enterprises in the digital realm, to the network society, towards the immaterial and biopolitical production, what has been evolving is a gradual disappearance of traditionally dominant aspects of work and the abolition of the accomplishments of workers' struggles in the western world; running parallel to an intensification of mechanisms of hierarchical domination and the biopolitical exploitation, of not just the workforce, but of the whole population².

Two poles of emerging tension, within the multiple forms of immaterial labour and social cooperation and coordination, have been long recognized by Negri and Hardt: a new self-constitution of subjectivity, in relation to the crisis³ and a new type of sociality, in relation to a process of self-valorisation and social valorisation of work⁴. Yet, focusing on the field of practice of the subject worker of the cognitive creative market field, what appears to have been established as a dominant model of the working subject is related to a model of (self-)entrepreneurship⁵.

² since virtually everyone is currently understood as becoming part of a debtor-creditor relation of himself to capital, a relation of power, shaping all social relations in neoliberal economies (Lazzarato, 2012, 20-35).

³ *"The crisis of socialism, the crisis of modernity, and the crisis of the law of value do not negate the processes of social valorization and the constitution of subjectivity, nor do they leave these processes (with unpardonable hypocrisy) to the unique destiny of exploitation. Rather, these transformations impose new processes of subjective constitution -not outside but within the crisis that we are experiencing, the crisis, that is, that the organization of old subjectivities is experiencing."* (Hardt, Negri, 2003, 10).

⁴ *"The subject, as Foucault clearly understood, is at the same time a product and productive, constituted in and constitutive of the vast networks of social labour. labour is both subjection and subjectivation -" le travail de soi sur soi" - in such a way that all notions of either the free will or the determinism of the subject must be discarded. Subjectivity is defined simultaneously and equally by its productivity and its producibility, its aptitudes to produce and to be produced."* (Hardt, Negri, 2003, 11).

⁵ *"In the debt economy, to become human capital or an entrepreneur of the self means assuming the costs as well as the risks of a flexible and financialized economy, costs and risks which are not only far from it-those of innovation, but also and especially those of precariousness, poverty, unemployment, a failing health system, housing shortages, etc. To make an enterprise of oneself (Foucault)-that means taking responsibility for poverty, unemployment, precariousness, welfare benefits, low wages, reduced pensions, etc., as if these were the individual's "resources" and "investments" to manage as capital, as "his" capital"* (Lazzarato, 2012, 51)

There are several characteristics recognizable in such working conditions: precariousness, combined with a constant sense of insecurity and competitiveness, connectivity with lack of relational intimacy and recognition among workers. These are coupled by the systematic organisational impossibility, in the traditional form of unions; as immaterial labour cannot be assigned to a specific categorisation into a class formation by knowledge workers, in the industrial/ fordist sense of the notion, since it is dispersed throughout the whole life, time and being of the working and producing subject.

Additionally, one can trace demands and prerequisites of this type of work: adaptability, flexibility, connectivity, on-off/ project-based relation to circuits and networks. Everyone is working overtime, while less and less are being (formally and officially) employed. This statement is descriptive of a situation, that has to do with the production and circulation of immaterial flows of (affects as) commodities, in terms of mediated cultural information. Thus, *“to emphasize how labour is not equivalent to employment also means to acknowledge how important free affective and cultural labour is to the media industry, old and new”* (Terranova, 88)⁶.

Aforementioned aspects seem to be legislatively boosted, finding their place in the agenda of reformative demands. So, they are being dispersed as conditions, becoming an embodied and dominant trend, throughout the greek environment of work. In specific reference to Greece, additionally, the phenomenon of a “brain drain”⁷ is being observed. Trained and educationally⁸ skilled cognitive workers’ creative aspirations, but even living conditions, cannot be met or guaranteed, within the current environment. So, they are fleeing towards other countries, in pursue of companies and academic positions, covering their full potential and abilities and compensating them for those.

2.2.2. Spatial Repercussions_ a Sequence of Diminution

Today, under the new conditions triggered by the financial crisis, the situation has been altered and apparently not yet balanced. The deterioration of the athenian city center in both symbolic and material level is aggravated because of the crisis, even if this condition is often an additional pretext for accelerating land exploitation. This fact is more obvious in already underprivileged central areas of Athens but it spreads across the city center: increase of fear and insecurity, drag use and trade, increasing number of homeless people sheltering in public squares. A large number of traditional Greek businesses bankrupted, famous brands left the local market, retail shops are closing every day leaving behind them an abandoned building stock. This fact leads to further desolation of central commercial districts, resulting in more intense phenomena. Consequently, the commercial real estate in Athens is facing a great recession and the rental values of both retail shops

⁶ In addition, for an analysis of labour intensification, leading to a flexible “*work-for-labour*” situation and “*work-for-reproduction*” angle, pl. see Standing, 119-127.

This distinction between work and employment and the conjecture of work with life is not the only “unsolvable” problem. An even more tenacious one is that pointing towards the resolution of unemployment, understood as a work-related issue. This fact lies in accordance with the tension between the notion of work and employment in the new form of wage labour. The “big narrative” of (full) employment is being directed upon to two non-contradictory discursive logics. On the one hand, the protection of waged long-term-contract labourers. The protection of the entrepreneur and the enterprise, on the other. Unfortunately, none of them is the exact case of things and, therefore, cannot conceptualize demands (Lazzarato, 2014, 153-158), related to, previously illustrated, contemporary issues.

⁷ For further info pl. see: < <http://www.cnbc.com/id/102450911> > [last accessed: 31/05/2015].

⁸ There is a contradiction worth mentioning, that the brain-drainers are usually carrying degrees obtained by greek free public institutions, which are nonetheless generally not at all highly rated in university ranking lists. Nevertheless, they are being presented as skilled and talented, succesfully-potential, well-sought-abroad workers. The subject of public vs private university education and the independence of research and educational activities have continuously been a critical debate matter since well before 2008.

and offices are in continuous decline, because of the reduced demand for commercial property and the fact that owners and tenants tend to move to other areas in search of lower prices. This situation affects the whole of the athenian city center; even high-class neighborhoods⁹.

Further degradation of public space is caused by the cancellation of necessary spatial interventions in overburdened neighborhoods and its replacement by questionable flagship projects towards temporary facelifts and gentrification.¹⁰ In general, during last years several luxurious projects in Athens downtown have either stopped¹¹ or are only announced but not yet implemented¹². Thus, it is possible that investors are expecting the economy to be stabilised at a low level and therefore, a field for riskier but more profitable investments to be created.

On the other hand, the public space of the greek cities in crisis and especially the athenian one seem to get also transformed in a totally different perspective. In this gloomy context, several citizen initiatives, collective actions and solidarity practices have emerged, aiming to cope with or resist crisis and austerity. Soup kitchens, social groceries, time banks, communal cooking, social medical wards and pharmacies; schemes for educational support and cultural events, local assemblies, advice and support centres, occupied public spaces, employment collectives and so on are some examples of different types of bottom up initiatives or initiatives from below, which gradually reconfigure urban public space¹³.

It would be rather an exaggeration to consider such initiatives as a solution; nevertheless, it could mean the beginning of a new concept for the city and public space. A different map of the city is generated and new users of the space can be part of alternative networks, which often create new perceptions of the athenian city center. After all, individual mentalities seem to get also transformed. This paper tries to point out the variety of new creative and productive practices, which may be followed by different individuals: some view crisis as an “opportunity” and adopt a competitive and entrepreneurial-focused way of living and working, whereas others acknowledge the potential of the social processes behind creativity (“social creativity”)¹⁴ and try to create an impact for the city in a context of “social innovation”¹⁵. Therefore, the necessity for an alternative concept is raised, which

⁹ It should be underlined that this reduction is not equally distributed geographically and it depends on the spatial characteristics of the area and the specific features of each property (age, level, view, etc.); it depends also on the prices prevailing in each area before the crisis.

¹⁰ A great example is Rethink Athens, a facelift project for Athens city center based on the pedestrianization of Panepistimiou str. Rethink Athens has been strongly criticized as a project towards gentrification, as a symbolic statement against the current users of city center at the same time that the city has humanitarian needs to address (Hadjimichalis).

¹¹ In fact, EU funding of the Rethink Athens has been suspended in November 2014, as it was considered, according to the press (To Vima) a low priority project by the European Commission.

¹² There are several examples of small regeneration projects in neighborhoods in need that are included in Athens' 'Plan of Integrated Urban Intervention' (SOAP) prepared by the Municipality of Athens, but there is no progress towards their implementation. Moreover, based on empirical data, the same tendency is observed as far as private investment activity is concerned.

¹³ *“The operation of solidarity initiatives seems to create new spaces of congregation and contact among participants -an emerging type of public space, local but also city-wide, and at the same time a “laboratory” for a different public sphere (...); these initiatives (...) tend to shape alternative ways of belonging and living together; (...) a rapidly transforming urban landscape in which people not only “receive” assistance and services but partake in reciprocal practices of coping/ resisting -and devising socially innovative practices to do so”* (Vaious, Kalandides).

¹⁴ Social creativity, as used in this paper's context, could be summed up in the following: *“Creative activity grows out of the relationship between an individual and the world of his or her work, as well as from the ties between an individual and other human beings. Much human creativity arises from activities that take place in a social context in which interaction with other people important contributors to the process. Creativity does not happen inside a person's head, but in the interaction between a person's thoughts and a socio-cultural context”* (Csikszentmihalyi), a definition of the term that points out the collective dimension of value creation, an investigation of the social processes behind creativity.

¹⁵ As meant here, *“[s]ocial innovation occurs because socially innovative actions, strategies, practices and processes arise whenever problems of poverty, exclusion, segregation and deprivation or opportunities for*

does not consist of features that make public space competitive but of those that can reactivate it and make it suitable for collective processes and uses. The question is whether social creativity can be a tool to use in this direction, which is investigated further in the following section of this paper.

2.3. Re-branding_ a New Case for a Profile

One of the characteristics of the biopolitical way of working and production is the process of a self-attribution of subjectivity, which can be interpreted also as a procedure of self-branding. Cognitive, and more specifically creative workers, live, work and produce in a context where self-branding becomes essential as it allows them to valorise their work accordingly. Moreover, it allows them to belong to networks from which they acquire work commissions and distribute their work products. A self-brand is composed not only by the individual's work, but also and more importantly by the content a person is promoting through social media and Internet and finally through the social circles it belongs to. Entertainment (bars, cafeterias etc) and cultural consumption (theater, music, art galleries etc) play an important role in the formation of these circuits, as they are the physical space of manifesting the self-brand.

Consequently, the creative workers choose the environments they live and work in, according to the possibilities of participating in these circuits as well as the authenticity, uniqueness and "image" that these environments have. The collective cultural and symbolic capital accumulated in these areas is a catalyst in the formation of the so-called creative milieu, which – as a next step – is embedded into the place brand¹⁶.

The concept of place branding has emerged as an umbrella term for nation branding, region branding and city branding and is organically connected with the notion of places competing in a globalised setting, in order to attract investments and highly skilled workers. The main idea is to communicate a brand that will turn a city into a destination, that people not only want to visit, but they want to live and work at. Creativity and culture are considered as important commercial marketing tools, towards the formation of a strong place brand, as they are able to shape special marks of distinction (Harvey). Real estate and tourism are economic domains which have evolved mechanisms to appropriate and extract surplus value through the monopoly rent that yields this marks of distinction, both in the scale of cities as well as in the scale of city areas. What is worth mentioning is that these mechanisms are able to extract surplus value without investing in fixed capital.

As far as Athens is concerned, the city brand is still fueled mostly by the history and cultural heritage of classical Athens. After the Olympic Games, organised in Athens in 2004, a new brand emerged, that encompassed a feeling of success and prosperity. Very soon, during the post-2010 crisis, the "Olympic Games Brand" was superseded by a new athenian "crisis-brand", which was connected with the image of rebellious acts, degradation and insecurity. This image has its counterpart, a "crisis as an opportunity" brand, which is being consumed mostly by young entrepreneurs and creatives¹⁷. It is no coincidence, that this brand is communicated through magazines and blogs that relate to the tourism industry¹⁸ and try to communicate a positive creative image of Greece, in

improving living conditions cannot find satisfactory solutions in the "institutionalised field" of public or private action" (Moulaert et al. 2013, 2).

¹⁶ Degraded to a commercial and political marketing tool, the semantic content of creativity has been reduced to an insipid spread of happy homogeneity – including the right amount of TED-styled fringe misfits and subcultures – that can be bureaucratically regulated and 'valorized'.

¹⁷ "People want to be in the city center, especially the entrepreneurial set. Its keeping the city buzzy. Ingenuity is paramount here - it feel like the land of opportunity." Easyjet Traveller On-Board Magazine, 38-45.

¹⁸ For further info pl. see: < <http://www.bordersofadventure.com/creative-transformation-crisis-athens/> > [last accessed: 31/05/2015]

general¹⁹. As the “classical Athens brand” is fading out under the negative “crisis-brand”, the athenian brand needs to be reinvented. The athenian city center is the main space field of manifestation of this brand and as such it is looked into in more detail in the following chapters.

3. Towards a Productive Domain of Creativity

3.1. Dominant Theories of Creativity

The concept of creativity or more specifically of the “creative economy”, has its roots in an ongoing procedure of commodification and economisation of culture²⁰. Creative economy is considered to be a highly dynamic and developing component of the urban as well as the national economies and as such stands in the core of international and european development strategies. The term “creative industry” refers to a knowledge- and talent-intensive production procedure, that emerged as an enrichment of the term “cultural industry”.

According to the UK Government Department of Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS) the creative industries are widely recognized as “*those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property*”.

Quite characteristic of this concept of “creativity-led-development” are the theories of Richard Florida, who introduces a system of classification and measurement of cities’ ability to attract the desirable “creative class” and evolve a creative brand, the “creativity index”. On the same line of thinking, Charles Landry’s “creative city” is a city where culture and creative industries drive innovation and contribute decisively in the cities’ regeneration. Another evolvment, as regards european policies, is the establishment of the “Creative Cities Network” by UNESCO. Cities submit their “portfolio” to join the “club” of the Creative cities without any subsequent financial benefits, in contrast to funds accompanied with the participation in the European Capital of Culture program. The shift from the investment in culture to the exploitation of creativity is evident.

On a city level creative industries gravitate to places and form bottom-up or institutionalised “creative clusters”. This paper confronts the spatial concentration of creative activities in the athenian city center as an ecosystem, which claims to enhance the dynamic evolution of creative interactions and evolutionary networks of collaboration between entities. This system, also referred to as “social creativity”, consists of interlinked creative resources, such as human resources, policy makers, creators, professionals and entrepreneurs, intermediaries and knowledge transfer channels and also creativity venues, workspaces and platforms either physical or digital. Like natural ecosystems, creative ecosystems have inputs and outputs, operating in open exchange relationship with their environments.

3.2. The Emergence of a Creative Ecosystem in Athens

Parallel to the in-crisis mode of Athens, there is a new urban milieu, in which new forms of creativity and entrepreneurship have been established. The idea that vibrancy, creativity and innovation have the ability to boom in hard times seems to be verified, at least in a first

¹⁹ For further info pl. see:

<<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/greeces-economic-crisis-fueling-the-creative-world.aspx?pageID=238&nID=27276&NewsCatID=385>> [last accessed: 31/05/2015]

²⁰ The Frankfurt school introduced the term “culture industry” to point out the transformation of culture in business and “deception”. (Adorno & Horkheimer)

level analysis. A lot of small and medium businesses try to thrive in the city centre of Athens. Their scope relates mainly with recreation and leisure activities, as well as services in the sector of tourism. Those businesses renew the existing stock of symbolic economy²¹, already established in the historic city centre (Souliotis). Apart from businesses of those sectors, there are others related to immaterial and cognitive practices of design, creativity, new technologies of communication and fabrication. The research interest in the latter category of businesses, resides mainly in their current high concentrations and not so much in the novelty of their content. Similar activities also existed before the crisis period in Athens (and generally in Greece), but lately an evolving spatial clustering of similar and/or complementary businesses can be traced in the city centre of Athens. Young people with self-funded or crowdfunded businesses are implementing a new way of entrepreneurship, that tries to resist to the difficulties of Greek economy (i.e. inability of bank lending, high taxation), at the same time they are addressing to a volatile and unstable market.

A new creative ecosystem seems to emerge in the very centre of the athenian urban landscape. Its gradual establishment in this particular area is not a random or coincidental incident. This new ecosystem refers and relates directly to the pre-existing ones; the vibrant cultural and leisure activities ecosystem, on the one hand, creates a familiar and fruitful environment, allowing for the “mandatory” flexibility between work and leisure. On the other hand, the older small-scale productive and commercial activities of the area empower and facilitate the new entrepreneurs in practical and even technical issues in their businesses. The central location of these spaces among other advantages (proximity to public transport and public services) offers proximity to wholesale shops and raw materials, located in the city center for decades. Moreover, the tradition of small scale enterprises or freelancers, established in the center of Athens, creates a familiar environment for new enterprises and offers the chance for local accumulation of knowledge, in an attempt to bridge the gap, between traditional and immaterial way of production. Thus, the new creative ecosystem finds itself anchored to the local know-how, renewing the urban ecology of the city centre.

One should not disparage the dynamic qualities in the availability of empty, and consequently cheap, commercial (retail shops and offices) spaces, or former manufacturing plants. These spaces are especially attractive to the young entrepreneurs and creatives, as they are perceived as urban ruins to be rejuvenated.²²

Some of the features of those creative businesses are mainly the following:

- according to their business plan:

They form models of small and very small businesses of collaborating partners with no hierarchical structures, featuring combinations of paid and unpaid works/ projects (voluntarily, self/crowd-funded) and deliver product based services, dealing not so much with client commissioned projects. These models leave room for the development of collective creative initiatives that can offer the chance for an alternative way²³ of entrepreneurship.

²¹ Following Sharon Zukin's definition, “symbolic economy is comprised by two parallel production systems (...): spatial production, with the synergy between investment of capital and cultural meanings, and the production of symbols which constructs both a medium of commercial exchange and a language of social identity.” (Zukin, 23-24).

²² “An urban ruin is a place that has fallen out of the economic life of the city, and in some way an ideal home for the art that also falls outside the ordinary production and consumption of the city.” (Solnit, 88-90)

²³ Although Athens has a tradition in small-scale businesses, there were few examples of collaborative attempts, up until recently.

- according to their value production:

The creative businesses produce value in the wider post-fordist capitalist framework, in a similar way that immaterial production²⁴ does. They both mobilize the cognitive power, talents, inspiration and ideas of the individual workers, who act, to some degree, autonomously to capital and its traditional means of production. Creative economy and immaterial economy do not coincide as far as their production cycles are concerned; however they refer to similar production, circulation and distribution processes²⁵.

- according to their spatial formulation:

It is observed that this embryonic creative ecosystem is also combined with the formulation of spatial typologies where the related activities are favored. Furthermore, users - members of the ecosystem themselves - potentially contribute to the urban field in a collective way, in order to create contemporary spatial conditions for the evolvement of the ecosystem, generating updated conceptions of urban space. Although there are not enough quantitative data available, it is argued that there is a spatial agglomeration of such activities in the districts of the athenian city center. These spatial constellations may be articulated in clusters, forming a network of spaces which potentially operate as hubs²⁶ of wider networks; research results²⁷ from other european countries also confirm the above observation.

Summing up, networking relations within the spatial confines of clusters plays a crucial role not only in business terms because of the obtained synergistic benefits (knowledge, experience, collaboration), but also at the level of motivation, as it possible that the network and much more a collaborative one, can create the perception of a stabilized entrepreneurial community albeit the difficult circumstances. Last but not least, public space is also affected by clustering, leading to further establishment of businesses, as the space is regenerated through peer attraction and promotion. On the other hand, the danger of future gentrification exists but the magnitude of economic recession seems to suspend this tendency for the time being.

3.3. Towards a Creative Sabotage

As commented in previous chapters, this paper acknowledges a spectrum of creative and productive activities, which vary from corporate oriented and intensively competitive, to

²⁴ According to Negri and Hardt, "immaterial labour is labour that creates immaterial goods such as knowledge, information, communication, a relationship or an emotional response. Conventional terms such as service work, intellectual labour and cognitive labour all refer to aspects of immaterial labour, but none of them captures its generality. (...) The labour involved in all immaterial production, remains material -it involves bodies and brains as all labour does. What is immaterial is its product. We recognize that immaterial labour is a very ambiguous term in this regard. It might be better to understand the new hegemonic form as biopolitical labour, that is, labour that creates not only material goods but also relationships and ultimately social life itself. The term biopolitical thus indicates that the traditional distinctions between the economic, the political, the social, and the cultural become increasingly blurred." (Hardt, Negri, 2004, 108-109).

²⁵ Their coincidence is illustrated in "the passage from the "mass worker" to the "social worker," from Fordist society to computerized and automated society, from regulated labour to autonomous and cooperative labour, immaterial and creative labour. This is the same social passage, in the very composition of the general productivity of systems, that has produced new subjectivities, determined new cultural and political relationships, and consequently defined a shift in the course of history." (Hardt, Negri, 2003, 19).

²⁶ "We found evidence of the four types of patterns (related to clusters) described earlier: Hotspots and bunches have been found to be more frequent in nonmetropolitan areas, hubs in medium and large cities, and clouds in the largest cities." In Barcelona for example, most of the clusters are concentrated in the central city forming a hub. (Boix et al.)

²⁷ "Synthesizing the findings in an aggregate fashion, we found that there were a large number of creative industry clusters in Europe, concentrating 61% of the creative firms, showing an exaggerated preference for metropolitan areas and for co-locating with other clusters of similar and different creative industries." (Boix et al.)

more loosely organised and, some times even not registered activities, which develop around the notion of social creativity.

The concept of classifying cities according to their Creativity Index (Florida), as well as all relevant reports about creative industries around Europe (starting with Great Britain's report in 1996), reveal an obsession about measuring and valorising culture and creativity. This is aligned with a general idea, that cultural and creative production are economic flows, like any other. Activities that don't have legal form or measurable revenue are often excluded and their social impact is ignored. A recent development in Athens (and Greece in general) are institutional attempts in supporting, consulting and space provisioning to startups, for them to elaborate their business model. These projects²⁸ aim to promote innovation and creativity in Greece, but often under the "crisis as an opportunity" concept. This concept can be proven quite problematic within a financial crisis, because it usually promotes solely profit-driven creative businesses instead of inspired ones with low profit potential at the time.

On the other side of this spectrum, we observe creative activities which emerge in the crisis-ridden athenian urban factory, that adopt different systems of organisation and networking and represent a bottom-up approach. These activities have the potential of a greater impact to the community, in terms of social innovation, and in some cases they are able to produce new commons. Even if they don't have any economic returns and they are not even measurable and classifiable these activities reveal a potential for a "creative sabotage" through the concept of social creativity²⁹. As Matteo Pasquinelli puts it, social creativity presents an opportunity for "*a sabotage of the value accumulated by exploiting the common domain of the cultural and symbolic capital and its redistribution*" (Pasquinelli, 145). Since this is a recent acquisition in the athenian context there seems to be no clear distinction in tracing and analysing spatial examples of those activities' clustering. Neither is their apparent division into one of two extreme categories: start-uppers, striving to make profit, by selling their product as a valorised commodity and other creative figures, forming alternative models of value production. Rather, a constant, shifting, ambivalent movement of individuals within the broad spectrum among these extremes is observed³⁰.

4. The Athenian Urban Factory

4.1. Features of Creative Clusters

Previous chapters of this paper have sketched the outline of a narrative, from the notion of creativity, to the emergence of an ecosystem around this concept's hotbed core, including the subjective identities of its precarious, creative workforce. Following these, the next focus is those independent, self-employed, interconnected, professionals' workplace. Matching in spatial conditions their lifestyle, one of work being diffused into the whole existence of members of a society founded on flexibility and insecurity.

All the cases presented and examined refer to places of work, creativity and production in the contemporary metropolis of Athens. They may seem different according to a variety of features: 1. goals, intentions, purposes, 2. ways/ terms of operation, 3. produced outputs, 4. character and profile, 5. branding strategies, 6. business models, 7. openness.

²⁸ A characteristic example is Innovathens. For further details pl. see chapter 4.2.

²⁹ Creative activity grows out of the relationship of an individual with other individual and their socio-cultural context. Creativity arises from activities that take place in a context in which interaction (spatial, temporal, conceptual or technological) are important contributors to the process.

³⁰ Yet, there is an observable correlation to the models of group subjectivation proposed in Felix Guattari's ecosophic environments: "[...] two forms of group organization of subjectivity: its phrenological triangulation in the I-YOU-ME Father-Mother-Child mode; or its constitution in the forms of subject-groups open to the broader spectrum of the socius and the cosmos" (Guattari, 143).

On the other hand, there is (at least) one main unifying element which interlinks all the presented cases: the value production issue. Within the current post-fordist, immaterial or post-material, globalised, biopolitical framework, in all these places immaterial goods, such as images, knowledge, information, affects, codes and social relationships are produced. Subsequently, some of those goods are shared, distributed and reproduced as (new) commons³¹, within networks and communities of users-producers, while others are commodified and sold in capitalist market for profit. In conclusion, all the presented cases constitute units of creativity which produce value, transforming Athens into a contemporary “urban factory”³².

4.2. The Spectrum of Creative Clusters

The choice of examples keeps in mind factors, relating to several degrees of scopes and aims, managerial and resources' organisation and handling, individualised and collective creativity, as well as the establishment of a community within its micro-environment and the corresponding collaborative relations, yet also in reference to the wider community, in various radius of influence, ranging from neighborhood- to metropolitan- scale.

Those remarks are effectively made by reflecting upon a variety of schemes for the production procedures, unfolding within (and beyond) their spatial compounds. An initial, general, open and, loosely bordered, threefold categorical distinction into clusters is being attempted:

A. Centralized Organisation and Management

INNOVATHENS³³ is described as a node that supports innovation and entrepreneurship and a business accelerator, where small startups can grow their ideas and network with experienced people from market and academia. This space of 1000 sq.m. is located in the renovated gas factory of Athens, Technopolis, owned by the Municipality of Athens and next to Kerameikos metro station. This project began in 2014 and it is implemented by Technopolis and six business associations, under National Strategic Reference Framework funding. INNOVATHENS seems to be a successful project, but it cannot be considered as a bottom up, collaborative initiative. On the contrary, space facilities, mentoring and networking is offered to selected startups for free, following an evaluation procedure.

³¹ New Commons (according to Charlotte Hess) or Artificial Commons (according to Negri and Hardt). New Commons are distinguished from traditional commons not by their necessarily being technology-driven, nor necessarily by their being human-made resources as opposed to natural resources. Rather, Hess thinks “*the “new” pertains to new institutional arrangements created to manage and sustain some kind of shared resource. Whatever the type of resource, the “new” is the new group of people and corresponding rules created in order to preserve/sustain that resource*”.

For further info pl. see: < <http://p2pfoundation.net/Commons> > [last accessed 31/05/2015].

Negri and Hardt consider artificial commons as more significant than natural commons. They acknowledge them as results of social production, and named them as knowledges, languages, codes, images, information, ideas, affects and so forth. They also note that: “*this notion of the common does not position humanity separate from nature, (...) but focuses rather on the practices of interaction, care, and cohabitation in a common world.*” (Hardt, Negri, 2009, viii)

³² One of the main starting points about the notion of urban factory is considered to be an analysis by Negri and Hardt. The post-fordist metropolis is the biopolitical city, where the space of economic production and the space of the city tend to overlap. Biopolitical city succeeds the commercial city in which agricultural production was dominant and the industrial city where the industrial production was taken place. Negri and Hardt finally argue that the metropolis is to the multitude what the factory was to the industrial working class. (Hardt, Negri, 2009, 249-260) This provocative analogy allows to conceive the concept of the urban factory.

³³ For further info pl. see: < <http://www.innovathens.gr/> > [last accessed: 21/05/2015]

Romantso³⁴ is a former printing plant in the historical center of Athens, which has been transformed into an incubator for start-up companies within the creative industry and as a cultural center, organising and hosting a variety of events. The start-up companies operating in Romantso belong to the wider creative industries sector, including architects, graphic designers, fashion designers, photographers, visual artists, new media artists etc. Romantso offers an collaborative environment where they can chose to interact (or not) with other professionals. At the same time it offers an environment where they can “consume” cultural events and can showcase their work. After its first year of operation, Romantso already has inflicted some changes in this degraded area of the athenian center.

The Hub³⁵ **Events** is a 2010 (concluded) renovated former industrial space, turned into an advertized-as-architectural landmark. Its setting is an upcoming leisure activities' neighborhood, upon recently middle-low class residential and previously industrial. It is promoted as *“bring[ing] together an intriguing mix of cultural programs, events and activities featured with exhibitions, meeting, dining and reading facilities creatively arranged within [...] the available spaces, ranging from 80 sq.m. up to 1500 sq.m..”*. It is of private ownership, operated by general management.

B. Self-organized and/ or Self-emerging Occupancy Patterns

Traces of commerce³⁶ began in May 2014 in the physical space of a former arcade in the center of Athens, which has been abandoned and empty for more than 20 years. The first phase of the project took place in May and June 2014 with a series of artistic installations and cultural events. Its aim was to reactivate this commercial arcade and at the same time create a framework of synergy among creative interdisciplinary collaborations, forms of local governance and public organisations. The second phase had a more permanent character, as it gave the opportunity to artists, designers, technicians, curators, architects, artisans, musicians, cooks, inventors, small business partnerships and all kinds of young artists to use for free the empty shops of the Arcade for six months. In exchange, they were asked to host events and workshops open to the public, resulting to the transformation of the arcade to an open creative and productive laboratory.

The **Meet Market**³⁷ is a non-profit cultural organisation that co-ordinates two day weekend events in various venues in Athens. These combine a contemporary market of local craftsmen, designers, artists, collectors or independent businesses with a line-up of music from local djs, as well as food and beverages by local producers. Since 2007, that it first started, Meet Market attracts over 200 vendors and more than 3000 visitors each month. The purpose of the organisation is to promote local creativity and give local craftsmen and producers the opportunity to access a larger audience.

The considerably bad condition of an old four-storey building block at **33 Praxitelous str.** with small independent rooms/ offices allows for low renting prices and gives the opportunity both to young professionals to run their small-scale workshops there and to elderly professionals to continue running their low-pace businesses. All the different tenants of the offices/ workshops act individually, without any official collaborations. Yet,

³⁴ For further info pl. see: < <http://www.romantso.gr/> > [last accessed: 21/05/2015]

³⁵ For further info pl. see: < <http://www.thehubevents.gr/altContent/?/eng/what-is-the-hub> > [last accessed: 19/05/2015]

³⁶ For further info pl. see:< <http://www.tracesofcommerce.com/> > [last accessed: 21/05/2015]

³⁷ For further info pl. see: < <http://www.themeetmarket.gr/> > [last accessed: 21/05/2015]

the gradual and growing interest in renting the empty spaces by young professionals with similar and complementary activities, configures an informal and spontaneous creative cluster.

In the basement of a 70's block of flats in the district of Kerameikos, a **shared arts and crafts workshop** started to run since 2013. Teams and individual young professionals work in an open plan space, sharing relatively low rent and utility costs. The workshop is equipped with a considerably wide range of machinery and hand tools accessible to all. The space does not comprise of an established collective with a legal entity or an official brand name, neither has a very social character, as an exhibition or event space. Its structure is horizontal and the operational decisions are made by all its members, through informal discussions.

C. Spatial Components of a Community, Focus on the Collectively Developed Product

Hackerspace.gr³⁸ defines itself as “*a place for creativity, collaboration, research, development and, of course, education. It is more than just a physical space: It is a dynamic community with ideas inspired by the Open Source philosophy*”. Its setting neighborhood is indirectly connected to the city-centre, less spatially anchored than the rest of the examples. It is run by an open collectivity of members and self-funded by membership contribution. Activities running there, range from workshops to seminars, upon proposal and/ or request, along the lines of the space's four-fold-values regulation: excellence, sharing, consensus, do-ocracy.

The printing plant building of newspaper “Embros” turned into a theater in 1988 and operated as such for almost twenty years. It then remained closed and vacant until 2011, when it was re-set into operation³⁹ as **free self-managed theater Embros**⁴⁰. Its location is in a leisure activities and mainstream entertainment setting, within a small-scale and labyrinthal downtown neighborhood, formerly extensively hosting small industrial facilities. The theater is self-tagged as an “*artistic space of contemporary expression*”, operating on an open, squat basis. Its productions cover variant thematics of, mainly, cultural production, maintaining a concise, though dispersed in numeral fields and approaches, political character.

It should be underlined that there is no specific, general state policy encompassing these clusters, leading to the fact that they are all developing in a semi-autonomous way. At first, there was a spontaneous establishment of these new businesses in the city center, based on heterogenous criteria, but today, there are distinguishable small clusters of similar or complementary businesses being formed and developed.

5. Conclusions

What this paper attempts is to reveal examples of social creativity and innovation, as well as acts of solidarity and claims of new commons, based on the concept that a new branding identity for the city of Athens is being constructed, strongly linked to the crisis. The spatial imprint of their networks and clusters in the athenian city center is also being

³⁸ For further info pl. see: < <https://www.hackerspace.gr> > [last accessed: 19/05/2015]

³⁹ Historical facts retrieved from the occupied theater's website. For further info pl. see: < <http://www.embros.gr> > [last accessed: 21/05/2015]

⁴⁰ For further details, covering also the ownership status of the building pl. see Vaiou, Kalandides, 9-10.

addressed, since it points towards an alternative direction, beyond facelifts and investments in urban infrastructure.

Conclusively, leading to a consideration of the economic crisis indeed as a crisis in democracy, a crisis in governance. If the collective subjectivations of the creative class (though not in the traditional sense of the class' division scheme), the cognitariat, the precariat, where to sustain an "autonomous", yet conscious political character, what could be the direction of its political radicalisation, dealing with the creation of methodical action: to affect the contents of contemporary forms of power and utilistic operation or shift towards the invention of alternatives towards those same forms⁴¹? Thus, establishing a critique of dividing concepts or one that is cutting into the matter itself?

In these veins, one should not overlook the importance of a commons' "democratic" attitude: namely, how could it incorporate critique towards the existing be addressed in generalised spatial terms, in relation to the dichotomies of private/ public, "as a *political regime of radical democracy, as a form of what Spinoza calls the absolute government of democracy*". This "*critique opens the process of constituting new subjectivities; critique is the construction of a space of freedom*" (Hardt, Negri, 2003, 15). Hence, further examinations of the evolvement of newly established hybrid spaces of inserted-into-life work might find themselves rotating around the main questions of what urban/ spatial forms/ organisations and types of value control/ production their ecosystemic environment might be willing to adhere.

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⁴¹ Pl. see the contemporary radical activism movements' character discussed in Day, 19-46.

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