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## The urban roots of anti-neoliberal social movements: the case of Athens, Greece

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**Abstract.** The recent rounds of anti-neoliberal mobilizations in Europe have shown to be rooted in cities. Whereas Madrid has become a central hub in Spain's social movement, Athens has assumed a central and centralizing role in Greece. Through a case study on Athens, Greece, this paper aims to show how cities have become the driving force of these national movements. The argument maintains that political institutional factors and local networking processes among activists contributed to making Athens a central hub of this national movement. First, weak state traditions in Greece undermined the abilities of government officials to mitigate the most egregious effects of urban neoliberalism during the 1990s and 2000s. As this triggered a proliferation of struggles throughout Athens, weak state traditions also denied local authorities the capacities to co-opt and control aggrieved inhabitants. Second, as urban grievances spurred countless localized struggles, participants formed new ties to one another, learned how to engage in their broader public worlds, and discovered new ways to become political. At the same time, well-networked activists within these particularistic struggles assumed the role of brokers between localized mobilizations and the wider social movement space. This networking process permitted the city of Athens to become an important staging ground in national mobilizations. In sum, we maintain that *political opportunities* and *urban networking processes* combined in ways to make Athens a driving force of the country's anti-neoliberal social movement.

**Keywords:** urban movements, Athens, neoliberalism

### 1 Introduction

In a recent article in *The Washington Post* (Faiola, 2011), Greece was described as the center of an “anarchist renaissance” in Europe. Though the tone of the article is sensationalist, it nevertheless provides an interesting description of the new geographies of antisystemic movements in Europe. At the European scale, activists are connected by transnational networks that permit the flow of ideas, resources, people, and reputations across space. These networks mark a relatively coherent space whereby activists from across the continent come to know each other, think about their distinctive problems in similar ways, employ similar languages to express their grievances, and exchange information about tactics. At the national scale, anti-neoliberal movements are composed of distinctive networks made up of an array of local and national organizations (local squatters and student groups to national trade unions) engaged in the common struggle to reject neoliberal structural adjustments. At the local scale, clusters of neighborhood-level activists have served as the driving forces of many of the most important protests in different European countries. Through the case of Athens, *The Washington Post* reports that neighborhoods are key sites for generating and sustaining

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the most radical activists in the movement.<sup>(1)</sup> As the neighborhood becomes a strategic site for producing radical subjects and subjectivities, connections between these sites and the broader world bring these individuals into contact with others around their cities, country, and world.

The complex geographical networks revealed by the article would lead many traditional social movement scholars to question the capacities of this social movement to achieve any of its major goals (della Porta and Tarrow, 2005; Tarrow and McAdam, 2005). Conventional knowledge would lead observers to suggest that the complexity of these mobilizations would likely undermine the levels of unity (ie, vertical and horizontal fragmentation) needed to transform activists into a substantial threat to capitalist hegemony (Castells, 1983; Katznelson, 1981). Moreover, the strong urban character of these movements would lead others to assume that the urban character of many of these mobilizations would override concerns for broader structural issues. While these are reasonable and well-grounded expectations, the Greek case has shown that in spite of its complexity and strong urban character, these social movements became potent threats to national governments, the European Union, and the International Monetary Fund.

Through the case of Athens, Greece, the paper aims to show how a social movement's 'urban' character can contribute to making it a potent threat to the national political and economic order. It does so by making the following argument. First, as the state embraced neoliberal development projects in the 1990s, its traditional tools for blocking resistance (ie, clientelism and repression) were not up to the task of exercising control over countless urban resistances. The Greek state possessed diminished capacities to absorb and co-opt the multiple anti-neoliberal resistances that emerged in the late 1990s and 2000s. Second, each of these localized mobilizations became sites where diverse activists would come out of their particular worlds and connect with others around issues concerning their common lived space. Through these interactions, they learned to form a common interest, develop mobilization frames to justify their actions to themselves and the broader political world, and forge a certain degree of trust and solidarity. Third, as each mobilization connected individual activists to others in specific localities, certain activists in these mobilizations also possessed affiliations with other organizations and networks across the city and country. These well-networked activists assumed the role of brokers between their localized mobilizations and the wider social movement space. This allowed for a conflation of interests across spatial scales as the privatization of public services and urban space were increasingly viewed as instances of the broader forces of neoliberal restructuring. In sum, we argue that the alignment of *political opportunities* and *networking processes* transformed the city of Athens into a driving force in the country's (and eventually Europe's) anti-neoliberal movement.

It must be stressed that this paper does not seek only to show how Athens became important in national struggles, but also more importantly, how cities in general become strategic spaces that anchor and drive large social movements. Athens is used as a strategic case to demonstrate the unique roles of the city for general social movements. While most social movement scholars recognize that cities and urbanization processes somehow matter, very few actually open up the city and examine the specific attributes that make it an enabling space for struggles that extend far beyond city walls (Nicholls, 2008). In this way the paper also departs sharply from the recent 'rights to the city' literature. This literature remains geographically and conceptually trapped in the city. Urban struggles are certainly about

<sup>(1)</sup> "Long a den of anarchists, the graffiti-blanketed Exarchia neighborhood is alive anew with dissent. Nihilist youths are patrolling the local park, preventing police from entering and blocking authorities from building a parking lot on the site. On one evening at a local cafe, an anarchist group was broadcasting anti-government messages via a clandestine radio station using a laptop and a few young recruits" (*The Washington Post* 14 May 2011).

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city-specific issues (eg, a right to stay in the city or appropriation of urban space) but these struggles often spill over to a range of other issues that exceed the city. We suggest that the city be viewed more as a space that facilitates relational processes rather than as an end point of specific struggles. The city, in other words, should be conceptualized as providing the relational means to achieve various political ends (rights to the city, civil rights, rights for immigrants, labor rights, etc) rather than as an end in its own right (right to the city). ‘Rights *through* the city’ may therefore be a more fruitful way to conceptualize the role of cities in social movements than ‘rights to the city’ (Nicholls and Vermeulen, 2012). Following from this, the ‘urban’ is conceived here as a space with unique attributes (ie, numbers, density, diversity, mobility) that facilitate the formation of important activist networks. Under the right political and economic conditions (like those found in Athens now, Los Angeles in the 1990s, Amsterdam in the 1970s, Paris in the late 1960s), these local activist networks can flourish and become strategic hubs that sustain and fuel broad national and transnational struggles. The case of Athens is therefore interesting but not unique. We believe that scholars of urban politics should interrogate the attributes that make cities into ‘incubators’ of activist networks (Nicholls, 2008) and the economic and political conditions that transform some of these urban-based networks (but not others) into powerful hubs of broad social movements.

The study is based primarily on field research in two districts where mobilizations have been particularly intense: the city center (made up primarily of the Exarcheia, Kypseli, and Patisia neighborhoods) and surrounding suburbs (the Zografou district in particular). Though the period covered in the paper spans thirty to forty years, the focus is on a cycle of mobilizations spanning the mid-2000s. The focus of most of these mobilizations was environmental issues and the privatization/reappropriation of urban space. In addition to archival research and participant observations of meetings and events, we employ sixteen semistructured interviews with members of nine key associations involved in various campaigns. While many of the activists faced very different situations and possessed different ideologies, we focus on the processes that have enabled them to connect to one another and to the broader anti-neoliberal movement across the city and country. To guard the anonymity of our respondents, we provide only their first names in citations. The main research questions orienting the fieldwork were: (1) how do urban issues precipitate activist connections at the neighborhood level; (2) how are connections between diverse activist groups formed across different neighborhoods; and (3) how are connections constructed between activists operating at different geopolitical scales? The ethnographic research performed for the study was inspired by Burawoy’s (1998) “extended case method” approach. Burawoy maintains that critical reflexivity more than objectivity is the core value of ethnographic research. By shedding the perspective of the externally situated and objective observer, the embedded ethnographer gains the trust of the subject which permits access to richer sources of information (1998, page 17). The researcher’s ability to stay reflexive and maintain a critical position as a social scientist helps mitigate strong bias effects.

The arguments of the paper are developed in the following sections. Section 2 provides the reader with a general review of the literature on cities and social movements. Section 3 examines the changing capacities of the state to co-opt and control urban resistance during the country’s transition to a more neoliberal economic development strategy. Section 4 describes how these neoliberal projects triggered several potent local mobilizations throughout the city. Lastly, section 5 examines how these local mobilizations connected to others across the city and scaled up to national-level political battles.

## **2 Building oppositional struggles in weak state contexts**

### **2.1 States and neoliberalism: uneven controls in neoliberal cities**

The literature on urban governance suggests that the 1980s and 1990s marked an important turn in the ways in which governments addressed urban problems (Lascoumes and Le Galès, 2004; Le Galès, 2002; Raco and Imrie, 2000). Local governments devolved services once performed by state agencies (eg, youth services, neighborhood development, and security) to neighborhood associations. While at first pursued as a method to encourage the participation of associations in the governance of cities, this associational strategy was soon widely employed as a cost-effective method to distribute services and to enhance government legitimacy (Nicholls 2006; Wolch, 1990). Concomitantly, local governments also embraced the discourse of 'active citizenship' which shifted responsibility of urban problems from systemic capitalism to the 'passive' conduct and values of individuals in deprived communities (Raco, 2007). Reframing the problem in this way, the goal of state welfare strategies was now to produce populations that possessed the right kinds of values and capital (eg, social, cultural, and human capital) needed to become good and responsible citizens.

These turns in urban governance had an important effect on the associations that were once the backbone of urban social movements. In Germany, for example, local officials developed partnerships with moderate squatter associations to deliver neighborhood services on behalf of the city (Mayer, 2000; 2009). The Netherlands and France pursued their own strategies to forge partnerships with immigrant and minority associations in low-income areas (Nicholls, 2006; Uitermark, 2010). In these various instances, local government officials targeted associations working with 'problem populations' and which they believed would make reliable partners. Growing dependency on public subsidies by these associations required them to conform to the values and goals of the local state. Associations that stepped outside of these normative and programmatic boundaries would lose access to essential public resources. Dependency on local government resources also required associations to submit to countless surveillance techniques including yearly funding applications, self-evaluations, audits, and random site visits. Financial dependence and enhanced state surveillance therefore had the effect of disciplining local associations and blunting their more contentious instincts.

While this form of urban governance ensnared thousands of local associations in the state's 'iron cage', it also aggravated cleavages between them. First, access to public funding depended on showing compliance with the normative and programmatic aims of the local state. This compelled dependent associations to distance themselves from radical associations (horizontal fragmentation). Political distancing between 'moderate' and 'radical' squatters, for example, precipitated the fragmentation of the German squatters movement (Mayer, 2000). In addition to dividing associations in the same city, these new government arrangements exacerbated divisions between local and nonlocal associations (vertical fragmentation). As local associations focused their attention on service delivery functions in particular neighborhoods, their abilities to connect to broader issues and movements were diminished (Ireland, 1994; Sites, 2007). The new techniques of governing through the grassroots therefore enhanced the capacities of local officials to discipline and fragment the urban associational milieu. In spite of new inequalities and injustices resulting from neoliberalism, these governance techniques denied aggrieved urban residents the organizational infrastructure (ie well-networked associations) needed to sustain system-threatening mobilizations.

The state strategies highlighted above are not universal and apply mostly to countries with the most developed welfare states (ie, Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium, France, the United Kingdom, Scandinavia). The continued importance of welfare states has provided these countries with the capacities, infrastructure, and financial resources to roll out the kinds of measures described above. Preexisting welfare institutions and resources have essentially been redirected for new strategic ends, permitting the rollout of innovative methods and



techniques to exert control through the urban grassroots. By contrast, countries with weak or eviscerated welfare states oftentimes lack the institutional capacities to develop effective and rationalized methods of control. Weak states often lack rationalized welfare agencies, employ prebureaucratic forms of control like personalized clientelism, and make greater use of police repression to maintain the rule of law. In such instances, local officials may be ill equipped to respond to the proliferation of grievances associated with neoliberal urban development projects. We maintain that the acceleration of neoliberalism spurs grievances within cities but the weakening powers of the local state limit the capacities of public officials to steer, channel, survey, and co-opt aggrieved inhabitants in effective ways. This opens political spaces for different challengers to step in and assert a greater degree of presence and power in relatively abandoned places (Holston, 2008; Nicholls, 2008; Vankatesh, 1997). As challengers build up support and loyalty in such places, they can use the power derived from their new bases of support to exert influence in their broader political worlds.

Our argument is consistent with Leontidou's studies of Southern Europe (1993; 2010). She demonstrates that differences in state traditions have resulted in important variations in how urban problems and politics have been managed in Northern and Southern Europe. Whereas the North followed a tradition centered on well-developed and highly rationalized welfare states, the South was rooted in a tradition centered on weak welfare states and clientelism. When Southern European countries embraced neoliberal urban development projects in the 1990s, the weak state tradition facilitated the rapid shift to large-scale urban redevelopment and privatization projects. This resulted in unregulated sprawl, chaotic speculation, and poorly planned 'big' development projects, which subsequently triggered countless grievances across Southern cities (Leontidou, 2010, page 1193). While neoliberalism triggered countless urban mobilizations, weak welfare states and the prevalence of clientelism have weakened the capacities of local officials to exert their control over these mobilizations. Weak state traditions in Southern Europe have therefore permitted a fast kind of neoliberalism, but these same state traditions have made it difficult for local states to exert control over subsequent mobilizations in an effective and comprehensive way. Thus, neoliberalism unfolds in different ways according to the particular structure and strength of national and local states. Such differences shape the intensity of neoliberal restructuring and the capacities of local states to exert governmental control over the urban grassroots.

## **2.2 Networking in and across place: making a social movement space**

Leontidou has provided important insights into how Southern European states affect the dynamics and opportunities of political mobilization in this region, but she has yet to examine how resistance networks respond to and evolve within these political-institutional contexts. In this section we now examine how the city provides the unique relational conditions that enable the kinds of activist networks needed to make powerful rights claims to and beyond the city.

First, localized grievances spur diverse urban inhabitants to leave their private worlds, come out and engage with others about issues of common interest, develop common ideas and narratives concerning their lived spaces, and forge concrete working plans on how to achieve shared goals (Castells, 1983). Through these repeated interactions, different actors do not develop trust only for one another but they may also *learn how* to engage in the public arena (Fung, 2003). Following on the work of economic geographers, we also assert that trust and know-how are crucial 'relational assets' generated through intensive and intimate face-to-face contacts (see Storper, 1997). These relational assets permit previously unconnected activists to not only pull their particular resources (eg, time, money, freedom, reputation, knowledge, etc) in collective political projects but also provides them with the cognitive capacities (eg know-how) needed to deploy these resources in politically effective ways.

In addition to relational assets, engaging in repeated struggles produces 'emotional energy' and a sense of possibility that reinforces individual attachments to the collectivity (Collins, 2004). These localized mobilizations serve crucial functions because they bring diverse individuals into the public arena and generate the relational and emotional assets that enable new activists to commit their time and resources to high-risk struggles.

Second, some activists within urban mobilizations or coalitions may have multiple group affiliations with organizations in their own city or elsewhere (Diani, 2004; Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994; Gould, 2004; Nicholls, 2008; Routledge, 2003; Tarrow and McAdam, 2005). For example, an activist engaged in a local dispute over an urban development project may also belong to a national labor union *and* to a regional labor union. These well-connected activists can use these affiliations to reach out to a broader public and connect them to the activists and issues of their particular and localized struggle. These 'brokers' play a strategic role by placing previously unconnected activists into direct contact with one another. As separate campaigns are connected through brokered relations, activists learn that their struggle is not unique and has commonalities with others in other places and scales. The 'attribution of similarity' encourages activists to explore the underlying structural forces that may be responsible for similarities and encourages them to maintain connections to distant allies (Tarrow and McAdam, 2005). 'Weak ties' to distant allies permit the circulation of strategic information about opportunities, resources, and events (Granovetter, 1973; 1983). In addition to this, these weak-tie relations provide activists with knowledge of what activists are doing near and abroad and which of these activists could serve as strategic allies in concrete coalitions and campaigns. In this way, through these weak-tie links, connected activists 'scale up' relationally, cognitively, and politically.

Third, operating at the intersection of compact local networks and more geographically diffused ones results in a process of 'scalar compression', whereby the issues and frames of one's own specific battle become inextricably linked to those of broader movements and vice versa. The battle of squatters for a particular building, for example, is no longer viewed as a way of attaining a place of residence for a handful of people but is thought and talked about as one front in the general struggle against neoliberal capitalism. As squatters become imbricated in broader urban, national, and transnational networks, urban space is viewed increasingly as an important site through which neoliberal globalization unfolds. The increased interpenetration of struggles unfolding in these different arenas results in accentuating the causal connections between general structural forces and particular and different problems. In such instances, activists embedded in the 'spaces of places' have very clear understandings of how their lives and opportunities are directly shaped by and through the 'spaces of flows', enabling them to take the necessary political steps to seek out far-ranging solutions for their everyday troubles.

Scalar compression may result in the *cognitive conflation* of local and nonlocal struggles and issues, but it does not result in the conflation of network functions. The strong-tie, proximate, and local networks produce unique relations between people and such relations are responsible for generating trust, loyalty, emotions, and intense commitment to a struggle. These relational and emotional assets contribute directly to producing political *subjects* willing to take enormous risks for a cause. Once committed to a cause, these subjects become the productive forces behind most struggles, contributing some of the most important resources to far-reaching struggles. The weak-tie networks are not so much generators of collective power as they are points for circulating the resources contributed by strong tie clusters. They diffuse information and ideas to different points in the network and coordinate efforts to align actions and words in ways to achieve general goals. While scalar compression permits local and nonlocal actors to perceive themselves as engaged in a common struggle, they deploy the

complementary resources from their structurally *and* spatially distinctive networks (strong–weak tie) to advance the common fight.

Our core argument suggests that the neoliberalization of urban governance both accelerated urban activist networks and provided a political/institutional space for these networks to flourish. These factors combined to make the city of Athens into a central hub of radical activism in Greece and Europe.

### 3 Neoliberalizing cities in weak state contexts: the case of Greece

In contrast to states of the European North, the Greek state reflects a particular tradition of top-down governance largely stemming from a history of dictatorship and party-dominated politics.<sup>(2)</sup> This tradition was coupled with the predominance of clientelism as the principal mediating mechanism between the state and civil society. As Bratsis (2010, page 192) stresses, the political culture that penetrated Greek society derived from the established ‘patron–party client’ networks. These networks not only legitimized state power, but also promoted a ‘win–win’ game for all interest groups involved, as the state became the principal institution for accumulating and redistributing resources through party patronage and personalistic ties.

The relative weakness of the state during the postwar period resulted in a pattern of unregulated urban expansions. This stood in contrast to the rationalized and comprehensive urban planning tradition of the European North. This pattern of urbanization was characterized by the development of loosely regulated, small-scale, and illicit constructions on the periphery of large cities. The weak regulations in the urban housing market resulted in an ad hoc and highly individualized urbanization processes for the lower middle and working classes, producing large swaths of semilegal settlements (Leontidou, 2010). Like many squatter and slum settlements of the South, these districts lacked basic infrastructure and amenities. Large, government-sponsored urban development and infrastructure projects during this period ignored these settlements and focused on scattered urban design schemes and low-quality public space projects throughout the city (Beriatos and Gospodini, 2004, page 192). Rather than mobilize collectively for public resources, patronage networks encouraged inhabitants to seek out the support of patrons in parties and the civil service for their own particular household units. Not only did this reinforce competition between individual inhabitants seeking scarce urban resources, but it also reinforced the ad hoc and individualized character of urban settlements. This urban political structure therefore favored individualized over collective consumption and downgraded the “collective, social, and political meaning of the city” (Portaliou, 2008).

The 1990s marked a departure from the postwar urban political economy described above. A number of neoliberal urban governance policies were initially adopted as parts of broader European Union urban policy agendas, introducing global capital investments through competitive place marketing (Brenner, 2004). Eager to become good and modern Europeans, the central government embraced strategies to liberalize land markets and stimulate urban entrepreneurialism by local officials. The centralized character of the Greek state ensured the diffusion of these strategies to cities across the country (Chorianopoulos, 2008; 2010). The case of Athens reveals how incorporating new neoliberal policies and strategies into existing regulatory apparatus contributed to accelerating problematic outcomes (Chorianopoulos, 2010, page 741). On the one hand, the government supported the liberalization of local land markets and the use of mega-events (eg, Olympic Games) and city-marketing projects spurred private capital investments into the city. On the other hand, the centralized and weak character of the state deprived local officials the regulatory and

<sup>(2)</sup> Alexandropoulos and Serdedakis (2000, page 12) use the term ‘partyness’ to describe the specificity of party politics in Greece. In this respect, social problems become political issues once they are represented and intermediated by political parties and their patrons.



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institutional capacities to mitigate the more egregious impacts of neoliberal strategies on the local population and environment.

Urban redevelopment strategies during this period consisted of three main components. First, like many second and first-tier European cities, Athenians sought to use mega-events like the Olympic Games as a means to promote the cosmopolitan character of the city and increase revenue flows from the national government (Afouxenidis, 2006, page 291; Petropoulou, 2010, page 218). While these events provided a large infusion of public revenue for new urban infrastructure, the renewal projects associated with the Olympic Games were aimed primarily at meeting the tastes and needs of tourists and global investors and not the needs (eg, housing, infrastructure, or social) of local inhabitants (Afouxenidis, 2006). In addition to this, these urban projects were carried out through public–private partnerships, which resulted in the large-scale privatization of public land and services. This enhanced the importance of markets in governing urban space, marginalizing the more political and personalized methods of governance associated with clientelism (Petropoulou, 2010, page 218). Second, in addition to the major structural and governance changes resulting from the Olympic Games, the city embraced the development of new commercial and cultural districts, the erection of office buildings, and the expansion of gentrified housing districts. These projects exacerbated the already high levels of sociospatial inequalities that characterized the city. In particular, these projects contributed to widening the social divide between the upgraded eastern neighborhoods and the downgraded western ones while accelerating the gentrification of the central city (Portaliou, 2008). Third, the city also embarked on an airport expansion project and new transportation projects. The weak planning and regulatory traditions combined with the spirit of neoliberalism to produce projects that were poorly planned, highly disruptive, and severely degrading to the natural environment (Portaliou, 2008). At the same time, the uncontrolled expansion of the city continued to pose new pressures as urban sprawl degraded the environment and introduced irregular growth. Thus, the weak state tradition resulted in a form of neoliberal urbanization that was fast and overwhelming, helping to accelerate inequalities, displacements, environmental decay, and everyday disruptions throughout the urban region.

These projects unfolded with exceptional force in Athens, triggering several important urban mobilizations. Mobilizations during the 2000s centered mostly on two issues: the environment and the appropriation of urban space. We suggest that while weak state capacities facilitated a pattern of fast neoliberalism, this weakness also limited the abilities of the state to penetrate the urban grassroots and to exert control over subsequent mobilizations. This undermined its capacities to deflect and depoliticize critiques, steer activists into acceptable policy areas, and exercise techniques of ‘divide and rule’ that worked so well in Northern European cities (see Mayer, 2000; Nicholls, 2006; Uitermark, 2010). In the late 1990s and early 2000s a wave of criticisms and grievances were expressed by several left-wing organizations and urban environmental groups, but these groups could not succeed in forming a strong oppositional force or a consensus about what should or could be done (Portaliou, 2008). However, as these activists continued to mobilize around particularistic issues, the repercussions of neoliberal urbanization became more apparent for Athenians while broader structural forces like public debt, heavy taxation, the retrenchment of public services, and the suffocation of the environment exacerbated residents’ grievances (Portaliou, 2008). These pressures triggered another round of urban mobilizations during the mid-2000s.

As these mobilizations gained momentum and resonance, diminished state capacities undermined the abilities of government officials to exert control over urban activists. In the postwar years, clientelism was an effective means of control because patrons maintained legitimacy by delivering scarce public resources and services to clients. Neoliberalism introduced a different governing logic. Rather than seeking to maintain political support and

control through the distribution of public resources to clients, the goal of neoliberal governance has been to leverage public resources to attract nonlocal investors (eg, tourists, upper middle classes, and global investors). Public investments in projects that spur private investors have therefore been given priority over maintaining fragile client networks. Moreover, the economic crisis in the late 2000s and the retrenchment of the welfare state deprived party patrons of the material resources needed to ensure the support and compliance of local clients. As grievances accelerated and broadened, fewer public resources were made available to bolster urban client networks. Lastly, while political clientelism weakened, economic clientelism (ie, 'crony capitalism') flourished, shaping the ways in which public contracts were awarded, public resources and services were privatized, and private–public partnerships were managed. This type of economic clientelism resulted in high-profile corruption scandals which further undermined legitimacy in the state and intensified mistrust of party politics.

In sum, neoliberalism did not necessarily result in the end of clientelism but its displacement from the sociopolitical sphere to the economic sphere. As the state capacities to exert its political control through the urban grassroots weakened, constant corruption scandals further undermined the bonds between state and civil society. The state therefore lost the institutional means and moral legitimacy to control political activities unfolding across urban civil society (Bratsis, 2010). This power vacuum meant that the grievances that had once been absorbed through a system of patronage and indirect representation were now left to fester and concentrate in various areas around the city. This carved out freer political spaces for new and innovative political activists to channel the grievances of urban dwellers.

The fast neoliberalism experienced in Greece exacerbated urban inequalities and social problems, triggering the proliferation of grievances throughout the urban region. The state's hollowed-out institutional and moral capacities deprived the government of its traditional means (ie, political clientelism) to absorb and incorporate grievances. This left a political opening for a new generation of activism to flourish in several neighborhoods of Athens (Bratsis, 2010).

#### **4 Building contention in the city**

Though grievances over the misuse of urban space spurred countless mobilizations, contact points in the city (eg, protest actions, workshops, coffee houses, or public spaces) provided many opportunities for activists in particular struggles to connect to one another. These loose and informal connections incrementally broadened urban activist networks and permitted individual actors to recognize the general character of their struggles. These slow network building processes resulted in the social infrastructure needed to transmit information, ideas, support, and tactics across the city's activist milieu.

##### **4.1 Assembling activism in urban places**

Local associations, neighborhood groups, resident committees, and squatter collectives emerged through different urban battles but they have come to connect to one another through networking processes. Most of the existing community-based groups in Athens have been created as responses to specific urban issues, such as urban redevelopment projects, environmental concerns, and the reappropriation of public spaces. Each of the particular groups has pursued different goals and built their own solidarities through daily face-to-face interactions. While activist groups have emerged across Athens, certain clusters have become particularly prominent in several areas. In particular, the city center (Exarcheia neighborhood in particular) has become a hub of social centers and squatter settlements, and several suburban districts have become centers of activism concerning the degraded environment resulting from urban sprawl (Zografou district in particular). Though these local activist clusters (figure 1) are different, their formation into activist clusters follows a similar causal process.



**Figure 1.** Map of key activist clusters.

First, the tangible nature of local issues and grievances has provided a common objective for diverse inhabitants in different parts of the city. The most experienced and active individuals of these clusters initiated meetings to discuss common problems in these areas. The leading activists have tended to be established members of political groups, parties, and local anarchist networks. In addition to posting up signs in the neighborhoods and using online social networking services, these leading activists employed their personal networks to recruit friends, family members, neighbors, and colleagues to their first meetings. The more experienced of these activists shared their knowledge of how to mobilize with others in these first meetings. Through these early recruitment efforts, neighborhood inhabitants came out of their private spaces and into public assemblies. The assemblies served as early ‘contact points’ whereby different individuals did not only connect others in similar situations but they also learned that these other people shared the same grievances and problems as themselves.

As campaigns wore on, dedicated activists began to address other issues affecting their area, drawing them deeper into struggles over urban space. For example, activists mobilizing in the Exarcheia neighborhood (central district) initially formed a local committee to address harmful aerosols in the area. The group of residents took action and made legal appeals based on health and environmental concerns. Their initial success emboldened the original activists and drew more



individuals from the neighborhood into this and other struggles. According to one activist, “Our enthusiasm about this success led us to setting up an official group which has been mobilizing since on several problems we are faced with. The committee is divided into work-groups which are responsible for addressing several local problems, such as environmental pollution, the dilapidation of local public spaces, drug-trafficking, and police repression incidents towards residents” (Giorgos, personal interview; for a list of associations and interviews see appendix). Despite the diverse backgrounds of these early participants, local grievances provided them with a reason to come out of their private worlds and to build connections through discussions over their common use of urban space. Connecting in and through urban space brought these diverse individuals into the public realm, building a sense of political ‘groupness’ through daily deliberations over how urban space could and should be used. Urban space in this instance has served to stitch together urban residents with different histories, identities, and visions of the political.

Secondly, as diverse actors came out to address their common grievances, constant interactions between the most active amongst them reinforced feelings of trust and emotional solidarity. For example, one activist in Zografou (suburban district) noted that, “The ongoing contact with other residents is our association’s strength and a solid ground for upgrading our claims. The fact that people get to know each other better, spend time and meet in the neighborhood on a daily basis provides our struggle with new perspective and food for action” (Matina, personal interview). Such strong interpersonal feelings have only intensified as actions escalated in intensity. These incipient activists learned that they could rely on their comrades in time-consuming, costly, and increasingly risky ventures, enabling them to escalate their actions in subsequent rounds of mobilization. Not only could they trust that their comrades would contribute as much time and resources as themselves to a campaign, but also that if problems like police repression were to arise, they could rely on their allies to provide support. For example, when Athens police raided a squatted public park in Exarcheia, activists at the park prompted a rapid and massive mobilization which forced the police to step down and cede the space to the squatters. This reaffirmed emotional bonds and validated the belief that their power to appropriate urban space depended on the strength of their ties. Thickening relations helped reduce individual uncertainties about risks and overcome collective action problems, enabling individuals to commit time, knowledge, bodies, and money to increasingly risky battles.

Lastly, engagement in concrete localized actions did not only help create and strengthen bonds between activists. Each action also served as learning laboratories for emerging political agents. Through their work on environmental issues or the appropriation of public space, activists learned about regulatory frameworks, governance arrangements, methods to create campaigns, strategies for exerting pressure on political officials, and tactics to mitigate co-optation and repression. These basic skills of political agency are forms of tacit knowledge that can be learned only through practice and experimentation (ie, learning by doing) and transmitted through face-to-face interactions. For example, activists from the Zografou neighborhood stressed the important aspect of building on collective skills and knowledge:

“During the first phase, our different perspectives and backgrounds set *communicative obstacles*, but after putting time and effort in it we managed to open up to more people and gain the neighborhood’s support. *We have managed to set a collaboration framework and take many steps forward*. While in the beginning we only claimed our rights through legal appeals, after a while we did our own policy-research and started taking action, organizing workshops, open discussions and events” (Matina, personal interview, emphasis added).

This activist reveals several important steps in the learning process. First, early collective action was hindered by the different cognitive frames because of the diverse backgrounds of the activists (“communicative obstacles”). Second, face-to-face collaborations between early

activists permitted the development of common cognitive or “collaborative frameworks”. Third, these frameworks were not only important in learning basic activist skills but also in expanding the range and sophistication of activities. Thus, learning by doing provided these activists with the know-how (Nicholls, 2008; Storper, 1997) to enhance their collective mobilization capacities in various policy and political areas.

Activists also learned how to construct frames and messages that served the dual purposes of creating a common identity and gaining support and resonance in the public sphere. Activists participated in long debates and discussions over who ‘we’ are, why the existing situation is particularly unjust, and how their particular demands and claims resonate with the core values of the general society. Through countless deliberations and debates, participants learned what discursive themes worked, what themes did not work, and how best to produce messages that made sense for the group and the general public. This process did not allow activists to learn only the essentials of political messaging, but also made them become increasingly able to translate abstract ideas about justice, urban space, and the public sphere into their real and lived political identities. Learning in this instance was therefore a process of acquiring instrumental skills and knowledge but it was also a process of constituting new political subjectivities.

In sum, local urban issues were the starting points for spurring activist relations in Athens. The concrete character of urban problems triggered the formation of connections between diverse individuals. Initial contacts were facilitated by informal ties among residents and proximate relationships found in the neighborhood. In addition to forming strong-tie relations through cooperation in concrete actions, emergent activists also engaged in learning processes that helped produce collective knowledge, skills, frames, and subjectivities. Localized urban struggles fostered the kinds of relational exchanges that did not only initiate individuals into the practices of politics but that also made these individuals into committed agents of public and political action.

#### **4.2 Making connections across the city**

Connections between local clusters seemed to appear more easily between groups addressing similar urban issues and operating in contiguous geographical areas. Activists in contiguous geographical areas faced similar urban problems and often operated in the same political jurisdiction. This facilitated the abilities of activists to identify similarities and to target the same public officials. The city center concentrated some of the most prominent associations and squats in Athens, mainly in the three adjoining neighborhoods of Exarcheia, Kypseli, and Patisia. The mobilizations directed by these activists were collective responses to similar urban issues, such as the lack of public spaces and the sociospatial exclusion of immigrants. These similar issues were coupled with a common political culture of radicalism sustained in this part of the city. The ‘attribution of similarities’ (Tarrow and McAdam, 2005) encouraged activists to find ways to connect and collaborate with one another.

Many activists involved in these projects stressed the importance of networking as a means to expand campaigns, promote common claims, and achieve more effective mobilizations. For example, in April 2010 the Exarcheia committee initiated a collaboration project with other associations throughout the city center. Exarcheia, along with most of the other neighborhoods of the city center, was faced with heavy environmental pollution. The committee decided to reach out to other local groups, proposing to launch a broad environmental campaign made up of activists throughout this area. By holding public meetings and workshops in the center, activists viewed this campaign as an opportunity to raise public awareness about the common environmental stresses in the area. In addition to this, initiators of the coalition also believed this was an important means to expand networks beyond neighborhoods because it would establish connections to other activists in various neighborhoods of the city center.



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In addition to creating coalitions, living and mobilizing in the city center provided activists with multiple opportunities to connect to potential allies throughout this district. On the one hand, the most active individuals had friendships and affiliations with activists operating in other areas of the center. These well-networked activists were able to call upon their friends and acquaintances to get information about political developments; request them to attend their actions; and, in rarer instances, coordinate actual campaigns. These activists served as brokers who connected their highly localized organization to other activists in the immediate vicinity. On the other hand, operating in the center provided activists from different organizations with common bars, cafes, social centers, actions, parks, etc where they socialized. These 'contact points' served as strategic spaces where individual activists encountered one another in informal settings. Through these settings, individual activists stepped outside of their particular organizations and engaged with one another informally. The informality of these interactions facilitated the formation of new relations and interactions between people who belonged to different organizations and activist clusters. Such interactions helped people form a string of weak-tie acquaintanceships. Thus, 'brokering' and 'contact points' have been key mechanisms for expanding activist networks across adjacent neighborhoods and forming a range of weak-tie relations. These weak ties enabled the circulation of information and ideas across the district.

We find a similar process of connecting outward occurring in the Zografou district, with six associations forming a collaborative network with other local community groups. The formation of these connections came in response to a city plan which sought to replace public squares and green areas with parking lots. Several groups in the neighborhood came together and organized a number of public meetings and events. Existing ties between local activists mediated the initial contacts while the workshops held in neighborhood meeting points helped extend the reach to area residents. Moreover, the support from cultural clubs and local unions broadened the campaign by bringing in more people with different resources and expertise (residents, lawyers, urban planners, etc). The extension of these connections diversified the material and intellectual resources available to the activists, which enhanced their abilities to contest the city's plans to replace public space with private parking lots.

Activists from the Zografou area stressed that the creation of these networks contributed to the campaign's successful outcome but, more importantly, that it presented a serious challenge to traditional forms of urban governance based on vertical patron-client relationships. The strong and weak ties that constituted the activist network enabled activists to substitute party patrons with horizontal activist connections as a method for expressing claims in the public sphere. Members of the participating associations highlighted the informal character of their connections as a feature that ensured the egalitarian participation of all actors. These egalitarian feelings were rooted in the neighborhood culture and enriched through participation in these campaigns. Finally, this assemblage permitted local activists to connect directly and indirectly to other activists in the district and city. By embedding themselves in this web of connections, activists in Zografou could call upon one another for different kinds of support. For example, activists blockaded city hall to pressure local officials to stop the planned expansion of parking lots. In a rapid succession of large-scale occupations, they were able to call upon their wide network of associations, clubs, organizations, and residents to provide the support and numbers needed to block access to the building. These highly disruptive political acts eventually pressured local authorities to redraw their plans.

While activists in adjoining neighborhoods in central and suburban districts became connected and interlaced in the ways described above, they also connected to others outside of these districts. Organizations that launched specific campaigns have been able to connect to individuals and associations with professionalized knowledge and skills. For example, the struggle to maintain control over a park in Exarcheia did not only consist of activists

of the area or their allies in adjacent areas. The social center leading the campaign also gained the support of lawyers, architects, urban planners, and academics who contributed their expertise in city planning and politics. In addition to contributing these core resources, these professionals also enhanced the legitimacy of the campaign and the claims of the activists in the public sphere. As the core activists in Exarcheia largely lacked technical expertise in urban matters and legitimacy in the public sphere, the contributions of these professionals played an important role in sustaining their campaign. Connections between these local activists to professionals were largely mediated through brokering processes. Well-networked activists in Exarcheia were able to establish connections to a sympathetic urban planner who then used his relations with other professionals to draw in further support (Stavros, personal interview). As one activist noted, "Our contacts with professionals and experts are made through our work groups. Each one is specialized and, thus efficient, in an area of interest; their responsibility lies in contacting the right people, who provide us with crucial information and help break down scientific findings" (Christina, personal interview). Thus, operating in the same city over extended periods of time provided multiple opportunities for some connections to be created and deepened between activists in and across different areas of the city. These connections allowed place-based activists to mobilize their base in a variety of campaigns while allowing them to draw upon the diverse and specialized resources of sympathizers throughout the urban area.

Thus, on the basis of similar interests and cultures, local activists established connections across the city (within and across neighborhoods). While similarities provided different activists with a rationale to connect, the actual connections were built up through the relational work of brokers and repeated encounters between activists in various contact points around the city. These connections allowed activists across localities to share information, tactics, and resources in what was becoming a permanent struggle with the state. In addition to enhancing their power to make claims and wage resistance, these complex networks also expanded the political worlds of local activists. They did not only take them from their private worlds into the public sphere, but the breadth of their public sphere expanded greatly as they encountered activists from different neighborhoods, classes, and political backgrounds.

## **5 Scalar compression: connecting the local to the national**

The connections between urban and national mobilizations were made possible by the crucial role of individuals who belonged to many groups and networks simultaneously. Several activists involved in local groups and clusters held affiliations with other groups as well, such as political organizations, left parties, unions, students' groups, environmental associations, cultural clubs, etc. Furthermore, these types of connections meant that many of these local activists were also participating in national mobilizations, such as student movements, demonstrations over immigrant rights, the antiglobalization movement, union campaigns, etc. Involvement in these broader mobilizations provided these activists with important forms of activist capital, namely experience in developing action repertoires, making political claims, and forging new discourses to interpret the meaning of their local actions. They served as a strategic pipeline between struggles unfolding at these different scales, constantly transmitting information, ideas, and practices into particular localities across Athens. These brokers could also employ their good reputations in their urban networks to vouch for the importance and legitimacy of national struggles, and recast their own struggles in ways that aligned with the goals and messages of these broader campaigns.

Connections to broader national organizations have been quite useful for local activists in a number of instances. Certain problems experienced locally could be addressed only through connections to actors with broader experience. Larger national organizations have been viewed as particularly important in providing guidance and support. For example,

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anti-immigrant and xenophobic sentiments found in some central neighborhoods could not be dealt with effectively locally. Addressing these issues required local activists to use their connections to national immigrant rights organizations to address and frame these issues in a more satisfactory way. In another instance, local activists engaged in campaigns over public services and police repression have sought out the support of national labor unions (teachers in particular). These larger organizations possessed the knowledge and political capital to assist local efforts to achieve change in policy. In both these instances, connections to national organizations were required to address the nonlocal roots of problems and grievances encountered by locals. These connections were made possible through the work of strategic brokers operating at the interface of local activist clusters and national organizations.

At the same time, the relational assets derived from the place-based networks described above can be extremely useful in enhancing the mobilization capacities of national organizations. As many national organizations (unions and left parties in particular) have operated as top-down and bureaucratic organizations for many years, the commitment of their actual members has weakened considerably. The passivity of most members has reduced their willingness to commit time and resources to their organizations' campaigns. These organizations have become good at lobbying and politicking through formal institutional spaces, but weak at mobilizing the numbers needed to exert sustained pressure on public authorities. In such a context, tapping into and directing the high mobilization capacities of urban activist networks have become increasingly important for national bureaucratic organizations. Consequently, members of national organizations with direct ties to local and urban activist networks assume great value for these organizations because they provide access to large reservoirs of mobilization capacities.

Local activists and national organizations therefore have scarce resources that the other needs, drawing them together into relational interdependencies. In spite of the work of brokers to bring these diverse actors together, many local activists continue to worry that the bureaucratic and top-down nature of large national organizations can co-opt urban struggles and destroy their democratic and participatory character. Many locals value their autonomy and while alliances with national organizations may provide needed resources to achieve short-term and instrumental goals (eg, introducing zoning regulations), these benefits place their long-term and more substantive goal of creating egalitarian and radical democracy at risk. However, in spite of general weariness, activists recognize their importance and suggest that working together in different campaigns can actually narrow the distance between them. One activist stressed these local mobilizations are fertile grounds for building wider alliances, "In my opinion our occupation in Kypseli is a good example of how local connections can actually demolish barriers between political identities, rather than reinforce them; the local can act as a bridge between actors that share things and facilitate wider coalitions" (Michalis, personal interview).

Urban activists need skills and capital of national organizations just as these national organizations depend increasingly on the high mobilization capacities of urban activist networks. Large-scale mobilizations have been made possible because of these interscalar networking processes but such mobilizations have also served to reinforce the fusion between the urban and the national. For example, December 2008 marked an eruption of a series of large demonstrations in response to the police killing of a 15-year-old boy. Because the shooting occurred in the Exarcheia neighborhood, local activist networks were immediately deployed to protest against this instance of police brutality. These activists possessed the knowledge and skills to erect barricades throughout the central district and to occupy key public buildings including schools and universities. The know-how, skills, and trust, cultivated over the previous ten years of local struggles, enabled activists to engage in these risky acts and catapult the issue of police repression in cities onto the national political stage.

In addition to these direct actions, local activists employed their connections to national organizations (ie, student associations, labor unions) to broaden support for their cause. These national organizations were helpful in supporting large demonstrations and exerting pressure on the government. Moreover, these national organizations helped shift the way in which activists framed their grievances. Whereas local activists initially mobilized to protect their space against further police repression, the national organizations used these events to criticize the economic and educational problems facing the national youth.

According to many of the activists involved, this mobilization helped reinforce working relations between local and national activists. While national organizations and local activists had worked together in the past on specific projects, this was one of the first large-scale mobilizations where they worked together in an attempt to coordinate their actions. Under conditions of extreme pressure and uncertainty, local leaders and representatives of national organizations had to assess how best to work together in ways that would strike a balance between their strategic and political differences and their tactical and ideological commonalities. Working to achieve this balance under the difficult conditions of December 2008, though not entirely successful, set up a precedence and framework for collective decision making during large-scale mobilizations. This would concentrate collective know-how among the situated activists, serving as a knowledge pool that could potentially be used in succeeding rounds of mobilization in later years.

While large organizations were helping to nationalize the urban, the urban had also begun to penetrate and shape national organizations and discourses. The originality of this mobilization was the use of the 'urban justice' frame to create wide appeal to diverse people from various backgrounds—students, leftist-anarchist militants, working people, unemployed, migrants, intellectuals, etc (Sotiris, 2010, page 207). The 'urban justice' discourse framing the protests successfully transcended the local scale, initiating a process of 'relational identity awareness' (Stavrides, 2009) and providing a basis for connecting diverse actors and neighborhoods. While they framed their struggle around the discourse of urban justice, they demanded their right to reclaim public space by occupying municipal buildings, schools, and universities (Petropoulou, 2010). The acts of making direct claims to real spaces of the city by these diverse activists resulted in the proliferation of new local associations and community centers, with these different organizations providing a semi-institutionalized basis to contest the commodification of urban space and incorporate demands for self-management of public spaces and occupied buildings (Leontidou, 2010).

The mass demonstration in 2008 also increased the notoriety of local activist clusters, which precipitated a large surge in the membership of Athens-based associations, squats, and social centers. As individuals became integrated in these networks, they were transformed into political subjects by equipping them with the skills, discourse, knowledge, emotions, and trust to become committed agents of change. The expansion of local networks in terms of strength and numbers was immediate, transforming Exarcheia into *the* central geographical node of national mobilizations since December 2008. This was a place that possessed the right relational mix to transform individuals into committed political subjects.

Thus, the process of nurturing these interscalar connections over an extended period of time resulted in the loose transposition of frames and discourses across activist spaces and scales. Local activists have begun to describe and interpret their struggles through a strongly national and, to a certain extent, transnational lens. As the local has been increasingly nationalized through the transposition of frames and discourses, so too have national struggles employed the discourses of urban justice and rights to the city to critique the country's move toward neoliberal capitalism. It is precisely at this stage that this complex social movement space achieves a certain degree of 'scalar compression', whereby the urban and national are viewed as thoroughly intermeshed with one another. We stress the critical role of well-networked



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activists in this process. The multiple positions and political affiliations of these individuals enabled them to introduce local issues and actors into the national arena and vice versa. Subsequently, the rescaling process provides opportunities for local associations to make wider claims and collaborate with migrants' organizations, labor unions, environmental groups, etc on the basis of local tangible goals, while at the same time local activist networks contributed their concentrated resources to national mobilizations. This facilitated working collaborations between locals and nationals in succeeding mobilizations while extending the local networks that were most effective in transforming individuals into dedicated and radical political agents.

## 6 Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to identify how urban-based struggles connect and contribute to wider anti-neoliberal movements. Through the case of Athens, Greece, we show that rather than derailing large social movements, these highly urban and place-based struggles became the driving forces of powerful antisystemic mobilizations. A form of fast neoliberalism ripped through urban space during the 1990s and early 2000s, exacerbating inequalities and introducing major disturbances in the lives of urban inhabitants. While the weakness of the Greek state limited its capacities to mitigate the egregious effects of neoliberal urbanism, it also undermined its capacities to channel, control, and co-opt the grievance of urban inhabitants. Within this power vacuum, aggrieved inhabitants responded by forming highly localized campaigns, coalitions, and associations to address their concerns. These microstruggles served to bring individuals outside of their private worlds, connect them to others around common concerns, and position themselves in their broader public worlds. Through the daily tasks of planning and implementing campaigns, local activists developed trust, solidarity, and emotional bonds to one another. Such relational assets enabled them to take greater risks and make greater contributions to the struggle. While these local activists were able to forge strong bonds in these places, the well-connected ones among them served as brokers who could connect local activist clusters to activists in adjoining districts, other parts of the city, and national organizations. This web of loose ties served to transmit information and resources between the different sectors of the social movement sector, permitting activists to maximize their mobilizations capacities in national and urban campaigns. In addition to diffusing resources and information between the diverse activists of this social movement space, this web of relational exchanges also permitted the transposition of frames, as local and national scalar distinctions were compressed into a single anti-neoliberal cause.

As *The Washington Post* article discussed in the introduction notes, the areas discussed in this paper (especially Exarcheia) have become central arenas in recent anti-austerity mobilizations. These mobilizations do not reflect some kind of spontaneous event or breach in the neoliberal order of things as certain commentators of postpolitical theory would suggest [for review of this literature, see Swyngedouw (2009)]. Instead, they are the result of a slow and incremental process of forming a robust relational infrastructure over the span of ten to fifteen years. Protestors against austerity plans have targeted urban space once again as *the* key terrain for manifesting contention. This wave of protesters has adopted most of the anti-neoliberal discourses employed in earlier rounds of mobilization and claimed direct democracy as an "antidote" to extensive party-politics corruption. After the first few days of spontaneous meetings in the symbolic Syntagma (Constitution) Square in Athens city center, protesters formed daily general assembly meetings and various work groups to coordinate their actions. So far, people participating have organized numerous events and workshops with experts and guest speakers from around the world, including Egyptian and Tunisian activists. A number of informative campaigns have been launched in several neighborhoods as activists have been trying to introduce their claims to the local settings and



set up connections within existing local associations. Once again well-networked activists have acted as the principal mediating mechanism between different activists and as a way to transpose national claims to local settings. Existing ties to local groups have been employed to make these connections possible and gain access to the rich variety of resources contained within local activist networks. As these protests have been taking place, the urban once again plays a strategic role in this particularly potent round of anti-neoliberal struggles.

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## Appendix

### List of associations and interviewees<sup>(3)</sup>

- (1) “Committee of Residents’ Initiative of Exarcheia”, Exarcheia neighborhood  
Interviewees: Giorgos (activist), Manos (activist), Christina (activist), Paschalis (activist).
- (2) “Self-managed Park, Navarinou Street”, Exarcheia neighborhood  
Interviewees: Giorgos (activist), Manos (activist).
- (3) “Residents’ committee for the Occupied Public Market of Kypseli”, Kypseli neighborhood  
Interviewee: Michalis (activist).
- (4) “Patmou and Karavia Squat”, Patisia neighborhood  
Interviewee: Vangelis (activist).
- (5) “Residents’ Committee for the Zografou estate”, Zografou neighborhood  
Interviewees: Dionysis (activist), Maria (activist).
- (6) “Residents’ Committee for the Merkati Square”, Merkati Square, Zografou neighborhood  
Interviewee: Matina (activist).
- (7) “Anti-Info Café Squat”, Gardenia Square, Zografou neighborhood  
Interviewees: Dionysis (activist), Maria (activist), Matina (activist).
- (8) “Residents’ Initiative in the southern suburbs”, Glyfada neighborhood  
Interviewee: Panagiotis (activist).
- (9) “Galaxias Squat”, Nea Smyrni neighborhood  
Interviewee: Kostas (activist).
- (10) Interviewee: Stavros (academic, activist).
- (11) Informal conversations: Aggelos, Dimitra (activist, “Committee of Residents’ Initiative of Exarcheia”), Marianna (activist, “Residents’ Committee for the Zografou estate”), Charis (activist, “Residents’ committee for the Occupied Public Market of Kypseli”).

<sup>(3)</sup>The interviews were conducted in April 2010, in Athens, Greece.