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Crisis and Grassroots
A Case Study of New Participatory Citizens' Initiatives
in post-2009 Athens, Greece

verfasst von / submitted by

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Part I: Introduction

1. Introduction

No other country in Europe has been as severely and persistently affected by the post-2007 financial crisis and the following Euro crisis than Greece. By now, the country has entered its seventh year of a tremendous debt, economic and social crisis with hardly a day without media coverage. During the past years of austerity, social inequalities have dramatically increased: More than one third of the population (36 percent) is at risk of becoming poor (Eurostat 2015). And still, Greece is the country with the highest unemployment rate in the European Union, both among the general population (24.6 percent) and the youth with almost half of the country's under-25-year olds without a job (48.0 percent) (Eurostat 2016[1]).

By the time I entered fieldwork in 2014, it had become evident that some institutions of the state were ceasing to work. For instance, the health care system was collapsing. Clinics run by the statuary health insurance were closing all over the country; and the ones that were still continuing their work weren't able to support themselves with essential equipment (ÄrzteZeitung 2014).

However, against this background, there are signs that a new movement of active, committed citizens is on the rise, starting to take their fortune into their own hands and carrying the wish to change the society they live in. Grassroots groups such as formal or informal solidarity networks, cultural or political initiatives, urban regeneration projects, hospitals in which doctors work unpaid or neighborhood movements have been founded all over the country in the last few years, with the capital Athens playing a leading role (Huliaras 2015). It seems as if the civil society of Greece has experienced a significant boost, with volunteers and activists spending a massive amount of their time for voluntary, unpaid work. This is particularly striking as, ahead of the crisis, Greece was known as a country with a weak tradition in civil society and civic engagement (Sotiropoulos 2014:2). *Fakelaki* and *rousfeti*, corruption and nepotism, are keywords commonly associated with the mechanisms to which society, politics and the labor market in Greece used to work (Heyer 2013). The economic crisis and the experiences of the years of austerity seem to

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[1] Both data are from November 2015.

have had a large impact on the formation of grassroots movements and the function of a trigger for significant developments within civil society. On a small scale, even a new narrative of the crisis as a *chance for change* in Greece has arisen in media, contextualizing active citizens with a general transformation within mainly young and urban society (Heyer 2013; Papadopoulos / Walker 2015). Given the dominant political and media narratives on Greece in the early crisis years, often representing simplified, stereotypical images of lazy, corrupt, protesting and/or violent Greeks (Knight 2013:150; Herzfeld 2011:25; Theodossopoulos 2013:201), I became interested in this new discourse and its theoretical implications (e.g. one of the questions that arose was whether changes in civil society have to be seen in the context of a *neoliberal* development). Thus I decided to set out and do research on the perspective of participants of grassroots citizens' initiatives and their relations and interactions with the economic crisis. I chose Athens as the site of research since more grassroots activity has taken place there compared to other Greek cities (not only because this is the capital but also because the crisis has affected Athens deeper than other cities), by which I had the opportunity of studying a broad range of multiple fields of civic activities taking place in close locality to each other. Thus, I decided to select a number of different groups for a case study.

1.1 Studying "the Crisis"

> Crisis: "A vitally important or decisive stage in the progress of anything; a turning-point; also, a state of affairs in which a decisive change for better or worse is imminent; now applied esp. to times of difficulty, insecurity, and suspense in politics or commerce."
> (Oxford English Dictionary 2015a)

Deriving from ancient Greek, the term krisis (κρίσις) originally meant decision or choice. When asked about the Euro crisis in a recent interview, the philosopher Giorgio Agamben pointed towards its medical definition as the moment when the doctor has to decide if the patient will live or die. The crisis has come to life, becoming a tool itself.

It is this dimension of a decision, a turning point within a critical situation that for me makes the crisis so interesting to study anthropologically. The notion of crisis implies *"[...] a moment that marks and reveals an almost instantaneous transition towards something different."* (Dalakoglou / Vradis 2011a:14-15) The crisis becomes a *"generalized state of exception"* (Dalakoglou 2012a:35), forcing existing patterns of action to cease, but at the

same time establishing space for new social practices; these can be emancipatory but also repressive (Bader et al. 2011:8-9). Both on a level of political trust and political legitimacy but also generally, in these last years, the economic crisis posed a threat to destabilize societies in affected countries (Castells et al. 2012:4). It creates new subjectivities and power formations (Kosmatopoulos 2014:479). Behind this stands the idea that the crisis is not only economic, it is structural and multidimensional, and it opens up a world with social and economic conditions different to those we were used to in the last three decades shaped by the rise of global, informational capitalism (Castells et al. 2012:1).

But the following thesis also aims to look beyond essentializing narratives that take for granted without question that all grassroots activity in Athens after 2009 is rooted in *the crisis,* whatever this crisis may be. Thus, particularly the multidimensionality of the events and discourses that happened in Greece after 2009 and possible interrelations with grassroots mobilizations will be in the focus of consideration.

In order to study the economic crisis in Greece, Renée Hirschon has highlighted that an anthropological approach is particularly fruitful as it provides a wider frame of reference than specialist disciplines such as political or economic science:

> *"Anthropology can make a valuable contribution because of its comprehensive and holistic scope, and it has interpretive and explanatory value in identifying the factors that underlie and produce observable conduct and patterns of interaction." (Hirschon 2014:154)*

1.2 Overview: State of the Art

The following lines shall give an overview on the state of the art on my subject. All of the mentioned authors were used as resources for this thesis.

When I first started to do literature research in 2013, only very few (non-Greek) publications had been engaging with grassroots activism, citizens' initiatives or solidarity networks in the wake of the economic crisis in Greece. By now, in the beginning of 2016, this has changed and there is gradually more literature emerging on the matter, although still not many anthropological publications have dealt with my particular field of study. However, the contributions of a couple of authors need to be mentioned as particularly valuable for my topic: Daniel Knight's work on the crisis, the crisis as a trope (Knight 2013), memory and temporality (Knight 2012a; 2012b), Rakopoulos (2014) on solidarity

economy and food and Theodossopoulos on anti-austerity indignation (2013), on ways to study the Greek crisis anthropologically (2015) and ethical dilemmas about humanitarian help (2016). Especially the work of Dimitrios Theodossopoulos on critical local crisis narratives and interpretative tactics discursively empowering against a perceived peripheralization (2013) was fruitful for my context. However, as far as I could verify this in a time of non-ceasing academic interest in this matter with increasing publications, the matter of grassroots citizens' initiatives and the particular life worlds of their participants and perspectives on their voluntary work still remain understudied within the field. Thus, this masters' thesis can be seen as an input to this anthropological discussion.

Mostly other disciplines, notably political science, have contributed to a growing body of literature on post-2009 changes within Greek civil society, theoretically focusing mainly on the political concept of civil society, with a publication edited by Jessica Clarke, Asteris Huliaras and Dimitri Sotiropoulos (2015) giving one of the most thorough overviews of recent developments and increasing civic engagement in the country. The valuable work of Lila Leontidou, a professor of geography and European culture, on austerity-related urban protest movements / social movements in post-2009 Greece needs to be mentioned, as well as the timely contributions from sociology, namely from Donatella della Porta (2015) on anti-austerity social movements and Lisa Mittendrein (2013) on solidarity economy.

Despite of the scarce anthropological research on new citizens' initiatives in Greece, in the last couple of years there are more and more scholars of the discipline who have engaged with the country and/or the economic crisis whose work I have used in this thesis to outline the theoretical, social and spatial context for my research (e.g. Herzfeld, Hirschon, Theodossopoulos, Knight, Dalakoglou, Kosmatopoulos, Rakopoulos).

Michael Herzfeld points out that not only concerning anthropological studies but in general Greece always had a marginal character (1987:2; 2011:26). However, it is precisely its marginality that makes Greece so important to study as it was often at the vanguard of political, economical and social change in Europe (Herzfeld 2011:26).

Theodossopoulos has criticized that in former anthropological literature on the Greek crisis the particular views and subjectivities of peripheralized local actors have often remained unmentioned and were presented as undifferentiated; instead workings of power and a criticism of neoliberalism were in the center of attention (Theodossopoulos 2015). Thus, in

an attempt of "de-exoticising the crisis-afflicted subject" (ibid.) my thesis and its empirical fieldwork will give priority to the views of the protagonists of everyday life.

1.3 Research Questions

Building on prior literature research, a broad guiding research question to my empirical fieldwork was selected:

- o What were the reasons for participants to found grassroots citizens' initiatives in Athens since the beginning of the economic crisis in the year 2009/2010?

I didn't want to artificially assume the crisis to be *the* reason for participation and to bias the research outcome. As pointed out earlier I wanted to study the crisis as being a significant event and to examine its role as a *possible* trigger for civic engagement, thus taking this as a hypothesis. I didn't know if any and which dimensions of this complex matter that appeared to affect multiple aspects of people's life worlds were considered important for activity in grassroots groups. Thus, the following sub question emerged:

- o What role does the economic and social crisis in Greece have on participant's reasons to engage in these grassroots citizens' initiatives?

As I will point out in the following subchapter, looking behind discursive practices of different groups must be a key part of social movements analysis. Thus, I chose this third research question in order to find out more about the specific character of each single group:

- o Which discourses are decisive for having become active within a respective citizens' initiative group and are articulated and negotiated in the work of the group?

Commonalities between groups but also differences, conflicts and fault lines were in the center of my attention during fieldwork in order to assess whether one can technically speak of a coherent social movement and to ensure that the analysis of my empirical research gives a representative picture.[2]

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[2] The following chapter will deal with questions of representativity and sampling in detail.

In order to answer these questions, there was emphasis on how these grassroots initiatives emerged. I was particularly interested in the factor of voluntary, thus unpaid, work in order to gain more valid findings on underlying motivations to become active. After having finished fieldwork, I realized that notions of collective and/or national identity played a certain role for becoming active, therefore I paid more attention to this particular discursive strand during analysis.

1.4 Theoretical Considerations

Now, I would like to shift the focus to theoretical considerations and outline my choice of theories. In order to take account of the whole matter of research in its multidimensionality, I chose to select one guiding theory and include others where fitting.

I first anthropologically engaged with the topic of Greece in 2012/2013 working on a seminar paper on neoliberal transformations of the state during the post-2009 economic crisis drawing on the debate on neoliberalism within the discipline which has become virulent during the past years. At first this theoretical perspective seemed to be appealing for the work on my masters' thesis as well, considering that I was interested in the role of new civil society actors in relation to the state, e.g. regarding grassroots activities that could be attributed to the realm of public services or the welfare state. However, the more I delved into research I realized that this perspective didn't take adequate account of the subjectivities of the actors involved, and, as Jessop (2013:65) moreover notes, isn't a suitable concept to guide research.[3]

Predominantly this thesis will theoretically follow the slowly but steadily growing *"anthropology of social movements"* (EASA 2016) and contextualize the studied citizens' initiatives in this theoretical realm. As I will further outline in chapter 3, this approach involves a close look on emic issues of the participants involved (Salman / Assies 2009:252) as well as on problems of meaning and identity in regard to issues of protest (Escobar 1992:400-401). As the crisis had a significant effect on matters of identity (Leontidou 2012), and identity issues also proved to be a significant topic during research,

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[3] As advocates of the politics of neoliberalism hardly make any use of this term themselves, in some contexts *neoliberalism* has fallen into the status of sort of a *Kampfbegriff*, *"a socially constructed term of struggle"* (Jessop 2013:65) being used predominantly to express criticism and resistance.

I gave more theoretical focus on this matter. Here, I also included approaches from cultural studies.

As Hirai (2015:3) notes, the research of social movements must include *"an analysis of the struggles and the discursive practices that bring about changes in meanings and definitions of problems within a particular group."* Thus, methodologically this thesis will also examine discursive practices of participants in citizens' initiatives linked to reasons to become active. The discursive approach follows a Foucauldian notion inspired by cultural studies (thus I adopt a social constructivist and poststructuralist perspective) which recognizes that all social practices have a discursive aspect (cf. Hall 1992:291, cited in: Hall 2007:44).[4]

I decided to not only include social movements theory by itself, but to embed the former within the conceptual framework of civil society, as in daily language use and from the view of other disciplines the studied initiatives would probably be attributed more to the realm of civil society as I will outline later. Additionally, I wanted to provide the reader with a connection to resources from other disciplines solely dealing with civil society (namely the ones engaging with Greece), and also to introduce the debate on the role of civic actors within the state and interrelations. As Hann notes (1996:14-22), the actions of state agents should be integrated into analysis as well when dealing with this issue. But instead of focusing on formal structures and organizations only, beliefs, values and everyday practices of civil society should be in the center of research. Although the *subject* of my research might best be described as civil society, its theory doesn't appear to be the suitable guiding tool for my research as it seems to better fit a larger study which focuses not so much on the emic level.

Escobar (1992:412) highlighted that social movements are as much struggling over meanings as over socio-economic conditions which is why its anthropological research is highly relevant. While some authors recently dealing with Greece concentrated on issues of emerging alternative and solidarity economy (e.g. Mittendrein 2013, Rakopoulos 2014), the sample of this thesis contains citizens' initiatives with manifold different activities. However, it appeared that also for initiatives with no evident economic activity anthropological economic approaches fit really well, particularly of the emerging field of human economy *"where the primary focus of economic life is on reconfiguring relations*

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[4] The following chapter on methodology will go into detail with the matter of analyzing discourses.

between people, rather than the allocation of commodities." (Graeber 2012:411) Thus this thesis will try to embed the studied initiatives both within social movement theory and economic approaches.

Finally a more practical consideration: Renée Hirschon has warned that often Greece's apparent cultural familiarity to *"what appears to be the common ground of a broad Western tradition"* (Hirschon 2014:159) has hindered anthropologists in Greece of a critical analysis of Greek society (as would be commonly done in more obviously "exotic" societies) and instead assuming shared cultural postulates. Therefore I decided to include an overview on specific characteristics of Greek society and historical preconditions in order to provide a framework in which civil society and grassroots initiatives take place.

1.5 Thesis Structure

The following chapter will outline the methodology of my fieldwork in Athens and outline the process of research and data analysis. After that, chapter 3 will engage with the theoretical framework of this thesis. As I locate the studied citizens initiatives within the realm of social movements, chapter 3.1 will contextualize them within civil society and give an overview on theoretical concepts, among them new social movements and urban social movements. The following subchapter will deal with the issue of collective, cultural and national identities. A last section in the theoretical part of the thesis will engage with economic approaches.

Part II of the thesis will then enter the local context. In the first part of chapter 4, I will engage in depth with specific characteristics of Greek society, civil society and historical preconditions in order to provide a framework to better describe under which circumstances current developments within civil society take place. After that, I will outline the history of Athens in respect to the research focus. Here, literature findings will be linked with results of my empirical research.

The chapter 4.4 will attempt to give an overview on the current economic crisis in Greece and summarize a couple of facts that seem necessary in order to better understand the context in which people began to mobilize and to become active in grassroots groups. It will go into transformations the post-2009 crisis has brought to Greece and Athens particularly on a social level, but I will also give an overview on what political and media

discourses on the Greek crisis in foreign countries frequently looked like, as citizens' initiatives reacted to this. Crisis narratives and implications on matters of Greek identity will be mentioned as well.

Chapter 5 presents an introduction into the grassroots mobilizations that I see rooted within social movements after austerity had started and in particular on the occupation of Syntagma Square in 2011. Here, I tried to gain quantitative information that showed a growth of civic engagement during the crisis. Also the solidarity networks that arose during the crisis, new approaches of alternative economy and relations between grassroots and politics will be mentioned.

Chapter 6 then provides a presentation of the studied grassroots groups and a start to the interpretation of the results. Whereas here the different initiatives shall be outlined, chapter 7 will discuss results of research and present common features, discourses, value systems and identity processes negotiated within the voluntary and participatory work these groups. Finally, in Part III, I will deal with political implications of these new developments and give a conclusion. In chapter 7 questions of community participation and governance will be in the focus. Also conceptual problems of the notion of civil society and practical approaches will be dealt with. Chapter 8 will present the conclusion, give a brief outlook and discuss possible future areas of research.

2. Methodology and Field Research

This chapter will outline the data-gathering process as well as the data analysis in order to make transparent how the empirical results of this thesis were obtained. Moreover, I will also shed light on *how* the very process of my fieldwork in Athens looked and with what previous experiences of Greece I entered the field. Since the 1970s and moreover as a reaction to the postmodern turn, within anthropology there has been the tendency to acknowledge the presence of the researcher, in answer to *"[...] the stark realisation that at the centre of every ethnography lies the self of the anthropologist."* (Collins / Gallinat 2010:4). Often, the experiences of anthropologists become relevant for how they do and write ethnography; inevitably they become part of constructing what they aim to represent (Collins / Gallinat 2010:3):

> *"Therefore, we argue that anthropologists should include personal experiences as data in their analysis. Not to do so seems to us [...] at best to represent an opportunity lost and at worst a moral transgression." (Collins / Gallinat 2010:17)*

Thus, before outlining the research design and the process of fieldwork, I will briefly describe my personal approach to topic and locality of this master thesis.

2.1 Personal Approach to the Field

Thanks to my Greece enthusiast parents I think, by now, I must have visited the country about twenty times during my life. During my trips in the last 15 years, I mostly spent time in the Greek countryside on the mainland near the city of Volos and during that time I slowly started to become interested in the country beyond my status as a tourist. An increasing insight in how the local situation changed since the beginning of the debt crisis contributed to my growing interest in Greece and to the decision to do research on how the crisis transforms society and affects conceptions of how people live their lives. Thus, I tried, with the words of Judith Okely to use my autobiographical knowledge for *„anthropological enlargement"* (Okely 2012:41).

In addition to that, I had encountered the Greek debt crisis from the perspective of a journalist. I regularly reported on events in Greece as an editor in the news department of an Austrian TV channel between 2010 and 2015, however covering only the "most important" events in short air time and with a spatial distance to Greece, being "fed" with a

constant stream of news by international news agencies. In order to be transparent about my journalistic take, here might be the right place to state that I became critical of dominant public discourses on the Greek crisis. Particularly (but not only) tabloid press proved to report pretty single-sided, e.g. in terms of whose "fault" this crisis was, in regard to a supposed general amount of corruption or "laziness" of Greek citizens being responsible for the current situation, or in respect to the image of Greece as a violent place (Knight 2013:150; Herzfeld 2011:25)[5]. In chapter 4.4.3, I will give an overview on what political and media discourses on the Greek crisis in foreign countries have frequently looked like.

When I first read about grassroots groups in Athens, urban regeneration projects, solidarity clinics and other initiatives doing their own thing and coping with the effects of crisis and austerity, the topic intrigued me, probably because this narrative was so different from dominant representations of Greek people these days. A significant part of my motivation to engage in this fieldwork was to tell the stories underneath the Greek crisis in depth, and to set what has been happening in Athens in these last years in a full picture which is scientifically "backed up".

I decided to link a stopover in Athens in 2013 with a meeting with a member from a citizens' initiative and, as she told me more about their group and agreed that I could do fieldwork with them, the topic of my master thesis was set, although I refined the concept.

2.2 Research Process

My research entails ethnographic interviews within grassroots citizen groups in Athens and, to a much more limited extent, participant observation, thus a qualitative approach was chosen. An explorative term of fieldwork was conducted during two weeks in February 2014 in Athens. A second phase of fieldwork was carried out in September 2014. I decided to use the time gap of about half a year in-between research in order to assess changes within and in the surroundings of the initiatives. Moreover, I used this time in order to refine the research purpose after going through the data of the first phase of fieldwork. By that, the relation between grassroots initiatives and political players and authorities (local and national government as well as political parties) and its implications

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[5] For example, the grassroots group *Omikron Project,* whom I did research on, describe one of the discursive practices deployed as *"crisis pornography*", a term which has been used by other people as well (SRF 2015).

on self-conceptions came into focus as well. One indicator that this relation was more meaningful than considered at first was that the advisor of the mayor of Athens in civil society matters whom I had interviewed in February was appointed *Vice Mayor for Civil Society and Municipality Decentralization* after the municipal elections in April 2014. This showed that, indeed, the emergence of grassroots groups in Athens had become a somewhat "official" fact that couldn't be left out of consideration within politics.

Apart from those empirically collected primary data, self-descriptions of the initiatives (like from their websites, Facebook pages or information sheets) and other secondary data were taken into account and compared to data gained during research. Field notes were taken during the whole stay in Athens. I decided to write them down as a stream of narratives. This brings the advantage that some of those experiences which aren´t considered suitable at first might be useful later on (Okely 2008:56). As the fieldwork contained a mix of methods I asked my informants informal questions within and during participant observation. Interviews were audio-recorded.

In total 29 interviews that I conducted were used for this thesis[6]: 13 interviews in the first phase of fieldwork in February 2014, and again 10 interviews in the second phase of fieldwork in September 2014. Additionally, I conducted two interviews in the fall of 2014 via Skype, as well as one additional expert interview via e-mail. In general, personal face-to-face interviews took about one hour each, some of them up to three hours. It has to be noted that most participants were interviewed twice, once in each research phase.

As fieldwork ended by the end of 2014, the empirical results of my thesis can only give a valid impression of what the situation for grassroots groups was like until then; moreover it cannot be ruled out that some of the factors of self-conception of the studied groups in relation to the political system have altered since then, given that the government of Greece changed in January 2015. Therefore, I will add extra emphasis on cases where I included literature and secondary data that discernibly had a later editorial deadline.

The interviews were semi-structured according to a guideline in order to guarantee better comparison and analysis of the different groups and to make sure that all of the topics are covered in the interviews in more or less the same way (DeWalt / DeWalt 2011:139-140). Questions were adapted ahead or during interviews according to the different range of

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[6] I originally conducted (a minor number of) more interviews but chose to narrow down my sample within the process of theoretical sampling after returning from fieldwork.

activities within the groups and to how the discussion went. Open questions were asked. Moreover, I tried not to address the topic of *crisis* ahead of my interview partners due to the intrinsic importance of how *they* refer to this issue.

In the explorative phase in February I conducted as many informal interviews and discussions as possible, also with other people than expected, mostly members of different grassroots initiatives (the following chapter will deal with the issue of sampling in depth). During my second stay the emphasis lay on participant observation and on verifying data gathered during interviews in the first stay. Moreover, the interview guideline was modified between February and September and developments in-between were stressed. Interviews were more informal and unstructured in order to guarantee that the interaction covered issues and obstacles within their groups that were most important for the participants.

> *"If the goal is to understand the way the participants view a phenomenon, then it is important to allow the flow of conversation to reflect those aspects that are salient to the informants" (DeWalt / DeWalt 2011:140).*

Over 500 photos were taken during research in order to be able to back up field notes with additional visual information. More than half of them were shot with a professional digital camera, the other ones with my smartphone which had the advantage to move around in the field more freely and not to attract too much attention.

As the focus of my research lay on citizen groups depending on voluntary work, my aim was to offer my help in certain groups in order to do participant observation and - in the words of James Clifford - to be able to *„hang out"* (cited in: Borneman/Hammoudi 2009:2) with the people. *„Participation through shared action brings vital insights and instrumental acceptance among the people themselves."* (Okely 2012:77). On a practical level this was possible sometimes. Still, in many situations it proved to be difficult due to a lack of properly understanding the Greek that was spoken within the initiatives.[7] Nonetheless, the fact that at least I tried to speak the language helped to establish a trustful relation with my participants. In this respect, the time gap between the two phases of fieldwork, and mostly the fact that I came back after a few months, also turned out to be very fruitful for research and to result in a more trustful relation with my informants.

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[7]Before entering the field for the first time I had some basic Greek skills and I have continued to learn the language. However, in order to be able to communicate fluently this can never be enough so within every initiative studied I established good relations to at least one person whom I used as sort of an "interpreter".

Moreover, in the context of difficult, stereotypical (foreign) media discourses on Greece and the crisis most interview partners had given me positive feedback on the fact that I was doing this research. Especially within the solidarity initiatives in my sample dealing with the negative consequences of the crisis on a daily basis it seemed to be considered as very positive to witness a foreign researcher being interested in their actions.

2.3 Data Analysis

After finishing research, interviews and data gained during participant observation were transcribed, indexed and coded.[8] Parts considered to be of minor importance in respect to the research focus were indexed or coded as well. These activities were performed according to DeWalt and DeWalt who point out that indexing and coding often take place simultaneously (DeWalt / DeWalt 2011:183). Whereas coding searches for categories which are inherent in the data (*emic*) and aims at abstracting and interpreting these ideas, indexing draws more on the initial theoretical approach:

> *"We use the term indexing to refer to the use of "etic" or a priori categories drawn in order to aid in the retrieval of material for further analysis." (DeWalt / DeWalt 2011:183).*

Whereas in a first round open coding was performed on the data, in a second phase I used elements of axial coding (Breidenstein et al. 2013: 126-128; 136). Thus, I only searched for specific topics and categories, e.g. matters of Greek identity. The software Atlas.ti was used for finding recurring themes and organizing the whole body of empirical data. Furthermore, building on Breidenstein et alii, I searched for "key issues" and bundled analyses into thematic units. These units were then analyzed in reference to theoretical findings (Breidenstein et al. 2013:156-158). The bottom-up strategy of Grounded Theory (Glaser / Strauss 1998) proved to be very fruitful for data analysis. Accordingly, most concepts don't stem from data alone but are elaborated in dialogue with theory (Glaser / Strauss 1998:15). This approach was particularly used for insights gained during participant observation.

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[8] As English isn't the mother tongue of virtually all of my interview partners (with only one exception), I decided to linguistically "polish" direct quotations in the text without distorting their meaning, in order to enhance understanding and to avoid linguistic discrimination.

Moreover, regarding the research focus why participants became active within their groups I examined discursive practices and therefore drew on discourse analysis. Social realities can be examined through discourses about certain objects or processes (Flick 2002:295). Methodologically discourse analysis places particular emphasis on how versions of incidents are constructed through representations by means of language and knowledge processes (Flick 2002:293-294). Following Foucault's concept of discourse, all social practices have a discursive aspect (cf. Hall 1992:291, cited in: Hall 2007:44). Discourse in his understanding is more than just language as it historically used to be seen (Foucault 2005 [1966]:256). It doesn't only apply to the type of language a certain group performs but also to certain typical actions. Stuart Hall condenses Foucault's concept like this:

> *"It attempts to overcome the traditional distinction between what one says* (language) *and what one does* (practice). *Discourse [...] constructs the topic. It defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. [...] It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others." (Hall 2007:44 [emphasis in the original])*

Therefore, I did not only apply this approach on data gained in interviews but also, to a lesser extent, to data collected during participant observation and other above mentioned resources. This choice also seemed to be highly suitable for my research as I could use data from oral testimonies of the interviews and check whether distinct discursive formations reappeared in data gained during participant observation (which was less due to limited time in the field as already mentioned).

2.4 Sampling: Choice of Groups

Sampling as a process is usually linked more to quantitative than to qualitative research. However, sampling starts to take place when research question and site are chosen. According to DeWalt and DeWalt, assuring the representativeness of information gained in participant observation and ethnography is as important as in quantitative approaches, since no community or group is homogenous (DeWalt / DeWalt 2011:128-129).

The focus of my research lies in grassroots movements depending on voluntary work, where people become active autonomously from state institutions and political parties. Thus, as I was interested in studying the phenomenon of grassroots groups that emerged since the beginning of the Greek post-2009 economic and social crisis and their underlying

meanings and not just one group with a single thematic focus, it became clear that sampling and questions of representativeness were an important issue. Hence, I decided to seek a broad variety of different grassroots groups:

> *"If we wish to go beyond the most general and superficial generalizations about a setting or a community, it is necessary to understand the range of variation of experiences and perspectives." (DeWalt / DeWalt 2011:129)*

In the explorative phase of fieldwork I conducted as many informal interviews and discussions as possible, also with other people than expected, mostly members of different grassroots initiatives. Since, according to DeWalt and DeWalt: *"One of the early goals of fieldwork should be to understand the kinds and sources of diversity within a setting or a group."* (DeWalt / DeWalt 2011:129) Thus, thanks to these features of snowball sampling techniques, I was able to get an impression of the current situation within grassroots movements and civil society in Athens. The initiatives for the case study section of this thesis were chosen via theoretical sampling (Glaser / Strauss 1998).

In order to ensure to gain insights into not only one branch of grassroots activity and to be able to do a comparative study a very heterogeneous sample was chosen for my case study with different initiatives having various thematic orientations as well as various structures regarding organization and professionalization. Therefore this master thesis pursues a multi-sited ethnography. Regarding this process, I was guided by Edelman's approach:

> *"Ethnographic analyses of social movements have been most persuasive when they transcend the single-organization or single-issue focus of much collective action research in favor of broader examinations of the political and social fields within which mobilizations occur." (Edelman 2001:309)*

In order to assess which parts of the data were to be included into the sample for final analysis after fieldwork had been finished, sampling was carried out as follows:

1. All groups can be considered "grassroots" in the sense that they were founded by private persons, not by a political party, with a not-for-profit focus and that they are participatory. Moreover, all of them depend on voluntary (unpaid) work. *Omikron Project's* definition correlates with how I understood *grassroots:*

> *"By 'grassroots', we mean that the groups are open for others to join and that, at the time of their inception, they had no affiliation with a profit-making entity." (Omikron Project 2014)*

2. All grassroots initiatives are active in the metropolitan area of Greater Athens[9], most of them either in the first or 6th district of Athens[10]. The only exception is the solidarity clinic at Elliniko which was the first free clinic founded in Athens.[11]

3. All interview partners have been founding members of their initiatives in order to be able to assess the motivations to set up these projects.[12]

4. All studied grassroots groups were founded after the beginning of the Greek debt crisis in 2009.

5. Although the initiatives' objectives can partially overlap, they should aim at different tasks or a mix of activities.

6. In terms of the legal status of groups, a majority of new grassroots groups doesn't have any legal entity at all[13], but initiatives in my case study can also include not-for-profit-organizations. However, the features mentioned in the first point have to apply (participatory, dependence on voluntary work etc.)

I decided to map the manifold activities the initiatives pursued, by assigning them to different categories. It needs to be pointed out that I did interviews with groups I didn't include in the case study for various reasons. In most of these cases I had not done much or any participant observation and therefore decided I had insufficient data about their structure and actual activities to include them in the case study section. However, I used data gained in these interviews to back up general insights.

Additionally I did expert interviews, particularly in order to find out more about interrelations with political players. Thus, I interviewed Amalia Zepou, first in her role as advisor of the mayor of Athens in civil society matters and as founder of an umbrella network for citizens' initiatives in Athens (*SynAthina)*, and in the fall of 2014 after she had been appointed *Vice Mayor for Civil Society and Municipality Decentralization*.

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[9] See chapter "Athens and its history" for more information on the structure of the city.

[10] This is particularly interesting as it seems that these districts and demographic structure are rather different. For example interview partners in the 6th district characterized it as "worker's district". There it also appears that studied initiatives are perceiving themselves in a strong opposition towards the right wing political party *Chrysi Avgi*.

[11] The Metropolitan clinic at Elliniko it is still accessible via the Athenian Metro and most people consider Elliniko to be a part of (greater) Athens. Therefore its counts as an Athens based initiative although situated outside of the municipality.

[12] Only in one case I interviewed someone who wasn't involved in the foundation, but who plays a key role in the meantime.

[13] See chapter 5.2 for more details about the legal status of grassroots groups in Greece.

I also did an interview with a member of the umbrella solidarity network *Solidarity4All* that was set up by the political party of *SYRIZA*. Someone as soon as in my first interview had mentioned this network, moreover I was interested in political commitment in civil society issues.

Furthermore, in terms of expert interviews I interviewed Ilias Katsoulis, emeritus professor in political sociology and member of the Greek NGO "Citizen's Movement for an Open Society", Konstantina Karydi, Policy Advisor & Head of the Europe Direct Office within the Office of the Mayor of Athens, who has worked academically on the topic of grassroots movements in Athens as a political scientist and with Asteris Huliaras, a political scientist.

3. Theoretical Review

3.1 Social Movements - a Part of Civil Society

> *"[...] without social movements, no challenge will emerge from civil society able to shake the institutions of the state through which norms are enforced, values preached and property preserved" (Castells 1983:294)*

Within cultural and social anthropology it appears that social movement theory and theoretical considerations about civil society historically developed rather separately from one another. However, it seems important to theoretically put these two strands into context, as a lot of (non-anthropological) literature on recent developments in Greece in the field of civic action rather concentrated on the terminology of civil society, as Part II will show. In line with Castells (1983), Sotiropoulos and Bourikos (2014:35) and multiple other scholars, I understand social movements as a part of civil society. Therefore I will shortly define its concept before going into detail on social movements.

Apart from social movements civil society includes non-governmental organizations, non-profit organizations and informal community groups and networks operating on a grassroots level (Sotiropoulos / Bourikos 2014:35). Thus, civil society can be *"both formal and informal actors who participate in the public sphere in order to make demands on the state or to pursue the self-organisation of citizens from below."* (Clarke et al. 2015:2)

Reaching back to Aristotle's *koinonia politike* in ancient Greece, there have been a multitude of different notions of civil society over time (Zimmer / Freise 2006:2), and yet it is a contested concept. The foundations of the modern tendency to draw a sharp dichotomy between the realm of the state and civil society reach back to Hegel (Hann 1996:4). Today civil society can be understood as

> *„[...] a wide-ranging set of social interaction and collective action taking place in the public space available between the individual household, on the one hand, and the state apparatus, on the other." (Sotiropoulos 2004:10)*

The definition of the Oxford English Dictionary further sheds light on the fact that it consists of *"a community of citizens characterized by common interests and collective activity"* (2015b). Moreover civil society is, rather normatively, defined as:

> *"that aspect of society concerned with and operating for the collective good, independent of state control or commercial influence; all social groups, networks,*

etc., above the level of the family, which engage in voluntary collective action"
(ibid.).

Within the field of anthropology, the term has been rather neglected for a long time. Anthropologists have tended to consider civil society and the state as relatively unproblematic phenomena and therefore not compelling enough to study (Gibb 2001:7). However, if studied, beliefs, values and everyday practices of civil society should be in the center of research instead of formal structures and organizations (Hann 1996:14ff).

Ernest Gellner's model of civil society differs from some popular approaches insofar as it stresses the necessity of an effective welfare state (Hann 1996:1), as opposed to the neoliberal principles of the *Washington Consensus* from the 1980s that entailed an excessive change from relying on government services towards relying on the market and individual responsibility (Alexander 2010:217).

In the hegemonic discourse on civil society most scholars relate to the concept of the private legal realm and western modes of liberal individualism, as it was shaped by the work of Hobbes and Locke (Hann 1996:1). This approach sees civil society as:

> *"[...] the social relationships which involve the voluntary association and participation of individuals acting in their private capacities. In a simple and simplistic formula, civil society can be said to equal the milieu of private contractual relationships" (Tester 1992:8, cited in: Dunn 1996:27)*

Following this perspective, civil society can be understood as supportive of capitalism and bourgeois democracy. This liberal strand of argumentation stresses a philanthropic solidarity approach where civil society occupies the space of private free initiative. It has been highly contested for its narrow conception which presumes that voluntary social activities, individual engagement and ethical awareness are crucial for improving the life standard of the poorest, instead of questioning political conditions and public norms (Laville 2015:54). Anthropological fieldwork on civil society has shown that this way of operating from the premise of liberal individualism doesn't necessarily account for its actors (Dunn 1996:27).

Here, it also seems practical to introduce the concept "Third sector", as 'Civil society' and 'Third sector' are umbrella terms often referred to synonymously in public or academic discourses, although they have different conceptual roots. Therefore precisely categorizing them has been considered difficult (Clarke et al. 2015:1).

In contrast to *Civil Society,* the term *Third Sector* wasn't framed until the later twentieth century. Coined by sociologist Amitai Etzioni (1973), the third sector is understood as an area of activity situated right between the state and the market sector, with its aim to be "serving our needs". In this realm *"'the best of both worlds'-efficiency and expertise from the business world"* (Etzioni 1973:315) is combined with *"public interest, accountability, and broader planning from government"* (ibid.). The third sector has been largely occupied with the provision of welfare services and public policy considerations (Etzioni 1973:315-317). Compared to civil society, the concept doesn't only have a more economical analytical perspective but it also stresses its organizational structure (Zimmer/Freise 2006:2).

Although the *subject* of my research might best be described as civil society, I am interested in how and moreover *why* people are mobilized on a grassroots level. Therefore, in the following I will draw on social movements theories as an analytical tool.

Social movement studies developed from a critique of economist attempts to explain mobilization through structures. Grievances or interest in societal change were always present but it's not only these that mobilize people (della Porta 2015:5). Arturo Escobar reflects this notion when he stresses that social movements carry new social practices that constitute spaces for the creation of meaning (Escobar 1992:408).

> *"What is crucial to these studies [...] is that social movements be seen as cultural struggles in a fundamental sense, that is, as struggles over meanings as much as over socio-economic conditions. This is doubly important because social movements in the Third World, for understandable reasons, tend to be seen primarily as struggles over economic means of survival. As central to the socio-economic aspects is the defense, creation and reconstruction of meanings at all levels, from everyday life to national development." (Escobar 1992:412)*

Within a comprehensive cultural field social movements link together economic, social and political issues (Escobar 1992:408). But what is the essence of social movements in the first place? From a sociologist point of view (which seems fitting for my context here) they can be seen as a distinct social process that consists of the following mechanisms of collective action (della Porta / Diani 2006:20):

• Actors are in conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents;

• Actors are linked by dense informal networks;

• Actors share a specific collective identity.

Within anthropology, Escobar has highlighted the *"invisibility"* of social movements, a trend that has ceased, although anthropologists have unfortunately seldom theorized the sometimes significant outcome of their ethnographies (Edelman 2001:309; Gibb 2001:4-5). Whereas traditionally, social movements had dealt with concerns of labor and nations, since the 1960s *New Social Movements* have started to engage with other issues such as women's rights, environmental protection etc. (della Porta / Diani 2006:6). It seems useful to introduce the approach of political opportunity or "political process" theorists, as this approach has been prominent lately. This approach rejects previous resource mobilization and new social movements theories for their "neglect of politics" (Tarrow 1988:423, cited in: Gibb 2001:2). (However, in following chapters I will show that these concepts don't necessarily exclude each other.) In order to better grasp agency, della Porta suggests a less structuralist perspective than usually adopted which shifts from a deterministic to a more processual approach (della Porta 2015:6).

I decided to look at my fieldwork predominantly through the theoretical lens of new social movements for reasons outlined below. Combining it with the perspective of urban social movements theory didn't seem to be a contradiction but a useful way to also take into account the local context of the studied groups, as well as the material needs out of which some of the groups have arisen. I will here follow Lila Leontidou (2010), who observed that urban social movements and new social movements tended to merge as from the beginning of the twenty-first century.

New Social Movements

Since questions of identity play a crucial role within Athenian grassroots movements, a theoretical summary of social movements would be incomplete without considering *New Social Movements (NSMs),* a theoretical body that developed around European scholars by the mid-1970s (Edelman 2001:288). It challenges reductionist Marxist approaches that highlighted the dominant role of the working class for historical changes (Canel 1997:189). Instead, the actors involved do not consider themselves in terms of socio-economic class. However scholars have mostly attributed them the status of *"new middle classes"* (Cohen 1985:667).

> *"Instead of forming unions or political parties of the socialist, social democratic, or communist type, they focus on grassroots politics and create horizontal,*

directly democratic associations that are loosely federated on national levels."
(Cohen 1985:667)

As NSMs have attributed a central role to cultural practice for political transformation, anthropologists have been drawn to its framework (Edelman 2001:290). NSM theory stresses the cultural nature of new movements and considers them as *"struggles for control over the production of meaning and the constitution of new collective identities."* (Canel 1997:189). Moreover, the NSM perspective investigates how changing structural conditions alter the stakes and the central actors of social conflict (della Porta / Diani 2006: 29). Theorists have focused on the fight of social movement activists for the right to realize their own identity (Canel 1997:199).

NSMs are located within the realm of civil society, as opposed to the state. In contrast, the North American *Resource Mobilization (RM) Theory,* which has been somehow regarded as the opposite to NSMs, has stressed the political nature of social movements and placed them in both areas (Canel 1997:189-190). RM Theory tends to view social movements as interest group politics and to assess their "success" rather in respect to achieved policy objectives than in relation to culturally transformative processes, like the NSM perspective does (Edelman 2001:290).

Rather than engaging in capital-labor struggles of the labor movement (thus "old" social movements (Edelman 2001:289)), according to Jürgen Habermas the central conflict of NSMs revolves around the rejection of an intrusion of the state and the market into areas of private life, a *"colonization of the lifeworld"* (Habermas 1981:35). This is the source of a legitimation crisis. Within NSMs, defensive reactions to restore endangered lifestyles take place. They care less about redistributional issues than social integration and the *"grammar of forms of life"* (Habermas 1981:33). Participants seek to construct an alternative society (Hirai 2015:3). Within "old" labor movements class was the primary social cleavage. NSMs, in contrast, with their focus on post-materialist values, have attained an image as new middle-class phenomena (della Porta 2015:8). They *"[...] emerge out of the crisis of modernity and focus on struggles over symbolic, informational, and cultural resources and rights to specificity and difference"* (Edelman 2001:289) Everyday movement practices in microcosms represent the very changes the movement seeks as a whole. Thus, participating in NSMs is in itself one of their goals (ibid.).

As the whole fieldwork took part in an urban context, the following sub-chapter will give a short overview on urban studies and on urban social movements theory.

Urban Social Movements

The intellectual field of critical urban studies set off in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the works of Henri Lefebvre, Manuel Castells and David Harvey. Although differing from each other theoretically, methodologically and politically, they all maintained that, in times of capitalism, cities function as strategic locations for commodification processes (Brenner et al. 2009:177-178). Cities and their constitutive sociospatial forms (buildings, the built environment to land-use systems, networks of production and exchange and infrastructural facilities) are arenas for processes of commodification as well as they are *themselves* continually commodified in terms of being shaped and continually re-shaped for the purpose of accumulating capital. *"Urban space under capitalism is therefore never permanently fixed [...]"* (Brenner at al. 2009:178). Profit-oriented (exchange-value) dimensions of urban sociospatial configurations and everyday life-oriented (use-value) dimensions unrelentingly clash with one another (Brenner et al. 2009:178). But strategies to commodify urban space have also often failed, creating depreciated, crisis-riven urban landscapes where social needs aren't met anymore. Destabilized sociospatial configurations result in human suffering and degrading environments. However, despite these failures and vulnerability to crises, capitalist urbanization is continually reinvented: Lefebvre called this dynamic process "implosion-explosion", whereas Harvey titled it "creative destruction" (Brenner et al. 2009:178).

A lot of critical writing about cities over the last years has engaged with Lefebvre's concept of the "Right to the city" (1968). As much as his claim has influenced scholars (among them Castells), it has also become an inspirational claim for political activists in many contemporary cities (Brenner et al. 2009:180).

During the process of empowerment of citizens within urban communities, public space attains a dual role. Individuals undergo positive situations of social interaction and relaxation, while these experiences are embodied within the collective memory (Gerodimos 2015:97).

Castells introduced the term urban social movements in the early 1970s, taking into account the city as a *"social product resulting from conflicting interests and values"*

(1983:xviii). The theory on urban social movements has historically developed in relative isolation from social movements theory although they are considered as one category of social movement (Pickvance 2003:105). On the one side, this isolation resulted from diverse disciplinary backgrounds of scholars who used Castells' work as a *"lingua franca"* (ibid.) and could therefore neglect delving deeper into other social movements theory. On the other side, in times of a rising interest in new social movements theory, some writers classified urban social movements as old social movements, like the labor movement, due to the ostensible materiality of their activists' claims. Since urban social movements can include demands for larger participation, new rights and other *"non-material"* features, Pickvance (2003:106) argues that they can neither be marked as old nor as new social movements. Again, other scholars (e.g. Leontidou 2010) put urban social movements and new social movements into context, which is also what I will do.

Castells' definition of urban social movements is generally regarded as being rather normative (Leontidou 2010:1180; Pickvance 2003), which is also why I only follow a few of these points here. Mayer points out that his work proves to be highly up-to-date as he located the conflict lines where major urban confrontations still happen today (Mayer 2006:204). Particularly his emphasis on collective consumption (*"goods and services provided directly or indirectly by the state"* (Castells 1983:xviii) proves to be interesting for the analysis of grassroots movements in times where public infrastructure and services are hollowed out (Mayer 2006:204).

Urban social movements are defined as *"urban-orientated mobilizations that influence structural social change and transform the urban meanings"* (Castells 1983:305) or, later, as *"processes of purposive social mobilization, organized in a given territory, oriented toward urban-related goals"* (Castells 1997:60).

> *"People socialize and interact in their local environment, be it in the village, in the city, or in the suburb, and they build social networks among their neighbours." (Castells 1997:60)*

Urban social movements are organized around three main sets of goals: *"urban demands on living conditions and collective consumption; the affirmation of local cultural identity; and the conquest of local political autonomy and citizen participation."* (Castells 1997:60) While the first goal is aimed at tackling the dominant logics of capitalism, the second counters informationalism, and the third goal directs against statism (Castells 1983:328).

Urban social movements become a critical source of resistance to this triad (Castells 1997:61).

These three sets of goals are combined differently in various movements, with different intensity, and some only tackle one or two goals, resulting in different outputs (Castells 1983:319; 1998:61). However, Castells argues that only if a movement uses *all* of these three goals in their practice, it can bring about social change (1983:328). Significant *innovations* in the city's role, as well as meaning and structure are considered to result from *grassroots mobilization, although* Castells (1983:xviii) only refers to them as *urban social movements* if these mobilizations also entail a *transformation* of the urban structure. Even if they are unable to transform *society* as a whole, grassroots movements, and this is especially interesting in the Athenian context, do transform urban meanings and remain within the collective memory.

Members in urban movements discover common interests, defend them, share their lives and thereby produce new meaning (Castells 1997:60). This social mobilization within a certain locality affects questions of identity. Participating in community organizations creates a feeling of belonging that can result in a communal, cultural identity, which Castells labels as defensive identity (Castells 1997:60).

> *"[...] local communities, constructed through collective action and preserved through collective memory, are specific sources of identities. But these identities, in most cases, are defensive reactions against the impositions of global disorder and uncontrollable, fast-paced change."* (Castells 1997:64)

These processes and their production of meaning make up an integral part of cities as throughout history *"the built environment, and its meaning, is constructed through a conflictive process between the interests and values of opposing social actors."* (Castells 1997:61) Thereby, societal hierarchies, which structure urban life, are undermined, and a city organized on the basis of use values, autonomous local cultures and decentralized participatory democracy can arise (Castells 1983:319-329).

From the perspective of successes of urban social movements, Brenner, Marcuse and Mayer maintain that only occasionally such movements have resulted in fundamental changes, *"but in other cases their radical promise has been aborted, co-opted or 'mainstreamed'."* (Brenner et al. 2009:180) However, it is important to note that not all such movements actually strive for systemic change (ibid.).

Throughout his research, Castells himself observed similar processes. In some cases urban social movements had been incorporated in the structure and practice of local government together with their discourses, actors and organizations. This happened either directly or indirectly, through processes of citizen participation and community development and these processes moreover "introduced the possibility of the local state as a significant instance of construction of political control and social meaning." (Castells 1997:62)

In other cases, urban poor communities around the world focused their actions on collective survival by building *"their own 'welfare states'"* (ibid.), resulting from the lack of public services. Networks of solidarity and reciprocity arose, sometimes including churches, NGOs or leftist intellectuals. Such urban movements have kept a significant role in the provision of daily needs in poor world areas (Castells 1997:62-63).

3.2. Identity

Above all, identity must be perceived as a fluid ongoing process of self-identification where the concept of representation, as described by cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall, plays an important role. Questions of who we are or how we were represented lead to how we represent ourselves (Hall 2004:170-171).

> *"Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation." (Hall 1990:222)*

Therefore both media representations and other discourses become meaningful for identity processes. This notion corresponds to Richard Jenkins' (1994) important assessment that externally-located processes of social categorization are as much decisive for the production and reproduction of social identity than internal definitions. Thus, also power and authority relations have to be taken into account in the social construction of identity processes (Jenkins 1994).

Theoretically, identity can be classified within three conceptually distinct types that often overlap: personal, social and collective identity (Snow 2001:2212). Within the context of this thesis, the concept of collective identity seems to be more important than personal and

social identity, as the study concerns groups. Although theoretical definitions of collective identity vary, they seem to be coherent about the following:

> *"[...] its essence resides in a shared sense of 'one-ness' or 'we-ness' anchored in real or imagined shared attributes and experiences among those who comprise the collectivity and in relation or contrast to one or more actual or imagined sets of 'others.'" (Snow 2001:2213)*

Moreover, collective identity always entails a sense of *collective agency*, resulting from *"shared perceptions of a common cause, threat or fate"* (Snow 2001:3314) that *"motivate people to act together in the name of, or for the sake of, the interests of the collectivity"* (Snow 2001:2214). Collective identity is also very much negotiated within social movements and it is a central concept of their studies (Snow 2001:2214). As they fuel boundary-making processes, social movements act as identity fields (della Porta 2015:83-84).

In order to understand how collective identities are constructed, it is highly important to look at the processes by which they are created, expressed, sustained and modified (Snow 2001:2216). These have been called *identity work* and they include *"activities people engage in, both individually and collectively, to signify and express who they are and what they stand for in relation or contrast to some set of others"* (Snow 2001:2216).

Studies on collective identity have engaged in a multitude of sets of categories, among others in questions of national identity (Snow 2001:2214). Discursive constructs of national and cultural identity often stress one shared culture, as *"a sort of collective 'one true self'"* (Hall 1990:223) that people with a shared history have in common.

> *" [...] our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history." (Hall 1990:223)*

Such a conception of cultural identity was very powerful in post-colonial struggles and still continues to be influential in forms of representation of heretofore-marginalized peoples (ibid.). These (sometimes imaginary) narratives correspond to Hobsbawm's concept of *invented tradition* with its processes of formalization and ritualization and the creation of symbolic complexes, by referring to the past (Hobsbawm 1983:4).

But there is a second strand how identity is constituted which is as much influential, or as Gingrich (2004:4) puts it: *„Othering and belonging are mutual constitutive components of*

identity". Matters of sameness/belonging (for instance to a group) are as much decisive for identity than matters of *differing* (from groups or persons) (Gingrich 2004:6). In contrast to relating to similarities, identity is constructed through the relation to *what it is not*, to the constitutive other, in order to define boundaries (Hall 2004:171). Externally-located processes and how people are positioned and subjected within dominant regimes of representation become part of identity processes (Hall 1990:225). An *"inner expropriation of cultural identity"* (Hall 1990:226) takes place. Although Hall refers to the colonial experience of afro-american people, the processes he describes seem universal for marginalized groups:

> *"Not only, in Said's 'Orientalist' sense, were we constructed as different and other within the categories of knowledge of the West by those regimes. They had the power to make us see and experience ourselves as 'Other'. Every regime of representation is a regime of power formed, as Foucault reminds us, by the fatal couplet, 'power/knowledge'." (Hall 1990:225-226)*

Manuel Castells studies collective identities within the context of power relationships as well. He differentiates between *legitimizing identities, resistance* or *defensive identities* and *project collective identities* (Castells 1997:7-11).

Also the acquisition and our contribution to collective memories are crucial to the building of identity (Halbwachs 1992:47). Collective memory is *"internalized by processes of both autobiographical and semantic memories"* (Knight 2012a:356). Both local and national issues are at interplay here (ibid.). Significant individual or collective actions and events are attributed to the whole as *"meaning structures"* (Knight 2012a:356). Life is understood within individual and collective time frames, as people relate present, past and future to each other (ibid.). Thus, collective memories are *"burned in the collective mind"* (Knight 2012a:356).

Furthermore, it has to be noted that nationalist identity and national identity should not be mixed. Nationalist identity is often connected to collective memories of trust, distrust and fear (Rantanen 2012:148-149).

3.3 Economic Approaches

> *"[...] the economy is made and remade by people in their everyday lives. (Hart et al. 2010:4)*

The economic crisis has given a boost to a new way of thinking about the economy, putting social issues and questions of political guidance high on the agenda. Particularly *Human Economy* has become an emerging field of study within social anthropology (Hart et al. 2010:4). In fact, the concept of human economy is not so different from what the object of economy used to be initially: reproducing human life and protecting everything that preserves life (Hart et al. 2010:6). In a modern context, economy moved beyond serving material survival only, which is why cultural needs have been included in its scope in order to *"serve the common good"* (ibid.) in general. Hart, Laville and Cattani understand human economy as a new way of thinking which puts *"emphasis both on what people do for themselves and on the need to find ways forward that must involve all humanity somehow."* (Hart et al. 2010:2) Human economy, moreover, includes a more holistic understanding of people's needs and the institutional complexity of situations, it is *"made and remade by people"* (Hart et al. 2010:5) and it should have a practical daily use for every member of society.

As all of the citizen networks and grassroots movements I will present in my fieldwork rely on voluntary work, it is important to investigate the processes that underlie them. In the context of this thesis I will apply the approach of studying work not only in terms of employment but via considering activities of the domestic sphere and voluntary activities as well as work which is socially and economically highly significant (Bolton / Laaser 2013:521).

By following Catherine Alexander, I will define voluntary work as a gift of time and effort (2010:220). Referring to Marcel Mauss (1967[1923]:10), giving a gift always entails giving something of yourself too. The transfer of possessions in terms of gift giving constitutes social relations (Mauss 1967 [1923]:27).

Moral Economy

The history of the concept of *moral economy* reaches back to the eighteenth century (Bolton / Laaser 2013:511). Both E.P. Thompson's and Karl Polanyi's analyses were highly influential for the discussion of moral economy. They share the view that the market principle, which has gained in importance since the late eighteenth century, threatens the foundations of society (Hann 2010:188). Bolton and Laaser, adepts of moral economy, warn against adopting a dichotomist, analytical view between the market and economic practices on the one side, and social and moral relations in society on the other, like new economic sociology has done. With their holistic perspective, moral economists are able to offer thorough insights on how social relations and everyday morality constitute markets, economic actions, decisions and the phenomenology of working lives (Bolton / Laaser 2013:513).

Everyday Communism

David Graeber (2010) coined the term *everyday communism* and related it to the crisis which I find immensely fruitful in the context of my fieldwork and some grassroots activities that I have witnessed. Rather than "*Mythical Communism",* which relates on a theory of history and comprises a messianic "notion of totality", *everyday communism* relies on everyday practices where the communistic principle of *"from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs"* (2010:199) is actually applied by people.

Communistic principles can be found in nearly every sphere of daily life in form of co-operation, e.g. between co-workers on a common project, self-evidently also within a capitalist context (Graeber 2010:205). Graeber argues, that in fact without this phenomenon society wouldn't be possible at all (ibid.).

Moreover, communistic relations are based on the presumption of eternity and of non-calculation, of not getting anything back (Graeber 2010:208-209). Self-organized groups often rely on such principles, e.g. collective access to common resources (Graeber 2010:208). Graeber suggests to investigate human relations as tending to adopt one of three forms: communistic relations, hierarchical relations or relations of exchange (Graeber 2010:209). By accepting this definition of everyday communism, a new perspective on capitalism opens up. Co-operation and the trust underlying baseline sociality will always

be the basis of human economy and society. Consequently, all common economic principles must be regarded as a method of organizing communism.

Solidarity Economy

As projects of social and solidarity economy (SSE) are expanding all over the world (Laville 2015:41), governments and international development agencies shift their focus on them (Utting 2015:10). In order to grasp the idea behind *solidarity economy*, Laville proposes to draw a dichotomy between capitalist economy organizations on the one side, and solidarity economy organizations on the other (Laville 2010:228). Utting argues that social and solidarity economy is the space where *"two of the most powerful world views that are contesting market liberalism"* (2015:35) - "embedded liberalism" and "alter-globalization" - meet. Following the European approach, profit making is allowed within solidarity economy. However, the legal distribution to its members always remains highly limited (ibid.). Utting defines the range of activities of social and solidarity economy as follows:

> *"The broadening field of SSE involves not only traditional 'social economy' or 'third sector' organizations and enterprises such as cooperatives, mutual associations, grant-dependent and service-delivery non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community and other forms of volunteering and giving, but also myriad types of self-help groups organising to produce goods and services, fair trade networks and other forms of solidarity purchasing, consumer groups involved in collective provisioning, associations of 'informal economy' workers, new forms of profit-making social enterprises and social entrepreneurs, and NGOs that are having to shift from a dependence on donations and grants to sustaining themselves via income-generating activities." (Utting 2015:1)*

Social economy, reaching back to the nineteenth century, already had some economic influence during the twentieth century, but still lacked political strength (Laville 2015:47). Building on Lipietz, whereas social economy focused on internal functioning and the formal equality of its members, solidarity economy additionally stressed the ideological framework and the goals in mind (whether environmental, cultural etc.) and added the dimension of direct participation (ibid.). Although, for obvious reasons, this model is cited here as an economic approach, institutionally solidarity economy is based on self-organization within the realm of civil society (Laville 2015:52).

The following chapters in the second part of the thesis will connect the theories with the specific situation concerning citizens' initiatives in Athens.

Part II: Entering the Local Context

4. Greece: Social and Spatial Context

Before delving into the results of the empirical research and the presentation of the citizens' initiatives that I've studied, the following chapters will outline the spatial und social context in which the fieldwork took place. Moreover, it is essential to take a brief look into history in order to fully grasp the form the crisis has taken and to understand the situation the Athenians currently live in. This is the breeding ground on which the citizens' initiatives have emerged.

4.1 Introduction: Greek Culture and Identity

Michael Herzfeld (1987:2; 2011:26) points out that Greece always had a marginal character, not only concerning anthropological studies but also in a geographic context. The culture of modern Greece merges in its society the stereotypes of both the exotic and the European (Herzfeld 1987:1). In foreign contexts Greece for long has been treated as somewhat mythical or at least exceptional, somehow oriental but at the same time quintessentially western, not least due to its EU membership (Dalakoglou / Vradis 2011a:23). Still, the centuries-long patrimonial Ottoman rule has left its legacy well beyond the foundation of the modern state of Greece in 1830 (Koliopoulos / Veremis 2010:2). Greek laws, for example, are still said to resemble the bureaucracy of the Ottoman empire (Dalakoglou / Vradis 2011a:23). One of my expert interview partners, Ilias Katsoulis, emeritus professor in political sociology and member of the Greek NGO *"Citizen's Movement for an Open Society"*, even claims that many Greeks don't understand themselves as a part of Europe as much as they feel close to the Arabic world (Interview 12). In contrast, Dalakoglou and Vradis refer to the feeling of a *"longing to become 'Western', to finally 'make it'"* (2011a:13) of their generation growing up in the 1990s. Also during my fieldwork, surrounded by people between their mid-twenties and late-sixties (however not representative for the whole society, as all of them are active within different grassroots initiatives), I had the impression that being a European citizen was certainly taken for granted.

In order to pin down Greek cultural identity, Herzfeld (1987) has coined the binary term *disemia* which implies a pattern of oppositional pairs. He discovered as one of the main polarities the disemic tension between Hellenism and Orientalism within Greece (Herzfeld 1987:161). Herzfeld called these disemic poles *"a rigidly centralized and 'European' bureaucratic system of law and government on the one side, a pervasively exotic segmentary idiom for the expression of social relations on the other"* (Herzfeld 1987:161), the first entailing a sublimation of the individual whereas the second relativizes self-interest (ibid.).

He moreover sheds light on the influence of foreign powers that continue to shape Greece until today, resulting in what he terms *"crypto-colonialism",* a *"paradoxical condition of a national independence that was contingent on the approval and support of colonial powers"* (Herzfeld 2011:25). Since the beginning of the war of independence, the country's state-building followed Western (mostly European) principles of governance and prototypes of different countries: First, it was largely shaped by Bavarian rule under King Otto who arrived in the country in 1833, resulting in a Greek legal system along German lines that still remains to this day. Later, in the twentieth century, parliamentary practices of Great Britain or administrative practices of the French were applied (Koliopoulos / Veremis 2010:1;6;28). And, most important for the context of this thesis, subsequently cultural identity and nation-building has been shaped by foreign influence: *"Historically the country has been forced to define its national culture in terms of an externally derived, neo-classical model of Hellenic culture."* (Herzfeld 2013:492) It wasn't until the Greek War of Independence that the narrative of a *"true identity as cultural descendants of the classical Greeks"* (Koliopoulos / Veremis 2010:16) became prevalent.

> *"In consequence, Western hegemony is deeply embedded in the identification of the West with classical Greece, an identification adopted and reproduced uncritically by Greek national narratives."(Theodossopoulos 2014:501)*

According to Herzfeld, foreign influence is a significant factor that has moreover triggered today's economic crisis in a certain way:

> *"From its declaration of independence in 1821, in reality Greece has always been highly dependent both economically and politically. It looked to the West (as well as to Russia) for support in its struggle for emancipation from Ottoman rule, in doing so carefully eliding the history by which 'it' became an imperfect and Athenocentric simulacrum of the West's image of the ancient glories. Its survival has always depended on heavy infusions of economic assistance, usually in the*

form of loans – the very phenomenon that has prompted the present crisis."
(Herzfeld 2011:25)

Herzfeld stresses that many Greeks might find the thought of a (crypto-)colonial past *"distasteful"* (ibid.) but considering the present-day situation of Greece with its dependency on European bail-out funds, his thoughts present an interesting perspective on a possible continuity.

Renée Hirschon points to the specific character of Greek social and personal identity that is strongly linked to family ties: *"No Greek exists (in the old paradigm) outside the kinship nexus which confers identity upon him or her."* (Hirschon 2014:161) Moreover, she argues that also in the current crisis the family continues to be the focus and point of orientation in people's lives. The fundamental social bonds remain those involving the kinship group (ibid.).

4.2 Civil Society and Social Structure - A Historical Approach

> *" [...] civil society in contemporary Greece is not as uniformly weak as it is generally thought to be." (Sotiropoulos 2004:8)*

4.2.1 Segmentary Society

The historians Koliopoulos and Veremis (2010:6) built on Ernest Gellner's concept of *segmentary society* to describe the social structure that the Greek state inherited from the Ottoman empire, a *"pre-modern system intended to protect the extended family from the transgressions of an arbitrary state."* (Koliopoulos / Veremis 2010:5). Gellner's approach on segmentary society stemmed from his thoughts on the social organization model of civil society that he defined as

> *"[...] that set of diverse non-governmental institutions which is strong enough to counterbalance the state and, while not preventing the state from fulfilling its role of keeper of the peace and arbitrator between major interests, can nevertheless prevent it from dominating and atomizing the rest of society." (Gellner 1994:5)*

He stressed that this intuitive definition of civil society doesn't go far enough as it would include undesirable forms of social order. Therefore, he proposed to strongly differentiate civil society from segmentary community that *"[...] avoids central tyranny by firmly turning the individual into an integral part of the social sub-unit."* (Gellner 1994:8).

Although this form of social organization is consistent with the intuitive approach to define civil society, as it has a pluralistic and centralization-resistant character, it is socially oppressive and restricts freedom for its members (Gellner 1994:8).

Through handpicked "armatoles" (war lords), the Ottoman state acted in an authoritarian, predatory, unrepresentative and unfair way: *"[...] it offered little in return of heavy taxation."* (Huliaras 2015:15) As a result, Greek society tended to organize itself within separate but co-existing communities according to religion, customs and cultural conventions (Evin / Veremis 2013:xi). Clientelism arose:

> *"The armatoles operated on a strict hierarchical basis within their own segment that cut society vertically to include various strata within the same clan. Each group would cling to its hard-earned privileges and would consider the members of other competing groups as enemies. Subverting state institutions and penetrating governments has been a constant pursuit of the segmentary community. Clientelism provided the group with its sorely needed connections in a hostile universe."* (Koliopoulos / Veremis 2010:6)

Nineteenth-century state building and its modern institutions sought to unify the society under the rule of law (Koliopoulos / Veremis 2010:6). Modernizing statesmen had the aim to abolish the influence of segmentary society and its extreme familism, clans and splinter groups by means of promoting the concept of civil society. Solidarity among citizens counteracted the predatory segments of society (Koliopoulos / Veremis 2010:6). However, the success was temporary. Elements of segmentary society *"resisted the unifying impetus of the modern unitary state"* and continued to challenge legal authorities in Greece over the course of the twentieth century (Koliopoulos / Veremis 2010:2;190). Koliopoulos and Veremis (2010:2) argue that this extreme familism, which evolved over history deeply, damaged the social nexus, hindering the development of an accomplished civil society. Society is fragmented by familial and patronage loyalties (Koliopoulos / Veremis 2010:8).

> *"In Griechenland gibt es eine Gemeinschaft, es gibt aber keine Gesellschaft. Das heißt, es hat sich noch nicht das Gefühl des Zusammengehörens herausgebildet. Die Griechen leben immer noch in der kleineren oder größeren Familie. Sie leben nicht in größeren Organisationen."* (Ilias Katsoulis, Interview 12) [14]

Interesting for me, building on Evans-Pritchard's observation of the segmentary Nuer society as *"ordered anarchy"* (Evans-Pritchard 1948:296), is a comparison of the social order of the Nuer to the one within Greece, where the anarchist movement has been

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[14] The interview with Ilias Katsoulis was conducted in German.

considered as one of the largest in Europe (Giovanopoulos / Dalakoglou 2011:106; Mittendrein 2013:104). In the wake of the December 2008 revolts in Athens[15] uniquely anarchist practices suddenly became *"the property of wide parts of the population and viewed with aspiration, awe, and or empathy even by people not involved in the uprising."* (Boukalas 2011:283). Interestingly, Greek society shows (slight) elements of anarchist behavior in everyday life, e.g. in terms of not observing laws. Not only that many Greeks refuse to abide by the law, as for example concerning smoking in public spaces, as Renée Hirschon (2014:167) points out, on the other side the Greek state has so many laws that it is considered nearly impossible to adhere to all of them (Interview 12).

This phenomenon correlates with Renée Hirschon's reflections on a Greek *"culture of resistance"* (Hirschon 2014:165). She suggests that some forms of Greek *"everyday resistance"* in terms of problems with authority and a general tendency to breaking the rules, as well as central cultural values regarding personal autonomy and obligation, should be understood in line with the political and economic culture of the region (as for the Balkans and the Middle East which were long under imperial regimes, similar patterns of conduct are noticeable) and within historical roots (Hirschon 2014:166). Therefore, attitudes to (state) authority and rules need to be seen within the context of periods of oppressive authoritarian rule: not only the Ottoman period but also more recent twentieth-century historical events such as the Nazi occupation, civil war and the military junta between 1967 and 1974 which left deep traces on a generation that was used to resistance (Hirschon 2014:167).

Greece has experienced an imperfect modernization with early parliamentarism but late industrialization (Huliaras 2015:14; Mouzelis 1995). Mouzelis terms Greece a *"late-developing"* (1995:232) society in regard to its Ottoman past and late independence. This entailed high degrees of clientelism and patronage where the social spectrum is included into politics rather vertically than horizontally. As a result, civil society remained weak (ibid.).

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[15] Chapter 4.3 will deal with these events in more depth.

4.2.2 Twentieth Century and Early Twenty-first Century

During the twentieth century, two violent events left an extreme division within Greek society's cohesion (Koliopoulos / Veremis 2010:1). The brutal occupation of the Germans after 1941 in World War II caused what is known as the Great Famine, resulting in the death of an estimated 300.000 people in Athens alone. Until present day, this crisis continues to be one of the most influential narratives of crisis in Greece constituting a very powerful source of collective memory (Knight 2012a:351) that I could observe in Athens as well.

The Greek Civil War immediately followed World War II between 1946 and 1949 (Graeber 2010:230). In these years, Greek society became deeply divided between leftists and rightists, a development that is perceptible until this day as the historian Tasoula Vervenioti pointed out (Interview 10). Or, as David Graeber puts it: *"In a very real sense, the Greek civil war […] never ended."* (Graeber 2011:230) While staying in Athens this fragmentation also became apparent to me as a discernibly high proportion of people from different age groups and social backgrounds expressed political views that would have been considered as (comparatively rather rare) far-left political accounts in Austria.

In the whole of southern Europe (and not just in Greece) civil societies were weak after that period, Leontidou points out. Centralistic states and clientelist politics refused the development of independent citizens' groups, voluntary associations, NGOs, collectivities or other intermediate groups as mediating factors between grassroots and state (Leontidou 2010:1191). Between 1967 and 1974 the era of the military junta followed (Koliopoulos / Veremis 2010:10), characterized by a state refusal of civic engagement with a political context. This is particularly interesting as during the same era, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, social movements in Western countries gained importance (Huliaras 2015:15).

However, even under dictatorships, grassroots groups had been active, for instance in squatting movements on the urban peripheries (Leontidou 2010:1183). Frequently such spontaneous movements have been confronted with coercive measures by the state (Leontidou 2015:87). Since the ending of the military junta and particularly since the 1990s, regardless of their background among the Greek youth left, radical left, anarchist and anti-authoritarian tendencies grew more and more important in social and political movements, not least as a reaction to neoliberal tendencies in the state (Giovanopoulos / Dalakoglou 2011:93,96). Thus, radical political protests such as occupations and blockades

became central political tools, at the latest since school and university protests in the 1990s (Giovanopoulos / Dalakoglou 2011:96-105).[16]

Ernest Gellner maintained in 1994 that civil society has attracted much political attention and has become a somewhat *"shining emblem"* (Gellner 1994:1). Normatively the concept of civil society has been highly endorsed by the policy of the European Union as being crucial for bringing together the EU and its citizens (Alexander 2010:218). Both Hann (1996:22) and Lila Leontidou criticize dominant European discourses on strong civil society as having a bias towards NGOs and voluntary associations *"rather than social movements as an emancipatory cultural and political force and indeed the 'third sector' in socio-political structures."* (Leontidou 2015:85) Strong grassroots movements build up civil societies (ibid.). Greek and European elites are applying a hostile top-down policy towards grassroots movements while supporting NGOs (Leontidou 2015:87). "Spontaneous" urban social movements are marginalized as a strengthening factor for civil societies in favor of social movement organizations (Leontidou 2010:1181; Leontidou 2015:102). In conclusion it must be said that without a doubt the semi-authoritarian past of Greece's political institutions during large parts of the twentieth century hindered the growth of (formal) civil society (Huliaras 2015:15).

Volunteering isn't widely practiced in Greece compared to other countries and has been described as "anemic" (Sotiropoulos 2014:11). According to a European Union study, conducted in 2010, less than 10 percent of the population engage in voluntary action (ibid.). In order to explain this, apart from mentioned historical factors and other top-down factors such as the domination of the public sphere by political parties, also bottom-up factors such as low levels of societal trust or a "lack of volunteering mentality" among Greeks have been regarded as important by the EU commission (Clarke 2015:69). In general, Greek civil society didn't have a particular strong role apart from certain advocacy activities like in environmental areas, human rights or consumer protection (Sotiropoulos / Karamagioli 2006:10).

Yet, since the year 2000 observers have noticed signals of a new wave of volunteering, in particular during the Olympic games of 2004 and to a much smaller degree, when fierce forest fires hit the country in 2007 (European Commission 2010:1;2:19). Ahead of and

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[16] The following chapter will deal with protests in Athens more closely.

during the Olympic Games approximately 45.000 (Huliaras 2015:18) to 58.000 volunteers (Sotiropoulos 2014:11) had been participating.[17]

It is vital to differentiate between formal and informal shapings of civil society, the former being indeed underdeveloped (Mouzelis 1995; Huliaras 2015), whereas there is and have been a multitude of informal and local groupings, networks, collectivities, protest movements and urban social movements *"which are the functional equivalent of formal associations in other Western societies"* (Sotiropoulos 2004:9). Research by the National Statistical Service of Greece points towards the fact that double as many Greeks participate in informal volunteering than in formal groups (Clarke 2015:69). In contrast to social movement *organizations* (which would correspond to the realm of formal civil society) spontaneous social movements have been dominating in Greece (Leontidou 2015:87). In this light, Greece has partly unjustly been branded a "weak" civil society (Sotiropoulos 2004; Leontidou 2015).[18]

In the Greek public discourse the formal civil society sector and foremost the NGO sector is perceived negatively due to numerous cases of financial irregularities, corruption scandals and closeness to party politics in the past (Interview 12; Mittendrein 2013:105; Bákouris / Sotirópoulos 2015:152). Greek NGOs and other voluntary organizations have largely arisen to profit from patronage-based relations with the state or EU directives and measures, rather resulting from top-down decisions instead of grassroots pressure. Moreover, they have been heavily dependent on - often intransparent - funding by the state that is inconsistent with the notion of a strong civil society (Leontidou 2010:1192; Sotiropoulos / Bourikos 2014:39). Thus, many Greek citizens regard civil society as part of the large issue of corruption in their country rather than as a possible solution (Bákouris / Sotirópoulos 2015:152).

Another factor that might explain formal weaknesses of Greek civil society is the "nationalization" of religion by the Greek state resulting in incorporating the Greek

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[17] Data on numbers of volunteers during this event vary considerably. Officially even 160.000 people had apparently registered to volunteer (Clarke 2015:70). Having said that, it is important to mention that these numbers shouldn't be compared to the current situation as some "volunteers" received benefits (Huliaras 2015:18). Group leaders earned a compensation (Huliaras 2015:18) while conscripts were allowed a 20-day leave off duty for the Olympic Games.

[18] There has even been a claim made by "Europäische Bewegung Deutschland" (European Movement Germany) stating that Greece doesn't have a civil society *at all* (EBD 2013). Although this remark is interesting in order to understand discourses on civic engagement of Greeks in foreign countries, particularly in Germany and in respect to attributions such as "lazy greeks", in light of academic evidence this statement is not correct.

Orthodox church into the state apparatus with offering the clergy state salaries and tax exemptions (Huliaras 2015:15). In contrast to Catholic countries, this nationalization hindered civic engagement. Although the church did engage in philanthropic activities, the resources involved were relatively small in comparison to the efforts made by Catholic or Protestant churches in other European countries like Austria (Huliaras 2015:15).

Before turning to recent post-crisis developments in grassroots movements and civil society in Athens, the following chapter will provide an introduction to the local context of the city.

4.3 Athens and its History

It was in the late 1980s and early 1990s that I first set foot to Athens when I was travelling to the Greek islands as a child with my family. We never stayed longer than a night as my parents considered Athens to be too polluted, too loud and too hot. As I will point out later in the chapter, back then, Athens indeed had a massive problem with urban-air pollution and its infamous "nephos", a cloud hanging over the city. But what I didn't know was that perhaps surprisingly, Athens didn't have the status of a large city until the twentieth century or, as the architect Nikos Kavadas who is involved with oral history initiatives puts it: *"The city is actually less than 200 years old."* (Interview 10) In 1820, one year prior to the foundation of the modern Greek state, (Koliopoulos / Veremis 2010:2) Athens had the population of a village with only 10.000 people (Kaika 2005:116)[19]. Only after it had become capital in 1834, the Athenian population increased massively during the nineteenth and twentieth century, (Interview 10; Koliopoulos / Veremis 2010:30). The period after the Bavarians settled, largely framed the ways Athenians perceive their identity (Interview 10). Referring to Athens' ancient past, under King Otto's rule, the city was endowed with a vast number of neoclassical buildings and infrastructure that continue to shape the image of the city until today. This contributed to a main Athenian identity *"that we are actually descendants of very glorious ancient people"* (Nikos Kavadas; Interview 10) omitting the centuries that had happened after ancient history (Herzfeld 2011:25).

In 2011, with a population of around 3.828.000, more than a third of the population of Greece lived in *Attica,* the area that encompasses the Greater Athens Area (Hellenic

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[19] To draw a comparison: In the same year Vienna had a population of 260.759 (Stadt Wien 2016).

Statistical Authority 2014a:1-2). The municipality of Athens itself is much smaller with a population of around 664.000 (Hellenic Statistical Authority 2014a:2). As Dalakoglou puts it, Athens has been growing into an *"urban complex that flows and grows out of its previous boundaries every few decades."* (Dalakoglou 2014:11)

Athens' massive population growth started with a flood of refugees after the Asia Minor disaster in 1922 and the population exchange with Turkey and became, together with Thessaloniki, a "prototype" for Mediterranean, or even Third World, as Leontidou claims, *"rapid urbanization without industrialisation from the 1920s to the 1970s".* (Leontidou 2015:90) This spontaneous urbanization provoked socio-spatial dualisms (Leontidou 2015:92).

During the twentieth century, large parts of the population settled in the central city with many of the higher socio-economic strata maintaining second homes in suburban or countryside areas (Economou 2014:14-15). Due to a deterioration of life quality in the city center, in the 1970s more and more members of the middle class began to migrate to the suburbs, resulting in a decline of population of the city center in the 1980s (ibid.).

One of the main reasons for this deterioration of life quality and subsequent radical suburbanization (ibid.) was severe air pollution, better known as the infamous "nephos" (Greek word for cloud) hanging over Athens since the 1970s, entailing massive health issues of its inhabitants who bewailed themselves "prisoners of the cloud" (Der Spiegel 1982). Prime minister Konstantinos Karamanlis supposedly even worried the city could one day become uninhabitable. Subsequent traffic bans and other environmental measures contributed to the exodus from the center, resulting in businesses moving to the urban peripheries as well. The newspaper *Ta Nea* wrote that the center of Athens is dying (ibid.). In 1991, there were 180 days when air quality surpassed health-based standards and posed a health threat (Elsom 2013:195).

Between 1991 and 2011, large parts of the older inhabitants of central areas continued to migrate to the suburban periphery where new city centers and urban zones were emerging. Instead, immigrants and refugees settled in the center that began to decline (Economou 2014:14-15).

> *"The more recent migration to the suburbs was motivated not only by environmental and lifestyle considerations, but also by a growing fear of*

otherness and crime, and a desire for increased social and spatial segregation."
(Economou 2014:15)

Between 1995 and 2007, the Greek economy had experienced one of the European Union's highest growth rates (Dalakoglou 2012a:24), resulting in the period of so-called "Strong Greece" or "Modernization" which brought a decade of neoliberal urban-redevelopment to Athens (Dalakoglou 2012b). During this era, new urban materialities such as facilities for the Olympic games of 2004, a new airport, new highways, a subway system, a tram network and new shopping malls were built (ibid.). Athens transformed into a city of consumption (Chatzidakis 2014:34).

> *"This materialization of the "utopia of unlimited exploitation" was accompanied by an inflated sense of collective optimism and national pride, linked to the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, the international success of Greek athletes." (Dalakoglou 2012b).*

Moreover, in this period, the Greek police force grew significantly, from around 45.000 in 1998 to approximately 61.000 in 2012, this development too corresponding to a neoliberal shift (Dalakoglou 2012a:30). Also during my fieldwork I could regularly see groups of three police officers or more lingering in the streets in the city center equipped with bulletproof vests.

As indicated above, even ahead of the post-2009 debt crisis, Athens showed severe signs of fragmentation. The city had started to look *"abandoned"* since many years, as vice mayor Amalia Zepou (Interview 2)[20] points out, with the Olympic Games presenting merely an intermission and sort of a *"bubble"* (Interview 2). Moreover, part of Athenian society already was in the state of a social crisis such as the underemployed and unemployed youth, migrants etc. (Dalakoglou 2012a:35). Dalakoglou speaks of a *"crisis before 'the crisis'"* (Dalakoglou 2012a:24).

> *"A number of processes from the 1990s and 2000s—such as mass urban redevelopment, economic growth, and new forms of precariousness and policing—provide a partial genealogy of the extensive social crisis that one can observe ethnographically in Athens in the early 2013." (Dalakoglou 2012a:35)*

In order to carve out the local context of the post-2009 crisis, it is impossible to leave unmentioned the events of 6 December 2008 (Leontidou 2012:304) when various tensions and contradictions within *"the Athenian spectacle"* (Chatzidakis 2014:34) of the *Strong-*

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[20]Also Tasos Chalkiopoulos from the citizens' group *Atenistas* was seeing a *"decay"* (Interview 6) of the city from 2009.

Greece era first burst. On that day, the police shot the teenager Alexis Grigoropoulos in the neighborhood Exarcheia, an area historically associated with social uprisings and termed by public discourse *"the heart of anarchist activity in Athens"* (Dalakoglou / Vradis 2011b:79). This murder triggered massive protests which, fuelled by digital communication, culminated in urban violence, bringing together a large range of youths affected by the consequences of neoliberalism (Leontidou 2012:304). These violent clashes between police and demonstrators started in Exarcheia but took place at Syntagma square (constitution square) in front of the parliament building in the heart of Athens. According to Leontidou, this event constituted the onset of large movements for direct democracy and grassroots protests against *"accumulation by dispossession"* (Harvey 2007) in a time when the debt crisis was already on the horizon (Leontidou 2012:303).

In the aftermath of the riots, the self-managed, anti-hierarchical park Navarinou was built on a former parking lot in Exarcheia by residents who had squatted the plot (Chatzidakis 2014:34). This was one of the first widely known examples of a community-based, participatory initiative in Athens in the recent period. The park exists until now. And there are other neighborhood initiatives within the city that started as early as 2007 (Interview 28). Moreover, in the wake of a historical students' occupation of the Polytechnic university in 1995, already a number of social centers (*stekia*) had been founded in Athens by the anarchist movement (Giovanopoulos / Dalakoglou 2011:106). This development had been triggered by an internal transformation of the movement (at least partly) renegotiating the tactics of radical violent confrontation as a reaction to the fact that the state had been starting to arrest all the protesters (ibid.).

These examples show that it is difficult to classify civic engagement and its origins into a pre- or a post-2009 crisis era.

4.4 The Economic Crisis

4.4.1 Introduction

There are other disciplines that have successfully addressed the *origins* of the Greek debt and economic crisis in depth. Therefore, in this context, I only want to summarize a couple of facts that seem necessary to better understand the context in which people began to mobilize and to become active in civil society.

Starting in the United States, the crisis of financial markets started to gain momentum toward the end of 2008 after the bankruptcy of the US-American bank Lehman Brothers, spiraling into an economic recession on a global scale. Greece, in a weak fiscal position with its governments having unnoticedly accumulated a tremendous public debt over the last few decades, was hit by the crisis with a slam (Thompson 2012:69-72). Between 1995 and 2007, the Greek economy had experienced one the highest rates of growth in the European Union (Dalakoglou 2012a:24). In the meantime, it seems, that the extent of debt had gone unnoticed. In 2009 it amounted to 129 percent of the gross domestic product - in contrast to 60 percent that would have been in accordance with the EU Maastricht treaty (Clarke et al. 2015:2-3; Kazákos 2015:35; Thompson 2012:69-72).

In winter 2009, international rating agencies started to downgrade the credit status of Greece and rates of return for Greek state bonds rose drastically. During this time the extent of the crisis became internationally known. In March 2010 the government of Papandreou passed a first austerity package (Mittendrein 2013:55). In spite of this prehistory, May 2010 became known as the "official beginning" of the debt crisis, with Greece receiving its first loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Union (EU) and the European Central Bank (ECB) agreeing to additional severe austerity measures and structural reform programs in order to avoid a default of the state (Dalakoglou 2012a:35-36; Angouri / Wodak 2014:540). The gross domestic product has sunk by a quarter between 2008 and 2013 alone (Sotiropoulos / Bourikos 2014:36).

Without doubt, it must be clear that in Greece (and even more in Athens as I pointed out in the last chapter) there were echoes of *"a crisis before 'the Crisis'"* before 2009/2010, as Dimitris Dalakoglou (2012a:24) has put it. The debt crisis had revealed a severe structural crisis within the Greek economy that had been existing from the 1980s already but which had been covered up by the country's entering in the EU and the Euro currency

(Petropoulou 2013:116). Moreover, many writers agree that its origins lie in inherent problems of Greece that have much to do with corruption, clientelism and failure of the political and economic elites that were in power (Kazákos 2015). In the last years, the public discourse in Greece (and the discourse in most parts of Europe too, I would argue) furthermore stressed the narrative that the crisis doesn't only root in economic misconduct but in a general malformation of the Greek society resulting in practices of corruption in almost every sphere of life (Bakoúris / Sotirópoulos 2015:142-143). Also my interview partners considered corruption in Greece a highly problematic issue. However, it cannot be designated as *the* origin for the crisis in Greece. Thus, it is important to face the Greek post-2009 crisis in its multidimensionality:

> *"The recent economic crisis in Greece is a local expression of a European and global crisis that revealed the structural workings and the failures of the market economy, the European Union, and the local economic and political system and culture." (Economou 2014:16)*

Wievieorka presents two types of argument, or rather narratives, how the financial crisis was globally approached in its causalities: The first perceives the crisis as a singular, financial phenomenon *"after which there can be a fresh start and a new cycle of capitalism can take place"* (Wieviorka 2012:86), not changing much about the rules of the game. Very much in contrast, a second type of argument considers the crisis in its systemic and structural dimension: as a crisis of neoliberalism itself (Jessop 2013:72; Wieviorka 2012:87-90). Consequently, this crisis is *"only a point in time"* (Wieviorka 2012:87) which since the global reconfigurations of the state towards neoliberal policy in the 1970s could have escalated well before.

According to Bob Jessop, the effects of the interpretation of the second strand of arguments just prevailed for a brief period, being followed by a *"return to neoliberal 'business as usual'"* (2013:73) due to massive state interventions. The financial crisis has *"produced a new phase of 'blow-back' neoliberalism"* (ibid). In the case of Greece, the politics of austerity, demanded by transnational financial capital and international lenders (but as shown above the Greek government had adopted an austerity package even before the first bail-out), have contributed to a neoliberal political shift (Jessop 2013:72-73).

Drawing on Appadurai's concepts, during the crisis financescape moved much faster than the ideoscape, resulting in a detachment between these two scapes. This brought a boost to nationalism in some countries (Rantanen 2012:148-149), a development that can also be

seen in Greece. Neo-fascist groups have gained influence, most notably the radical rightwing party of *Chrysi Avgi (Golden Dawn)* (Chatzidakis 2014:37). Observers state that Greek society seems to be deeply divided as a result of the economic and socio-political crisis with the Greek newspaper *Kathimerini* having assessed a *"pre-civil-war state"* (Fouseki et al. 2014) for the country. The crisis has not only reorganized economics, debts, development levels and livelihoods but also social relations, political participation and cultural identities (Leontidou 2012:309).

But the financial crisis has also provoked a discourse on alternatives leading to the development of scenarios for post-neoliberalism (Jessop 2013:72-73) amongst others. A large number of discourses on alternatives have emerged within civil society and within social and grassroots movements.

4.4.2 Austerity and Social Transformations

The properties of the debt crisis brought a significant social transformation to Greece. Whereas ahead of 2009 only a few groups like migrants and unemployed or underemployed youth were affected by a social crisis, this *"state of exception"* (Dalakoglou 2012a:35) extended to become a generalized condition for the majority of the population after that (ibid.).

In accordance with the Memorandums of Understanding signed between the Greek government and its creditors of EU commission, IMF and ECB, the state radically reduced expenditures by fiscal reforms.[21] These comprised reductions in the welfare system concerning pensions and other social programs but also defense, operational spending, the privatization of public goods, etc. (European commission 2012:3; Petropoulou 2013:116).

As a result, the standard of living and provisions in health, education, public and infrastructural services and other forms of social welfare severely decreased, whereas social inequalities increased and the social nexus became more and more fragmented (Petropoulou 2013:116; Dalakoglou 2012a:35). During the first phase of fieldwork in February 2014, the government released figures of a new record high of the unemployment

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[21] By 2013, the target of fiscal consolidation was achieved when a substantial primary surplus was reached. However, in 2014, the IMF itself conceded that this step has had resulted in a dramatic decline in the living standards of middle- and low-income groups (Sotiropoulos / Bourikos 2014:37).

rate of 28 percent with unemployment hitting 61 percent among the youth (BBC 2014).[22] In Attica, 28,0 percent of the entire population were unemployed during the first quarter of 2014 (Hellenic Statistical Authority 2014b). By 2014, more than one third of the population (36 percent) was at risk of poverty or social exclusion (Eurostat 2015).

> *"The deep cuts in welfare and other social provisions, the rapid devaluation of labor, and increasing unemployment represent a paradigmatic shift toward a new type of neoliberal governance in Western Europe." (Dalakoglou 2012a:35)*

During the last years, social inequality and poverty became publicly visible in the increasing number of homeless people on the streets of cities (ibid.). As the medical journal *The Lancet* pointed out, the austerity programs caused enormous social costs for the Greek population, entailing a *"public health tragedy"* (Kentikelenis et al. 2014:748) with soaring suicide rates and a downgrading of the general health of the population resulting from the fact that social health-insurance coverage is linked to employment status in Greece (Kentikelenis et al. 2014:748-749). After 2010 uninsured persons lost access to public health care and pensions fell below poverty line (Sotiropoulos / Bourikos 2014:37) Even urban air-pollution returned to Athens when households reverted to heating with firewood after the government had increased the tax on heating oil (Agkyridou 2014).

By 2014, the crisis had not only hit the poor social strata but also members of the middle class (Vervenioti 2015). I feel safe to say that during my fieldwork I didn't meet one person who wasn't affected by the crisis in any or the other way. From professors to young creatives, architects or pensioners: the economic recession and austerity-related cuts in social provisions or new taxes have hardly left anyone unaffected.

Compared to the rest of the country, the social consequences of the crisis were harder in Athens where family solidarity is not as strongly pronounced as in rural areas (Interview 29; Vervenioti 2015). Many people chose to move back to family members, sharing salaries and consumption objects (Chatzidakis 2014:38). Many, mostly young, well educated Greeks who live in cities have decided to migrate either to the countryside or abroad to other countries where chances to get employed are higher (Mittendrein 2013:67-90). For Andreas Chatzidakis, Athens has become *"[...] the world's 'failed' consumer city par excellence: comprising 'zombie' retailscapes for increasingly disempowered consumers [...]"* (2014:36) who can neither define themselves according to what they

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[22] This record high was reached in November 2013.

consume nor according to what they produce (ibid.). Chapter 7.6 will deal with implications of the crisis on questions of identity for citizens' groups.

4.4.3 International Media Representation

> *„Verkauft doch eure Inseln, ihr Pleite-Griechen ...und die Akropolis gleich mit".*
> *[Sell your islands, you broke Greeks ... and the Akropolis as well]*
> *Newspaper headline of German tabloid "Bild" - October 27, 2010*

It is certainly imperative to highlight how anti-austerity protests and the crisis have been represented in the global *"mediascapes",* in the term of Appadurai, when Greece all of a sudden had come to the center of global public attention (Knight 2013:150). Whereas local narratives were more nuanced and more often addressed a critique of the protest, foreign media discourses tended to highlight a simplified image of angry, rioting, protesting Greeks and the whole country, above all Athens, as a violent place (Theodossopoulos 2013:201; Herzfeld 2011:24-25; Knight 2013:153). Knight holds that across Europe the Greek crisis was adopted as a trope (at first not so much by the media, but by political actors) in order to provoke fear and to *"justify sociopolitical change"* (Knight 2013:153). Greek mediascapes have got a very powerful global impact (Knight 2013:150) and at the same time disseminated an essentialized image of Greeks:

> *"In northern Europe the Greek people are portrayed as being equally accountable for the current financial situation due to their open participation in 'corrupt' practices and 'lazy' work ethic." (Knight 2013:150)*

Instead of giving more differentiated accounts, Greece and its citizens tended to be depicted as a cause of the Euro Crisis (Knight 2013:148) rather than as a symptom or something in-between (which would correlate more with how my interview partners saw it).

> *"In the corporate media, the Greek crisis is usually represented almost as a revolt of spoiled children: a population living beyond its means, rising up in a tantrum when forced to face the fiscal discipline it has for so long, and so unrealistically, resisted." (Graeber 2011:229)*

The grassroots group *Omikron Project* that I will present in chapter 6.5 has termed these processes the Greek *"image crisis"* (Stratoudaki / Khalili, Interview 13).

Lila Leontidou sheds a light on *"quasi-Orientalist"* (Leontidou 2014:108) neoliberal discourses by North European power elites, similar to Edward Said's Orientalism (1978) *"castigating 'the lazy, unreliable, and delinquent' Southerners"* (ibid.) that have been proliferating for some time already - and which correlate with Knight's and Graeber's accounts. Clarke et alii reported about similar media accounts of Greek society, frequently based on stereotypes, with *"lazy Greeks, living beyond their means, a society of takers, not givers"* (Clarke et al. 2015:1).

4.4.4 National Identity and Crisis Narratives

Greek national identity seems to have been destabilized as a result of the crisis (Fouseki et al. 2014). Daniel Knight argues that if national identity comprises perceived universal political and economic circumstances, then these days Greek national identity is defined by crisis (Knight 2013:153). As formative the post-2009 crisis is for shapings of identity now, following the logic of polytemporality, the current crisis will remain in the center of public imagery for the next decades (Knight 2013:156).

Specific symbols and periods of the past have become a means to restore and re-define Greek national identity (Fouseki et al. 2014). Newspapers and politicians have utilized certain historical events in order to boost narratives of unity, national pride, hope and heroism (Knight 2013:154; Fouseki et al. 2014). For example, some of the protestors in Greece used flags from the 1821 anti-ottoman revolution in order to position themselves within a glorious past (della Porta 2015:101). Furthermore, during the last years, these narratives repeatedly cultivated anti-German feelings, widening the subject of colonization from Ottoman landlords to historical notions of German occupation (Knight 2012b:13; Fouseki et al. 2014). Hunger reappeared as an iconic symbol and as a tool for concepts of deprivation throughout ethnography about Greece, not only in terms of the current crisis (Knight 2012a:357). To a lesser extent theories about colonization play a similar role (Knight 2013:149; 156).

The phrase "foreign occupation" has moreover been applied with reference to the role of the Troika (Hirschon 2014:169). Often these past narratives convey nationalist discourses that also tend to trigger emotional behavioral patterns (Knight 2012a:362) and jeopardize social cohesion at national or international level (Fouseki et al. 2014).

Furthermore, the financial crisis had a significant effect on the construction of new resistance identities (which include nationalist identity):

> *"The key analytical observation is that the current crisis has produced strong resistance identities against not only the measures used to treat the crisis but more deeply against the very development model that led to the crisis and from which the current attempts to rectify the situation derive." (Himanen 2012:159)*

Dimitrios Theodossopoulos has done research on current "*blaming tactics*" and local narratives where in most cases responsibility for the crisis was traced externally: "*among wasteful politicians, inefficient civil servants, unscrupulous speculators, and inequalities in the global financial system*" (Theodossopoulos 2013:208). Therefore, the discourse of local discontent can be perceived as an approach to contextualize austerity and crisis, to renegotiate responsibility and blame and to regain control over a "*deeply felt sense of political peripheralization*" (Theodossopoulos 2013:201)

> *"Here, blaming Others to escape responsibility is not merely a rhetorical tactic but is also, more importantly, an attempt to explain—and through explaining decode and make less threatening—an external crisis, which is beyond one's control." (Theodossopoulos 2013:208)*

Moreover, many Greeks confined themselves to blaming "'*the foreign finger' (to kseno dhaktilo*)" (Herzfeld 2011:24) for their gloomy situation within the crisis, resulting in two opposite narratives that became dominant in recent years:

> *"The crisis allows Greeks to blame two very different sets of outsiders for the present malaise: the wealthy managers of the IMF and foreign banks, and the indigent immigrants on the streets." (Herzfeld 2011:23)*

Interestingly, both narratives have been used by political parties that have experienced a considerable rise during the last years and that couldn't seem more different one from another: the first narrative has been used by *SYRIZA*, the second by *Chrysi Avgi*. As Theodossopoulos (2014:501-502) points out, although indignant anti-austerity discourses challenge hegemonic master narratives and are critical to Western power, they have however tended to follow the (unquestioned) nationalist, hegemonic Western vision of glorious, classical, Hellenic Greece.

> *"[...] nationalist undertones are also hidden in the anti-hegemonic critique of left-leaning indignant citizens. Anti-austerity political parties (from the left and right) have capitalized upon this fusion of nationalism with anti-hegemonic critique, and have adapted their rhetoric accordingly, to fit electioneering purposes." (Theodossopoulos 2014:502)*

5. Grassroots Mobilizations and Crisis

In this chapter I would not only like to deal with the factors why the crisis influenced citizens to found a grassroots group or to become active within one but also approach the question whether the experience of crisis has triggered grassroots activity in Athens in general. So before going further into the case studies and issues of subjectivities of participants involved, I will try to give a summary on implications of the economic crisis on citizens' activity in general.

Building on extensive research on the topic by multiple authors (e.g. Clarke, Huliaras, Sotiropoulos), it becomes clear that a substantial number of new citizens' initiatives have emerged during the economic crisis. However, as indicated before, it is difficult to classify citizens' initiatives into a pre- or a post-"crisis era" as the breeding ground on which they have emerged with all its fragmentations, social and political origins has in some cases started to appear well earlier. There have been grassroots citizens' initiatives existing in the city already earlier than in late 2009, when the debt crisis had first surfaced. Particularly after the years of economic boost which lasted until 2007, a material decay of the central urban space had become apparent in Athens, both resulting from the fact that political authorities had less financial means at disposal but also stemming from developments which had started to show long before. As pointed out in the historical chapter about Athens, mostly due to urban pollution large numbers of inhabitants of the center of the city had moved to the suburbs until 2011, resulting in a deterioration of these areas and an ongoing crisis before the debt crisis became apparent. Thus, neighborhood initiatives within the city, which engaged in the regeneration of urban materialities, had started to form themselves at least by 2007, as interviews with participants indicated, reacting to this urban and social crisis which then deepened through austerity. Also protest movements and the social movements that followed had been incubated over a long period of time, having started with rallies against the Olympic games and gained further momentum with December 2008 (Leontidou 2012:305).

5.1 Anti-Austerity Protests: Syntagma and Social Movements

It is impossible to contextualize the recent history of grassroots activism and the developments in civil society in Athens without mentioning the anti-austerity mobilizations starting in 2010, the so-called *Indignants' Movement* and the occupation of Syntagma square in 2011. This movement has attained a historical and symbolical meaning regarding social movements in Greece, and has played a significant role for the (subsequent) foundation of citizens groups as many (but not all of the) participants of my research have stated. The events at Syntagma square have been particularly important for foundation processes of solidarity initiatives as Lisa Mittendrein observed in her qualitative research (Mittendrein 2013:79). For reasons I will outline below it had reached many more people than traditional political protests would have done (Mittendrein 2013:77), thereby becoming a mass movement (della Porta 2015:54) that influenced people to become active in civil society for the first time.

In the wake of the adoption of the first austerity measures, large-scale demonstrations organized by trade unions and opposition parties began to take place all over the country in 2010 (Sotiropoulos et al. 2015:239). As more and more government policy measures with no prior consultation of social partners followed over time, not only the trust in political parties sank to 5 to 9 percent between 2010 and 2013, but in general the feeling that conventional means of political participation were exhausted came to the fore (Sotiropoulos et al. 2015:239-240). A time of *"unconventional mobilization of civil society"* (Sotiropoulos et al. 2015:240) followed, comprising occupations of squares and government buildings and - sometimes - violent protests (Knight 2012:362).[23]

In order to understand the breeding ground for recent social movements in Greece it is important to cast a glance at reactions to the financial crisis and the Euro Crisis in other countries. European countries like Iceland, Spain and Portugal saw massive protest movements in the wake of the financial crisis as well. Particularly the protests in Spain which were also very much inspired by the Arabic spring, seemed to have triggered events in Greece. In mid-May 2011, the anti-austerity protest movement of the Spanish *Indignados* in the square of Puerta del Sol, Madrid was thriving when demonstrators publicly invited the Greeks to join their protest with the claim: *"Don't make so much noise, you'll wake up the Greeks"* (Theodossopoulos 2013:200; Mittendrein 2013).

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[23] I will come back to the aspect of violence later on.

Theodossopoulos makes a powerful point by arguing that, following Appadurai's work, local peripheral actors tend to *"imagine themselves as part of a larger, international community of discontent"* (Theodossopoulos 2013:200) resulting in an "imagined community", in the terms of Benedict Anderson, of the disenfranchised with politics, politicians and global neo-liberal capitalism. As the Spanish invitation circulated through media more and more, people began to organize the first mobilization of the Greek *"movement of the indignants"* online via Facebook, resulting in enormous protests in major Greek squares, with the largest in Syntagma Square in Athens (ibid.). Under the collective name of *"the exasperated"* (*Aghanaktismeni*) 150.000 people from different social backgrounds were signed on the Facebook page around the event (Himanen 2012:156; Herzfeld 2011:24). There it became apparent that the internet, digital activism, international networking and social network involvement, some of it by very young people, have taken a significant role within Greek social movements [24] (Leontidou 2012:305).

> *"Many protesters in Greece chose to camp in Constitution Square itself (from the end of May to the end of July 2011), thus creating a physical manifestation of their "imagined" community of discontent—one that the members of Parliament convening next door could not easily ignore: their campsite was the starting point of dynamic protest but also worked as a communication station, a forum of debate, and space for socialization more generally (frequented by citizens who did not necessarily participate in the protest)." (Theodossopoulos 2013:200)*

According to estimates, overall 2.6 million people could have been involved in the Syntagma protests by spending time on the place on a regular basis (Leontidou 2012:306). Remarkably the whole movement wasn't affiliated with party politics and trade unions anymore (Himanen 2012:156) as it had been organized via the social networks Facebook and Twitter, so during the first days it brought together a large number of people who had formerly not (or seldom) been active in political actions and demonstrations (Mittendrein 2013:77). Later, the participating groups mixed with more "politicized" people, all united by the conviction that politicians were unable to deal with the crisis, that democracy was fading in favor of a troika dominance, that Greek elites were enriching themselves and by rejecting the dysfunctional political and economic system (Mittendrein 2013:77; Theodossopoulos 2013:200; Herzfeld 2011:24). Similar to movements in Spain, Italy and Portugal the defense of the declining welfare state was a strong mobilizing factor. Della

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[24] This could also be seen within groups that I did research on that the internet was a tool that enhanced ways to communicate.

Porta argues that some of the demands of these anti-austerity movements were quite moderate and reformist, *"a restoration of old rights"* (della Porta 2015:97).

Although the first people to mobilize had been unemployed and underemployed people between the age of twenty-five and thirty years old, Greeks engaging in the protests were coming from a broad variety of different social, educational and generational backgrounds (although most of them from the Left), constituting indeed a mass movement (della Porta 2015:54) and reaching to many more people than traditional political protests would have done (Mittendrein 2013:77).

Having studied European anti-austerity protests in depth, Donatella della Porta comes to the conclusion that these movements can be regarded as a reaction to a crisis of political responsibility:

> *"[...] those protests react not only to economic crisis (with high unemployment and high numbers of precarious workers) but also to a political situation in which institutions are (and are perceived to be) particularly closed towards citizens' demands, at the same time unwilling and incapable of addressing them in an inclusive way." (della Porta 2015:5-6)*

This approach follows the theoretical framework of political opportunity or "political process" theorists who stress the importance of social movements for political change, new policies and, moreover, how the state influences forms of collective action (Gibb 2001:2-3). Accordingly, activists mobilize if they *attribute* a political opportunity rather than in fact *having* a political opportunity. Also, threats can mobilize (della Porta 2015:6). Within anti-austerity movements, however, activists did not only react to opportunities and threats but, in the words of Habermas, who advocated New Social Movement Theory, to a *"crisis of legitimacy"* (Habermas 1976, cited in: della Porta 2015:6). In contrast to Habermas' point of reference towards the social formation of the *"organized, state regulated, Fordist, advanced level of mature capitalism"* (della Porta 2015:6), this crisis of legitimacy, evolving in a late neoliberal system, becomes a crisis of responsibility (ibid.). As a direct consequence, anti-austerity movements have emphasized direct democracy, while in the global justice movement of the early 2000s an associational dimension had been prevalent and institutional trust had still been higher (della Porta 2015:25). This focus on a crisis of responsibility has opened up a debate on consequences for democratic institutions. Whereas some scholars warn that antipolitical sentiments could give rise to a populist

backlash, others anticipate that through cracks in capitalism or constant mass movements an autonomous development of civil society is in the making (della Porta 2015:24).

Over the course of two months, Syntagma square was becoming a mixed-use hybrid space and a "public" realm in the literal sense of the word, mostly in the *"lower piazza"* (Leontidou 2012:306) of Syntagma. In contrast to the "upper piazza" where people with more *"rough tactics of anger"* (ibid.) and all sort of political affiliations were active, people in the lower part were in general more politically progressive and closer to the Left. Here, every night the next actions were discussed, decided democratically in open plena and political debates took place. In an effort to revive direct democracy from the ancient Greek "agora" speakers to the popular assembly were selected randomly (Leontidou 2012:306). *"Direct democracy was actively sought and spontaneity was chosen, over and above representative democracy and conscious leadership."* (Leontidou 2012:306). Concerts and artistic performances happened and the occupants organized themselves in work groups, by that covering media work, medical help, food supply, translations and many more actions (Leontidou 2012:306; Mittendrein 2013:76). Moreover, at the "lower piazza", a pattern of peaceful protest was employed:

> *"[...] most of those who demonstrated under that banner were not violent, and were chagrined by the few who took advantage of the unrest to commit acts of physical aggression." (Herzfeld 2011:24).*

Indeed since May 2010, there has been a number of violent protests in many urban centers in Greece stemming from a feeling of being pushed to the limits of - material - survival and a deep frustration with the government (Knight 2012:362). Or, as Himanen puts it, resistance identities of the Indignant movements in southern Europe sometimes resulted in expressions of violence (Himanen 2012:161). However often, and also at Syntagma, the government started to deploy heavy violence against activists and protesters with tear gas and other chemicals (Leontidou 2012:308-310):

> *"[...] the riot police were repeatedly unleashed against the people in the belief that chasing demonstrators away from their material spatial opportunities would dissolve the movement." (Leontidou 2012:308).*

The peak of the Syntagma mobilization with *"practically all of the Athenian social movement organizations (SMOs) joined forces"* (Sergi / Votziatzoglou 2013:226) in June 28 and 29, 2011 in order to prevent the adoption of new austerity measures ended in a fierce clash between police and protesters and almost 800 people injured (ibid.). By August

2011, using tear gas and assaults, the police had cleared the square from all the tents and protesters (Leontidou 2012:308).

After that, the movement slowly faded (Sergi / Votziatzoglou 2013:226). But although the physical movement at Syntagma square was dispelled, its manifestations shifted to another space, namely citizens' initiatives. Some groups continued to be active in assemblies on a local level in their neighborhood as my research revealed. Also Vathakou (2015:174) has pointed out that many initiators of citizens' initiatives have participated in mobilizations, as did participants in my research. In particular many solidarity groups have a history there (Mittendrein 2013).

However, for many people, although it had become a very meaningful event, the movement was a perceived failure as it did not result in tangible change. Nonetheless, for grassroots initiatives arising there, these events seem to have triggered what Castells spoke of when he wrote that urban social movements arise after proactive movements and politics have failed to confront economic exploitation, cultural domination, and political oppression and thus people react *"on the basis of the most immediate source of self-recognition and autonomous organization: their locality."* (Castells 1997:61) The underlying foundation refutes the assumption that urbanization results in a loss of community.

5.2 Recent Grassroots and Civil Society Activity: An Overview

It is by now common understanding among scholars that the economic crisis has had a motivating effect for civic agency in Greece (Huliaras 2015:19):

> *"Many new NGOs, civil society organisations and grassroots movements appeared and old ones reported an increase in volunteers. Several observers noted a spectacular rise in informal networks, grassroots movements and support networks with cooperatives, social groceries and solidarity bazaars." (Huliaras 2015:20).*

There is no doubt that these citizens' initiatives emerged as a result of deteriorating living standards, as outlined in chapter 4.4, and a *"new social and political landscape, brought about by the harsh austerity measures taken by Greek governments, in return for loans from the IMF and European institutions."* (Vathakou 2015:167) For example, as a result, the clientele of social solidarity NGOs changed from a very large proportion of migrants

and refugees, like in the past, to more and more Greeks seeking social assistance (Sotiropoulos / Bourikos 2014:51). This development led to a discourse that had been overdue for a long time:

> *"For the first time, radical civil society voices criticised official rhetoric about deserving and non-deserving victims, brought to public scrutiny the lives of marginalised groups and illegal migrants and revealed hidden exclusions."* (Huliaras 2015:19)

Before going more into detail on the reasons why people become active in citizens' initiatives and what meanings are negotiated with it, I will try to give an overview on different kinds of grassroots movements. There is a multitude of activities citizens' initiatives have engaged with, including those listed above. Clarke, Huliaras and Sotiropoulos have categorized the different types of Greek civil society actors into urban social movements, solidarity initiatives, organizations about social welfare or environmental issues, refugee- and migrant-serving organizations, and minority organizations (Clarke et al. 2015:3).

In light of an extensive dissatisfaction with politics, the spread of alternative citizens' networks in Greece reflects both the willingness to experiment with new forms of (radical) activism but on the other side the mere need to give social support in the face of the crisis: *"Thus, 'need' and 'choice' guide the activities of numerous new schemes in Greek civil society."* (Simiti 2015:29) As Asteris Huliaras pointed out in an e-mail interview, it seems that much more civic engagement is happening in Athens than in rural areas as the capital has been hit harder by the crisis (Interview 29).

A 2013 opinion poll by the Human Grid, a project by the TEDx Athens discussion forum, found that the number of Greeks taking part in volunteer projects has increased by 44 percent since 2010. The most distinct rises in volunteerism were in providing goods and promoting the health of people who were most affected by the crisis. Environmental and cultural projects were prominent in this survey as well (Ekathimerini 2013). Although this was no academic study, the general findings of this opinion poll are in line with the results of scientific research.

Gerodimos moreover states that, since 2010, Athens has

> *"[...] witnessed the flourishing of a civil society of activists, volunteers and concerned residents who have mobilized so as to rebuild the urban landscape, to*

preserve memory, and to reconnect with others and with their own past." (Gerodimos 2015:94)

The initiative *Omikron Project,* which is part of my fieldwork sample as it is a citizen initiative itself, has mapped active grassroots groups with a non-for-profit aim in 2013 and 2014 (Interview 13; Interview 20). They divided groups within ten categories: Alternative Economies & Local Exchange Trading Systems, Art & Culture, Collective Kitchens, Education, Environment, Nature & Ecology, Health, Human Rights, Information Technology Media & Communications and Neighbourhood Assemblies & Democracy Projects. For their second mapping in June 2014, the activists found more than 400 groups in Greece which corresponds to a growth of 70 percent compared to the year before (Omikron Project 2014).[25]

As already pointed out, it is difficult to set a date when this trend has started, considering the extensive prior history of the crisis with symptoms of societal fragmentation becoming evident in Athens as early as during the 1990s and several neighborhood projects appearing already back then. At the latest this trend of a *"dramatically increasing number of citizens' initiatives"* (Vathakou 2015:167) has begun in 2010. Some speak of a *"new era for civil society organisations"* (Garefi / Kalemaki 2013:7) starting in 2009 and bringing a boost of volunteers predominantly in informal citizen networks and grassroots movements. According to studies by Jennifer Clarke and Sotiropoulos and Bourikos, even formal volunteering in organizations grew since the crisis started manifesting itself (Clarke 2015:77; Sotiropoulos / Bourikos 2014:51). According to Huliaras, the *"relative awakening of (mainly) left-wing activism"* (2015:22) is also leading to a segregation within civil society. As for a long time, the Greek Orthodox Church had dominated philanthropic activities in Greece, many people have considered this realm as conservative in daily discourses (Huliaras 2015:22).

Ironically, the crisis had a negative impact on the already established formal civil society sector as public funding for NGOs decreased or even completely ceased in 2012 (Huliaras 2015:19; Simiti 2015:29; Sotiropoulos / Bourikos 2013:40).[26] After 2010, national and

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[25] Although these results can't be considered as scientific data, the map of *Omikron* probably represents the most comprehensive listing of grassroots activity in Greece in the year 2014 that goes along with the criteria of my empirical research. Moreover, as this is the updated version of a first list, *Omikron* has removed groups which were not active anymore and corrected errors of the first version. Chapter 6.5 will deal with *Omikron Project* and their aims in depth.

[26] In 2014, active NGOs in Greece, most of them active concerning environment protection, social welfare and human rights, were estimated at between 850 and 900 (Fotiadi 2014).

international NGOs and the Greek Orthodox Church mobilized in order to help people in need with food, medical and social services, thus being active in the field of philanthropy rather than solidarity (Sotiropoulos / Bourikos 2013:40).[27] Many authors argue that the NGO sector neither has the resources nor the institutional capacity to fill the gap the diminishing social welfare system has left (Clarke et al. 2015:4; Sotiropoulos 2014:52).

According to Tsomou, it was the loss of legitimacy of the Greek parliament during austerity that has somewhat made a parallel institution of self-administration necessary (Tsomou 2014:165). These new neighborhood initiatives have emerged as a new form of a social movement where the political has been articulated anew in a sense of reproduction (Tsomou 2014:167).

5.3 Solidarity Networks and Alternative Economy

Many academics saw an *"alternative", "parallel"* economy appearing due to recent developments (Huliaras 2015:19). These economic practices don't have a for-profit motivation, for example barter networks, social currencies, co-operatives or agricultural networks (Castells 2012).

In 2013, Sotiropoulos and Bourikos did a pilot study on 35 formal and informal social solidarity organizations, active in the greater Athens area which resulted in valuable insights. During the past years social solidarity *"from below"* (Sotiropoulos / Bourikos 2014:34) sometimes took the legal form of officially registered voluntary associations and NGOs whereas other groups deliberately preferred to maintain informal networks, self-help groups or loose circles of likely-minded individuals with no legal recognition or registration out of distrust against NGOs (Sotiropoulos / Bourikos 2014:34;44). In 2011, the Greek state created the legal form of "Cooperative Social Enterprises" (European Commission 2016). By January 2015 over 700 of such legal entities had been established.

Informal groups established themselves as hubs of new distribution networks for food, clothes, healthcare, shelter or other essentials (Sotiropoulos / Bourikos 2014:51). Volunteering doctors, nurses and social workers established informal healthcare networks and makeshift clinics, frequently in spaces provided by municipal authorities (Sotiropoulos

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[27] The Greek Orthodox Church claims to feed more than 250.000 people every day (Huliaras 2014:15-16).

/ Bourikos 2014:41). In 2014, Omikron counted 42 social clinics and pharmacies all over Greece (Omikron Project 2014).

Groups which provide food have sometimes started to act in a field between civil society and the market, for example when supermarkets cooperated with voluntary organizations or when agricultural producers sold their products themselves without middlemen at a lower price via solidarity structures (Sotiropoulos / Bourikos 2013:41-42).

> *"[...] informal networks of volunteers served as intermediaries between, on the one hand shelters for the homeless, food banks and poor households, and on the other hand restaurants, hotels and bakeries which could spare food."* *(Sotiropoulos / Bourikos 2014:42)*

Members of social solidarity activities come from a broad variety of social backgrounds. Whereas some are upper- or middle-class people, others are unemployed citizens with free time or people who suffer from social isolation during the crisis, and some members are employees or workers with low wages or precarious jobs who are both beneficiaries and participants of their networks (Sotiropoulos / Bourikos 2014:51). Many participants in solidarity networks have participated in the *Indignados* movement in 2011. Although this doesn't apply to all the participants as some have a diverse political background, some of the initiators tend to have an experience in political activism with a leftist ideology of solidarity (Vathakou 2015:174). As these groups in Athens all entail a dimension of direct participation, they correspond to the model of solidarity economy (Laville 2015:47).

These activities grow on the ground of social practices that have already globally existed ahead of the crisis, performed by people who were at the vanguard of finding different new ways of life, often drop-outs of the mainstream economy which they deemed destructive (Castells et al. 2012:12). Now, it comes to a historical intersection between this group (sometimes also called "de-growth movement" (Castells 2012)) and the group of people who have economically suffered from the crisis, *"who no longer have the opportunity to consume anything but themselves"* (Castells et al. 2012:12).

Rakopoulos points out that groups involved in solidarity economy become morally and ideologically more and more entangled:

> *"[...] participants engaged in initiatives related to the solidarity economy tend to imagine that their activities are inspired by larger aims and claims than the immediate significance of their material actions."* *(Rakopoulos 2014:189)*

This can also be seen in anti-hierarchical, horizontal approaches in decision making processes that Vathakou observed in solidarity networks which ideologically anticipate a participatory society, in contrast to the majority of NGOs which have a hierarchical structure (Vathakou 2015:176). I will come back to this point later on.

5.4 Grassroots and Politics

Despite of differences in other matters, members of citizens' initiatives see as causes of the current crisis not only financial but also political and social problems, both within Greece and on an international level (Vathakou 2015; Clarke et al. 2015:5). Significantly, mostly informal organizations incidentally completely distanced themselves from the state and the parties they deemed responsible for the crisis (Sotiropoulos / Bourikos 2014:43;48). In my whole fieldwork, almost everybody was very critical towards the two parties that had been at the power, *PASOK* and *Nea Dimokratia*.

> *"The interesting thing is that, in most interviews conducted with members of these collectivities, it is revealed that there is a systematic attempt to disengage from older political guidelines [...] and a mood of self-presentation as something completely new that is made exclusively for today's needs and has no roots in earlier historical ventures" (Petropoulou 2013:79)*

In contrast, the local government was considered less problematic and a possible partner for cooperation as Sotiropoulos and Bourikos (2014:48) have also found out. Numerous initiatives I did research on already had been collaborating with the municipality in different fields.[28] However, I am convinced that these steps have much to do with the specific political actors and parties involved. The current mayor in Athens, for example, Giorgos Kaminis, has run for office as an independent candidate; a fact that might have helped to distance his municipal government from the national one.[29] Moreover, the specific position of political actors towards grassroots groups and activities certainly play an important role.

The political party SYRIZA (coalition of the radical left), for instance, has been active supporting the umbrella network *Solidarity For All (Solidarity4All)*, founded in 2012 and aiming at helping solidarity initiatives all over Greece by providing resources and

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[28] I will come back to this later when dealing with the issue of possible implications.

[29] However, it needs to be pointed out that he was supported by the center-left parties PASOK, and DIMAR which both have a history within national governments (Ekathimerini 2014).

networking tools for decentralized organizing practices. Moreover, the network has been active in mapping solidarity initiatives all over Greece with the goal to create a new agenda for collective action (Panagiotopoulos 2015). In September 2014, according to Tonia Katerini of the network, *Solidarity For All* was in contact with about 300 solidarity initiatives all over Greece (Interview 18).[30] According to their own sources, in 2015 there were 400.

> "[...] SYRIZA was successful in becoming the favoured party of any kind of activism with an anti-establishment political message. SYRIZA sympathisers are now active in a variety of civil society initiatives. The party sees them as natural allies." (Huliaras 2015:21)

Leontidou sees a clear link between the electoral victory of the left and the rise of social movements (Leontidou 2015:89).[31] Though, it clearly cannot be deduced that large parts of civil society activity between 2010 and 2014 were facilitated by *SYRIZA* (Sotiropoulos et al. 2015:248).

Also the municipality of Athens has acknowledged the growing numbers of grassroots groups by even appointing a *vice mayor for civil society and municipality decentralization*, Amalia Zepou, in September 2014. Even before, while serving as an external advisor to the mayor Giorgos Kaminis on this issue since April 2013, Zepou had established *SynAthina,* a digital platform seeking to support grassroots groups and to provide participants a network and new relationships between public and citizens for their actions (Interview 2; Interview 28; Alevizou 2015). From July 2013 to September 2015, 778 actions had been listed online in the realms of urban intervention, environment, culture & education, networking, and children's activities. 167 citizens' groups have been taking part all over Athens at the latest (Panagiotopoulos 2015).

Zepou's personal history is particularly interesting. As a social anthropologist with a professional background in producing documentary films, she had been an activist herself starting with activities around her neighborhood of *Kerameikos* in Athens in the year 2007 and later engaging within the citizens' group *Atenistas* that will presented in the following chapter. Zepou claims that although in rural areas taking care of the immediate public

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[30] However, it needs to be said that there also solidarity structures which have requested to be left out in Solidarity4All's listing due to its political affiliation (Vathakou 2015:169).

[31] In January 2015, SYRIZA became the strongest party in the legislative elections resulting in the first national government led by SYRIZA. Already in spring 2014 the party had won the local elections in Attica, with their candidate Rena Dourou becoming the governor of the whole greater Athens region.

space next to people's homes had already been a common practice, in an urban environment this was seen as the duty of public authorities. She recalls a change in the eagerness of people to become active in civil society in the period of the past years and she also speaks very openly about failures of public authorities to maintain the urban space during recent years

> *"[...] people just got out of their apartment [...] and said, you know, I can't wait until the state cleans up. I will do it myself, because I don't want to live in a dirty place anymore. And I can't clean the whole of Greece, but I can clean at least my own street. And it was interesting because the first people that started initiatives like this immediately convinced others to participate and this is how it multiplied. You needed a trigger and suddenly we had all of these community groups taking initiatives all around Athens around several topics and issues." (Amalia Zepou, Interview 2)*

On a very different note the numerous philanthropic activities of the radical rightwing party of *Chrysi Avgi (Golden Dawn)* need to be mentioned as well. By introducing soup-kitchens and solidarity trading initiatives "from-Greeks-for-Greeks-only'" (Chatzidakis 2014:38) as well as creating a *"migrant-free zone"* (Dalakoglou/ Vradis 2011:16) on a public place in Athens, Chrysi Avgi has been active in performing solidarity among Greeks, while at the same time strengthening ingroup-outgroup categorizations and undermining universal solidarity through practices of othering (Chatzidakis 2014:37). Particularly the area of Agios Panteleimonas in the 6th district of Athens has become known as a neighborhood where *Chrysi Avgi* and affiliated groups have grown strong. In this area where many migrants settled members of *Chrysi Avgi* gained trust of the population, also through actions like accompanying Greeks to shops etc. in order to protect them from immigrants (Interview 12). Actions of the far-right have further contributed to a *"fragmentation of the emerging service-providing civil society"* (Huliaras 2015:22).

6. Case Studies

This chapter will present the results of empirical research within the groups. It will show a variety of issues citizens' groups have been concerned with in the last years in Athens, but of course it cannot represent the whole *topical* range active citizens have been engaged with. For that, the previous chapter was trying to give an overview. However, as pointed out in the methods section, this sample seeks to be representative in terms of meanings different groups are negotiating. In the following, I will present the different activities the initiatives are dealing with, how these groups emerged and sets of value shared within groups. A discussion of common features and shared meanings will follow in the subsequent chapters.

6.1 To Mirmigi - The Ant

> *"This is not philanthropic help, like people were used to. We want it to be solidarity. In Greek the word is Αλληλεγγύη [Allileghi]. That means we are close to each other." (Teresa Vekiarelli, Mirmigi; Interview 1)*

Founded in autumn 2012, *to mirmigi* (the ant) is a solidarity network that gives away groceries and other non-food everyday necessities such as baby diapers and clothes for people in need.[32] As it provides help to residents based in the neighborhood of *Kypseli* in the 6th district in Athens, it can be labeled as an initiative that provides *Neighborly Help*[33].

Based on features of solidarity economy, members of the group collect material resources and pass it to people in need. The group has adopted the legal form of a non-profit organization. Usually the participants ask for donations in front of supermarkets from private people or donations are brought to their office, but sometimes producers give them donations themselves, or *Mirmigi* acts as middlemen for direct sellings, or the SYRIZA-affiliated umbrella network *Solidarity4All* hands away donations. In the past, *Mirmigi* has also received donations from groups from abroad such as from Austria or Italy. Moreover, the initiative was active organizing cultural events, like on the occasion of the anniversary

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[32] Most of my findings on *Mirmigi* stem from interviews with the founding member Teresa Vekiarelli as well as participant observation during meetings and on days when donations were handed over to beneficiaries.

[33] *Omikron Project* labelled *To Mirmigi* as an initiative within the field of *Alternative Economies & Local Exchange Trading Systems* and moreover within the group of "movements organising micro-economies without middle-men or without money, to increase solidarity and strengthen social bonds" (Omikron 2014).

of World War II where similarities and differences between hardships now and then were discussed and participants to the festival were invited to bring donations.

In the past years, *Kypseli,* a densely populated district, became known for the fact that many immigrants, mostly from African countries settled here, but the neighborhood has also seen a strong rise of the extreme right party *Chrysi Avgi* (Golden Dawn) and affiliated groups. Most of the beneficiaries of *Mirmigi* are immigrants but there are many Greeks as well; although it's important to mention that this information is a guess of a core member and not statistical information. In order to be able to obtain donations, people need to get registered at the office of *Mirmigi* first, give personal information on their social, financial and family situation and then they can come on a regular basis in order to get a plastic bag full of food, sometimes together with other items of daily use. Figure 1 shows how these ration packs look like (one plastic bag per person).

Figure 1: Food Donations at Mirmigi (photo by author)

The fact that *Mirmigi* doesn't do verifications of indigence has attracted criticism from outside if people are really "in need". Founding member Teresa Vekiarelli points out that compared to the effort people need to make to obtain donations (e.g. stand in a line for many hours, needing to inscribe before getting donations), those donations are relatively little:

> *" [...] I know they are in need. Because nobody would come there to take one kilo of spaghetti, one kilo of rice and one kilo of sugar and two cans of milk a month if he's not really in need." (Teresa Vekiarelli, Mirmigi; Interview 1)*

This also correlates with situations I experienced when I went to their premises and the line of people waiting reached out to the street.

As mentioned, the *SYRIZA*-affiliated network *Solidarity4All* has been offering help to the group in terms of providing a computer or other necessities. Most of the members of *Mirmigi* come from a politically left background or from left parties and I have encountered people who were members of SYRIZA at the office. However, there is an official acknowledgement to work beyond political parties; a decision that seems important to the founding team.

The group is open for everybody to participate. Thus, beneficiaries are participants of the work team as well. In 2014, about 20 members were in the core team of the group in terms of doing most of the work (obtaining and handing out donations, managing stocks etc.). An administrative meeting takes place on a weekly basis where everybody, also new members, are invited to participate.

Racial violence in the neighborhood and a strong opposition to the extreme right were a strong trigger for founding *Mirmigi* as well as a reason to engage in voluntary actions on a daily basis. As Teresa Vekiarelli recalls, one event seems to be particularly important for the foundation, self-conception and identity of the group: an assembly of another grassroots group, of the "movement of the citizens of the sixth district" *(Κίνηση Κατοίκων της 6ης Δημοτικής Κοινότητας Αθήνας)* which reacted to the rapid rise of *Golden Dawn* in the neighborhood. In the wake of this event, among some old friends, who are all past their 50's and had lost contact for many years, although they all had lived in the same district, the idea arose to *"gather together"*, *"see what we can do"* and to *"reconquest our neighborhood"* (Vekiarelli, Interview 1). It needs to be noted that especially since 2014 many new younger members, also in their 20s, have joined the group. Nevertheless, the understanding of being in opposition to the political right was further enhanced when the office of *Mirmigi* was virtually attacked in summer 2013 by a group affiliated to *Golden Dawn*, and the entrance door was set on fire. Thus, within *Mirmigi,* identity strongly depends not only on boundaries to the political right but is also closely connected to spatial ties with the neighborhood, in a "Lefebvrian" sense of regaining a right to (their part) of the city.

6.2 O Allos Anthropos - The Other Human Being

> *"What the people need most, is to communicate with each other."*
> *(Konstantinos Polychronopoulos, O Allos Anthropos; Interview 4)*

Probably no other group that I have encountered in Athens is as inextricably linked to its founding figure than this one. Created by Kostantinos Polychronopoulos, *O Allos Anthropos* ("The Other Human Being") is a so called „kinoniki kusina" (common kitchen).[34] Each day on a public spot in different neighborhood in Athens, Konstantinos (as he is known by everyone) cooks a meal together with people who want to help, as well as with those who are in need. It has to be said that in no other group I have encountered the differentiation of people in need and people who provide help blur so much as in *O Allos Anthropos.* It is a project that provides *Neighborly Help* and, by cooking food for everyone on the basis of donations, it has characteristics of *Solidarity Economy.* The group has no formal entity, yet monetary donations are accepted. Donations are provided by different sources but not by official authorities: marketers, private persons etc. A majority of the people who participate on a regular, almost daily basis are unemployed and/or homeless. In 2014, 180 portions daily were prepared on an average.

As the foundation history of *O Allos Anthropos* has so much to do with its philosophy, and it has attained a somewhat legend-like status, I will go more into detail here than with other groups. The mutual aid group exists since December 2011. Back then, the now 51 year-old former marketing specialist Kostantinos Polychronopoulos had been unemployed for two years already and had been forced to move back to his parents' house resulting in a feeling of depression, as he called it. It was then when he saw two children fighting on the street over food from a trashcan. What struck him most was that nobody interfered. After this incident, he decided to provide a small number of sandwiches for people on the street, but it occurred that no one wanted to take the offer until he started to eat one himself. Intrigued by the sudden epiphany that instead of receiving aid, people prefer to share food with others, the next day he started to cook on the street. He asked marketers for food donations but also passers-by gave away food and started helping out with food preparations. After the meal was done, Polychronopoulos began to eat, and people were asking what he was

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[34] My findings on *O Allos Anthopos* are based on two interviews I did with Konstantinos Polychronopoulos and two members who helped to translate in February and September 2014. Moreover, I did participant observation both during cooking and eating, and at the group's headquarter.

doing. He said that he cooks for people who don't have enough to eat, and thus, passers-by ate with him. [35]

He emphasizes the communicative aspect of the group, that everybody can participate, no matter if anyone has financial resources or not. Origin, religion or political affiliation of participants are irrelevant as well. Thus, the philosophy follows principles of solidarity and Polychronopoulos stresses the group is neither a humanitarian cause or philanthropy. In the begin of 2014, an anonymous donor provided premises for the group in the neighborhood of *Metaxourghio*. There, in a large loft-like apartment, beneficiaries/participants can take a shower, eat, hang out, see a doctor, have a haircut, children can play or study for school and donations are stored in a separate room. Some people of the core team stay overnight and Polychronopoulos lives in the apartment as well. With those core members, also financial donations are always shared at the end of the month.

At first, *the police and municipality had battled O Allos Anthropos*. Polychronopoulos had been arrested on health related charges multiple times (Meijer 2015). Thus, some placed in the city were abandoned. But as time progressed, the group was even asked by the umbrella network from the city, *SynAthina,* if they would like to be included in their list. The municipality had moreover suggested that the group comes out as a NGO but Polychronopoulos refused. However, until now he remains critical of the municipality though he mentioned that the workers of the city had provided them donations during Christmas 2013.

In consequence of his actions, he has won several awards, one of them after fieldwork was already finished: He was granted one of the Citizens Prizes of the European Parliament for 2015 together with the Metropolitan Clinic of Elliniko; yet both refused the award as a protest against the austerity measures imposed by the EU (as part of the troika). Without austerity, their groups wouldn't have to exist (Metropolitan Clinic of Elliniko 2015b; Greece2Day 2015). Moreover, it might be interesting to add that the group has become very active during the large influx of refugees from the war in Syria in 2015. During summer in that year, the group has begun to cook on the island of Lesbos in parallel to the activities in Athens and also provided food in Pireas at the beginning of 2016. In Lesbos,

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[35] I need to point out that I couldn't do a recheck on this story. But as also members of the group and media have reported about this history of *O Allos Anthropos* there is no other version.

the subgroup *O Allos Anthropos Mytilini* was founded which also continued to share food after the team from Athens had gone back.

If there is such a thing as a "star" within grassroots groups in Athens or even in Greece, Polychronopoulos is one of them. Via his online blog, his Facebook and Twitter account, people can stay informed where the group will cook next. Many media outlets have reported on him nationally and internationally. A sister group in Salamina has started to work on a similar principle on weekends. A member of another grassroots group who knows him said that he turned so famous as he has become a *"symbol of how much a man with no means can do"* (Petinaki, Interview 8) in Athens.

There is a very familial atmosphere within the group as, for some members, particularly those who have experienced unemployment or other forms of social regression within the past years, the group has become very important in terms of replacing kinship ties. The familial atmosphere becomes very apparent in the apartment/headquarter of the group where most members were sitting around a large table when I was there, talking in a relaxed atmosphere. Although Polychronopoulos has a separate sleeping room, it is normal for others to enter and when I was visiting the son of a core member was playing video games there.

As I will point out in the following chapter, particularly food has a large power of maintaining social boundaries. Moreover*,* given that sharing food can be considered the foundation of morality (Graeber 2010), there is a highly moral aspect about the activity of *O Allos Anthropos,* a moral aspect that the group shares with the other initiatives mentioned in this chapter, but in this particular case it becomes more apparent and can thus be a reason why the group has attracted much attention.

6.3 Metropolitan Community Clinic of Elliniko

"Every citizen of this country should have access to the public health system." (Giorgos Vichas, Metropolitan Community Clinic of Elliniko; Interview 5)

This is an Athens based solidarity clinic that gives away medical services without charging money.[36] Their beneficiaries are people who lost access to public health care, mostly because they lost social insurance in consequence of becoming unemployed during the crisis. More than 200 people work in the clinic on a strict voluntary basis, among them doctors, pharmacists, therapists and staff supporting them. Volunteers come from a broad range within society, between an age of 15 to 75 years, some employed, some unemployed. Sometimes, more than 100 patients are treated per day (Metropolitan Community Clinic of Elliniko 2015a), with a number of about 40.000 patients per year. Some patients are beneficiaries as well.

The clinic was founded in December 2011 on an initiative of cardiologist Giorgos Vichas. He had realized the need of such a solidarity clinic in spring 2011 when a patient showed up at the public clinic where Vichas worked (and still does) who was near death as he couldn't afford his medication for already four months. Moreover, a statement by composer Mikis Theodorakis that no Greek should be left without a doctor during the crisis had been an additional trigger to gather a group of other volunteer doctors. Eventually, Vichas approached the municipality of *Argyroupoli Elliniko*[37] that agreed to provide the building and pay for the expenses of water, telephone and electricity.

The clinic works without any legal entity. It only accepts material donations and no monetary contributions. Moreover, strictly no political party or political affiliations are involved in the operations of the clinic. The clinic is run by different groups responsible for different areas of activity (e.g. doctors, communication, pharmacy, secretary etc.). Decisions are made in a general assembly on a democratical basis.

The goal of the clinic is that every citizen of the country should have access to the public health system, no matter if insured or not. Between my first and my second round of

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[36] My findings on the community clinic of Helliniko are based on two interviews I did with Giorgos Vichas and two staff members in February and September 2014. On these occasions I visited the clinic's premises.

[37] As mentioned, the clinic is situated in Greater Athens and thus accessible via the Athenian Metro. Most people who work there are from Athens. Therefore its counts as an Athens based initiative although situated outside of the municipality.

fieldwork in 2014, a new law had been passed that aimed to provide basic coverage of health services to uninsured people. However, from part of the Metropolitan clinic it was insufficient as patients would have to arrange each single doctor's visits through a fee-based telephone hotline run by a private company and the law also didn't include the cost of medicine or additional examinations like x-rays. Moreover, hospitalization of uninsured people in case of surgery etc. needs to be approved by a three members committee. However, by September 2014, this law hadn't been applied yet. Dr. Vichas told me of a hospital with more than 500 patients in need of a hospital with their cases still pending and waiting for approval from these committees.

In the past years, the solidarity clinic has assumed the role of a communicator on the issue of the collapsing health sector in Greece, with a strong online appearance on its website which also reaches out to the European public, with very much content in English language. Moreover, it has strongly positioned itself in opposition to the state which often resulted in open conflict, claiming the responsibility of the government as well as the troika for the *"humanitarian crisis"* (Vichas, Interview 6) in Greece. In the past, Vichas has been under attack also personally as his car was demolished and there was a break-in in his office. When the clinic was granted the Citizens Prize of the European Parliament in 2015, the clinic became very active in communicating the rejection, also on a European level (Metropolitan Clinic of Elliniko 2015b).

6.4 Place Identity

> *"Protesting is part of our [Protestpolitical culture, because there is no other way to participate." (Stephania Xydia, Place Identity; Interview 3)*

The office of the citizens' initiative *Place Identity* is located in *Psiri* in the center of Athens in the 1st district. This neighborhood has seen some degree of material decay in the past years (like the whole center of Athens did as outlined above) with a visible number of homeless people and drug addicts on the street and a dangerous reputation, but recently, since the 1990s, the area has started to turn into a hub where much creative action, such as street art and galleries, community actions and urban regeneration activities take place. Moreover, the neighborhood is known for its nightlife and touristic spots. Recently *Psiri* has started to be labeled as a gentrified neighborhood, though this can only hold true for

some central areas. In 2014 I saw a significant number of empty premises and many people were aware of these vacancies.

The activities of the initiative *Place Identity* need to be divided into two categories.[38] Whereas one part of the activity aims at the promotion of place and local identity within Greek cities, the other engages with citizens' participation and projects which facilitate participatory processes in civic life, both on a local and national level. Thus, the group has been active in numerous projects during the past years, run by a broad variety of members and volunteers, mostly by people between their 20s and 40s, some of them with a background in the communication or creative sector.

The first branch of *Place Identity*'s focus that I did research on was their initiative *Politeia 2.0 - Democracy Reborn*. This initiative was founded in June 2012. With a central focus on participation of citizens, their aim is to change the practice of policy in Greece (strongly opposing corrupt state practices of the past) as well as redefining the constitution with their project „*Syntagma 2.0*" in order to reconstruct the Greek state. Behind this stands the deep criticism of the group that political and civic participation within the Greek state (apart from voting which is not seen as particularly participatory) and protesting is not possible. I categorized *Politeia 2.0* as a project that aims at Political Remodeling and at providing a (social) platform. The initiative has moreover won a prize as one of the „Best European Social Innovators" by the European Investment Bank (EIB 2013).

Furthermore, with their participatory network *Imagine the City,* the group has been active in terms of urban regeneration, local identity and in providing a social platform.[39] Improving the image of the city has been a starting point for the group's activity. Their most renown project has become *SynOikia Pittaki* where, together with another group called *Before Light,* the group and local population have provided street lighting and murals in an abandoned street of Athens (Pittaki) in their neighborhood of *Psiri*. Lamps and wand murals were established in the street that thus has become a popular subject for tourists' photographs. This project has been sponsored by *Coca Cola* which has attracted

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[38] Fieldwork for *Place Identity* took place on numerous occasions. I have conducted formal and informal interviews both in February and September 2014 with the two core members Mary Karatza and Stephania Xydia and moreover done participant observation on both occasions. As I could use the office of the initiative as my workplace, I was able to gain many additional insights.

[39] *Omikron Project* has labelled *Imagine the City* within the category *Art and Culture: "*Collectives making alternative art, organising free cultural events, and experimenting with new lifestyle models (carpooling, cohabitation, cycling and reviving abandoned spaces)" (Omikron 2014).

criticism from other grassroots groups. Moreover, members of *Imagine the City* were involved in the development of a physical space for the municipal civil society umbrella network *SynAthina* for the city of Athens. Through an open call to the network of *Imagine The City*, architects were found who undertook the project voluntarily (Place Identity 2013).

By that time already active doing projects, in July 2013, the two core members Mary Karatza and Stephania Xydia have decided to form a non-profit-organization together in order to be able to apply for official funding for their activities. Other members decided not to commit themselves to this legal structure. This is a step that has proved difficult as a large amount of bureaucracy is tied with it and, as the group members say, has resulted in a loss of creativity. Mary Karatza's role can be described as responsible for concepts, community development and *s*trategic design of the NPO. She has worked as an interior designer but now only does a small number of design projects. Stephania Xydia is widely responsible for management and communication within the initiative. Born in Athens, she grew up in Luxemburg among her Greek family and studied in London and Cambridge with a master's degree in Cultural Policy and Management. After finishing her studies, she decided to move to Athens, already during a time when people in her age in Greece chose to migrate due to the difficult economic situation. Her step was regarded with suspicion in her surroundings as for others her high education seemed to offer more promising career prospects elsewhere than in crisis-ridden Greece. Her ties to Greece are a significant factor for her civic engagement. Although having spent most of her lifetime abroad Greece, the aspect of Greece's image is highly important within her work for *Place Identity* and she says that she has always seen herself as kind of an ambassador for Greece.

> *"I think it is my first interest actually to see how you can communicate true material to foreign media and the rest of the world, I'd say." (Stephania Xydia, Place Identity; Interview 7)*

A potential impediment for future activities within the group is financial precarity. As mentioned, NGO funding has severely decreased during the crisis in Greece, which is why the group is dependent on foreign funding and a large proportion of voluntary work.[40] During the long and personal interviews I got the feeling that they were torn between

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[40] However, group members have also stated that in a way the crisis has also sometimes helped them to find international partners as Greece had moved to the center of European media coverage.

selling out (e.g. to companies or the city of Athens which became a regular partner for the NPO in the past) and trying to reach institutional change with their projects.

Although the structure of *Place Identity* clearly is that of an organization and could also be described as an entrepreneurial start-up, both core members see themselves as grassroots activists, having worked on a voluntary basis for many of the last years, often fulltime, and having taken many personal and financial risks for the sake of their civic engagement. When one of them was offered a job within the municipality, she declined for ideological reasons in order to stay at an activist level. Both initiatives of *Place Identity* mentioned here, *Imagine the City* and *Politeia 2.0*, have been filed on the list of grassroots groups by Omikron (Omikron Project 2014). For a long time activities were managed in a non-hierarchical manner, yet since Karatza and Xydia have started to become financially liable for the NPO, this has changed. Yet, this decision wasn't easy and is constantly under critical scrutiny by themselves as they see an irony in promoting participatory projects and having features of hierarchy within their own group.

Members have emphasized that the foundation of the group didn't have much or anything to do with the economic crisis. Instead, tackling inherent problems within the Greek state as well as improving the image of Greece abroad clearly has been a factor for civic engagement within the group. However, my interview partners pointed out that they see these inherent problems and the lack of democracy as reasons for the crisis.

6.5 Omikron Project

> *"Yes, there are lazy Greeks, but the whole country isn't lazy.*
> *Yes, there are corrupt and tax evading people here but not everybody's doing it.*
> *Yes there are protests occasionally but it's not every single day and they are not violent."*
> *(Mehran Khalili, Omikron Project; Interview 13)*

Omikron is a grassroots project involved in media and image reshaping. This initiative started off in March 2012 from group meetings at a bar in the first district of Athens at Lekka 12, just around the corner of Syntagma square, which is called *Omikron* (this is the fifteenth letter of the Greek alphabet). As later meetings also took place there the members

- rather pragmatically - decided on the name *Omikron Project.* While we had done our first interview there, by my second stay in Athens in September 2014 this bar had shut down.[41]

The group consists of volunteers who noticed that the international discourse on the Greek crisis had become highly problematic for them.[42] As can be seen in the figure below, the group's aim is to correct false international images of Greece and in which manner the social situation is represented.

Figure 2: Food queue vs. Direct sales (Omikron Project)

Omikron's target is that stories on the country should be told correctly and always in context. Moreover, their mission consists of deconstructing the prevalent international media narrative of past years of Greek people being passive, corrupt, lazy or violent etc. Thus, participants of *Omikron Project* have started to create videos, pictures and other media content in order to dismantle these discourses and "myths" as they call it. For example one issue of the so-called "Alex" video series uncovered that the narrative that all Greek nationals are lazy is incorrect, by using data from the statistical services of the European Union.

Moreover, members started to compile a listing of grassroots citizens' groups in Greece (which I have already cited and mentioned in former chapters) in order to call attention to the fact that many Greek citizens are active in civil society and in particular to tackle the narrative that within the crisis Greek people stick to their role as a victim. Figure 3 on the following page shows the latest edition of Omikron's map of grassroots groups in Greece.

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[41] Findings on *Omikron Project* are based on three interviews and to a limited extent on participant observation.

[42] Chapter 7.6 will go into detail on implications of this matter on questions of identity.

OUZO-DRINKING LAZY GREEKS?

Grassroots groups in Greece

Last updated: June 2014

OMIKRON PROJECT

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
Groups promoting open-source software & freedom of information

Example:
P2P Lab
(www.p2plab.gr)
An independent collective researching free/open source technologies & practices

ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIES & LOCAL EXCHANGE TRADING SYSTEMS
Movements organising micro-economies without middle-men or without money, to increase solidarity & strengthen social bonds

Example:
Svoura Korinthos
(svourakorinthos.espivblogs.net)
A self-managed social space in Corinth, offering free classes, workshops & cultural events

COLLECTIVE KITCHENS
Communal events where citizens cook & eat together, paying only what they can & with the goal of sharing knowledge & ideas

Example:
Tip The Chef
(www.tipthechef.gr)
A group of young chefs, driven by a love of food, offering their services for free & holding community cooking events

ART & CULTURE
Collectives making alternative art, organising free cultural events, & experimenting with new lifestyle models (carpooling, cohabitation, cycling & reviving abandoned spaces)

Example:
Alternative Tours of Athens
(www.atathens.org)
A team of Athenians offering affordable, unusual, themed tours to share their passion for the city

EDUCATION
Groups providing free lessons & knowledge exchange, stimulating entrepreneurship, or hosting game festivals & book-swapping initiatives

Example:
Nea Guinea Collective
(www.neaguinea.org)
An Athens-based group organising free workshops to give people skills in areas like food growing & complementary medicine

ENVIRONMENT, NATURE & ECOLOGY
Groups campaigning for a better environment, & eco-communes implementing a vision of a self-sufficient sustainable society

Example:
Save Greek Water
(www.savegreekwater.org)
A citizens' movement fighting the privatisation of water in Greece through creative campaigning

HEALTH
Volunteer movements providing free medical services, drugs & vaccines for people without access to public health facilities

Example:
EDRA
(www.edra-coop.gr)
An Athens-based cooperative helping people with mental health problems & children with learning disabilities

HUMAN RIGHTS
Solidarity networks helping refugees & migrants, supporting basic rights, or tackling racism or discrimination

Example:
MultiKulti
(www.multikulti.gr)
A vibrant portal for multicultural news & events in Athens, promoting solidarity & confronting racial prejudice

NEIGHBOURHOOD ASSEMBLIES AND DEMOCRACY PROJECTS
Projects advancing economic, ecological & political democracy

Example:
Real Democracy
(realdemocracygr.wordpress.com)
A collective of citizens' groups pushing for direct democracy, collecting & sharing info from neighbourhood assemblies across Greece

MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS
Citizen journalism & independent outlets, providing alternative views & reporting you won't hear in Greek mainstream media

Example:
UnFollow
(www.unfollow.com.gr)
Pioneering, Greece-focused independent monthly magazine & website, publishing investigative journalism & political & cultural analysis

Go to **www.omikronproject.gr/grassroots** to see a list of all these groups in text format with links to their websites, or to download this poster in high resolution.

These groups have all been verified by us as grassroots, explicitly not-for-profit, Greece-based and active as of June 2014. By "grassroots", we mean that the groups are open for others to join and that, at the time of their inception, they had no affiliation with a profit-making entity. If you notice any errors or omissions, mail us at **info@omikronproject.gr** and we'll make the necessary changes in the next version of the list.
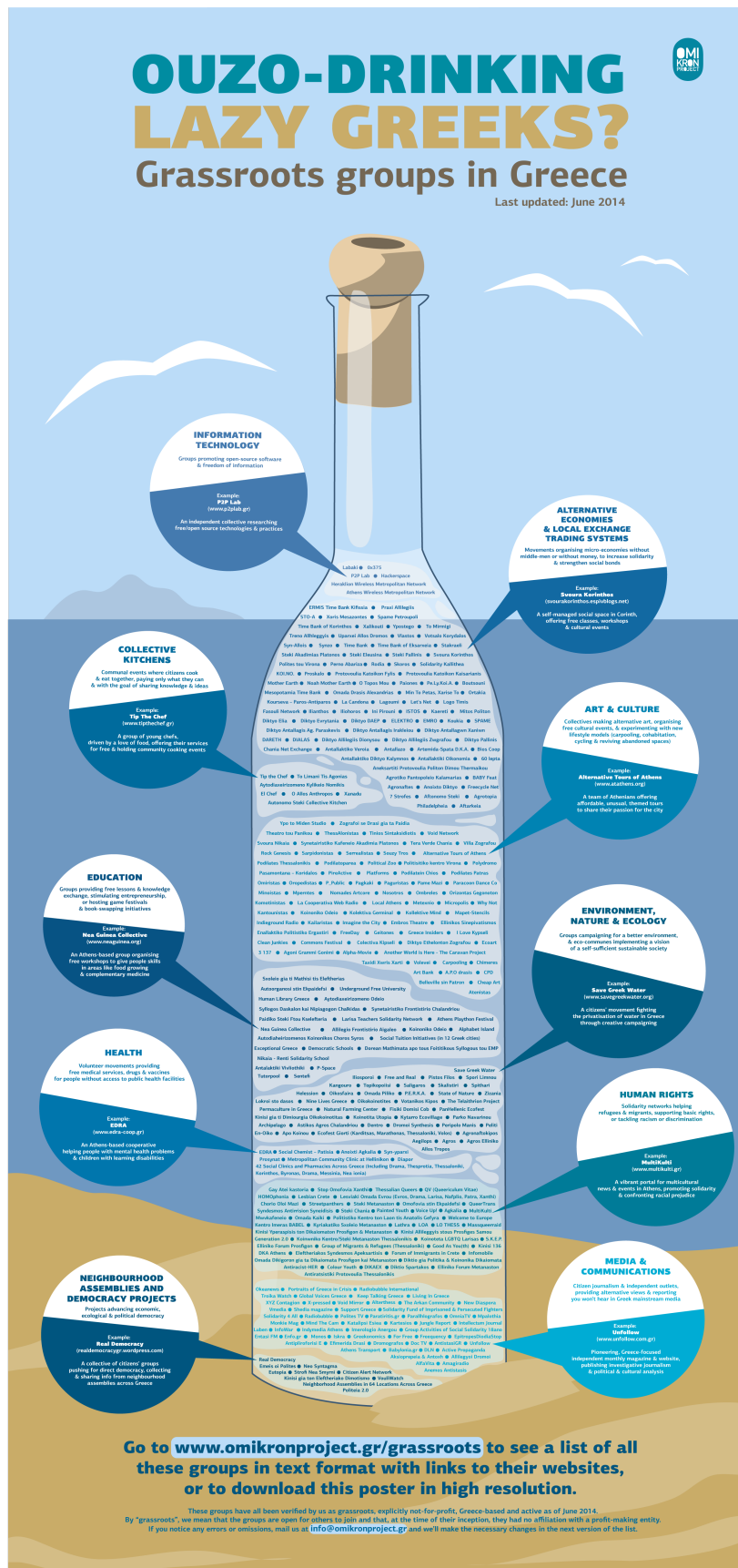
Figure 3: Map of Grassroots Groups in Greece (Omikron Project 2014)

As *Omikron Project* is a grassroots group itself whose members have engaged in many hours of voluntary work in order to realize their projects, I have decided to put them in my sample. All work within *Omikron* is done on a participatory and voluntary basis. In total the group has consisted of about 40 people, although according to the website there is a core team of about 8 members (Omikron Project 2016). The group has no legal entity. Since mid-2014, it need to be said, that activity declined in terms of meetings and media productions, although the group still is active engaging in the discourse on Greek media image and group members give interviews to international media outlets. As one of the founding members, Mehran Khalili, an English expat, isn't fluent in Greek and moreover the target audience of *Omikron* is international, the whole group works in English which has not only made *Omikron* stick out of the sample but also facilitated fieldwork. Most of the members of the group are around their 30s, with higher education and many of them coming from a creative professional background or a background in political or social sciences. Moreover, many participants are personal friends as the whole group developed rather gradually from discussing Greek image matters to the decision of forming a group with a website and social media appearance. Since then, group meetings have been open for everyone to drop by. Also decisions have been made on a democratic and participatory basis.

The group has coined the term „crisis pornography" for media coverage on the economic crisis being unrepresentative for the whole situation and which focused solely on issues such as poverty, violence during protests or corruption:

> *"The extreme poverty, the part that makes Greece look like an apocalyptic 24-hour war zone, almost like hell; that people say it is a failed state, like Somalia in the 1990s. It's not a failed state, look it's not! It's got a lot wrong with it. But it's not how it is in these dramatized representations. And these representations create problems that for Greeks today are of an enormous magnitude." (Mehran Khalili, Omikron Project; Interview 13)*

The group has criticized that not only such representations have had a bad impact on Greeks psychologically, but moreover they might have had a negative influence on political decisions concerning Greece since many of them have been made abroad from national politics, like by the troika or the European council, in recent years. Behind this is the conviction that decision makers can be biased by information disseminated in media. This can have negative consequences if information about a country and their people are incorrect or partially incorrect. Through incorrect media representations the economic

development of the country might have been damaged as well as they have triggered that Greeks abroad are treated differently than members of other nationalities according to group members (e.g. *Omikron* members told me that Greeks abroad have received less salary than their counterparts from other EU countries).

6.6 Oral History Groups

"People [People History to invent another narrative for their past, in order to visualize a better future." (Tasoula Vervenioti, Founder Oral History Groups; Interview 10)

In 2011, the first grassroots oral history group was created in the neighborhood of *Kypseli* by volunteers and Tasoula Vervenioti, a 66-year old historian and expert in the methodology of oral history.[43] Starting from the *"movement of citizens in the 6th district"* of Athens, a grassroots group itself, where Vervenioti was affiliated at this time, the wish to engage in history had become apparent, thus the group *Omada Proforikis Istorias Kypseli* (OPIK - Oral History Group Kypseli) was created. As many more people in Athens became interested, a second group followed one year later, by fall 2014 there were seven, and until 2015, eight oral history groups had been established under Vervenioti's guidance in Athens with two more in the stage of planning. In 2015, even a festival of oral history groups took place. In other Greek cities such groups have appeared as well (Vervenioti 2015).

Within these groups, people first learn the methods of oral history and then go out and record personal testimonies of citizens in their neighborhood. There are subgroups engaging with different eras and issues within their surroundings, such as the civil war period of the 1940s or 1950s, migration, everyday life, architecture or nowadays' crisis. The groups are not funded, strictly on a voluntary, collaborative basis and no financial means are involved. Vervenioti claims that, on the contrary, the lack of material funds strengthened their social dynamic (Vervenioti 2015).

Why has such a large movement of oral history groups emerged? There clearly is a correlation with the crisis, as Vervenioti points out:

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[43] My findings on Oral History Groups are based on two interviews I did with Tasoula Vervenioti, one with a member of the oral history group Kolonaki as well as with Nikos Kavadas, an architect who did a lecture at an oral history seminar. Moreover, I did participant observation at one of their seminars.

"Because of the crisis people lost their social frame. What happens with the family, with the collectivity, what happens with the job, [...] what happens with pensions? They have to change the whole structure of their mind. They have to construct another identity. Really, this *is the crisis for Greek people now. And so they need a new narrative. They have to make it by their own." (Tasoula Vervenioti, Oral History Groups; Interview 10)*

She points out that especially during periods of crisis it is important to renegotiate narratives of the past in order to reshape an image of a better future. Hegemonic historical narratives, particularly those that picture a glorious past, like of a heroic Hellenic ancient period, prove to be psychologically insufficient in the current phase of crisis. Therefore alternative narratives are needed. As people's everyday life has been transformed due to austerity, this has also transformed their identities. Thus, working on new conceptions of identity becomes one of the most important features why people engage in those groups. Renegotiating, knowing and in a way "getting over" the past gives agency for the present and future. What's more, these groups contribute to a democratization of history as history is written outside of academia or hegemonic media discourses (Vervenioti 2015).

Under the phenomenon of the success of oral history groups lies also a general weakness in dealing with Greece's recent past. Until now, particularly periods of authoritarian regime in the twentieth century, the civil war and the time of military junta, have been tackled only inadequately in Greece resulting in the fact that the traumatic character of civil war with its fragmentation of society lasts until present day, as I have suggested in chapter 4.2.2. So through these groups, be it consciously or not, members question the hegemonic conception of history.

6.7 Atenistas

"As active citizens we do have obligations." (Nadia Papadimitriou, Atenistas;
Interview 24)

It would be an impossible endeavor to study citizens' initiatives in Athens without encountering *Atenistas*. In this context, I would like to introduce the group as an exception among grassroots groups in Athens, for reasons that will become clear below.[44] Founded in September 2010 by a group around graphic designer Tasos Chalkiopoulos, it was the first group to mobilize volunteers on such a large scale in Athens and to get large media attention (Gerodimos 2015:94) No other group has claimed to have had such a large numbers of participants in activities in the past years with a newsletter for interested volunteers reaching out to around 15.000 people (who need to enlist to this newsletter first, but don't necessarily have to take action). Until 2014, in eleven other Greek cities "franchises" of *Atenistas* have become active (Sotiropoulos / Bourikos 2014:43).[45]

The group organizes *"small-scale urban interventions"* (Gerodimos 2015:94) by residents and volunteers like redecorating or cleaning urban space such as local parks, schools or streets.[46] There are indications that the image of Athens on tourists and foreigners also matters to the group as can be seen in street signs put up in Greek and Latin letters and the fact that many English texts can be found on the website. Moreover, the initiative has become active in the social field, creates artistic and cultural events in the urban public space and has been active in reactivating architectural memory when they opened an abandoned train station (Peloponnese train station) for the public for a Tango night. Almost 2000 participants have taken part in a treasure hunting game in the center of Athens in spring 2014. There are five subgroups within *Atenistas* where around 25 to 30 work voluntarily, so in sum around 150 people are involved on a regular basis in the activities. Until September 2014, each group had to organize one event each month. The group organizes itself via Facebook and since actions are easily accessible through newsletters it is simple to take part in actions without becoming involved into the planning process. Atenistas' members have a diverse social background and it has been pointed out

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[44] I did two interviews with members of Atenistas including founding member Tasos Chalkipoulos and Nadia Papadimitriou who is responsible for the coordination of teams, administrative work and media communication.

[45] Moreover, in 2014 the group had over 78.000 "likes" on Facebook.

[46] *Atenistas* is an initiative of the categories *Urban Regeneration, Culture and Neighbourly Help (*the activities are manifold because this is the largest grassroots group in Athens).

that new media might have been a significant factor to mobilize people who wouldn't engage easily on a voluntary basis (Gerodimos 2015:101).

Members of Atenistas stressed that the group is no creation of the economic crisis. Instead they became active out of the urban degradation of central Athens. However founder Chalkiopoulos emphasized that the economic crisis is all around their members on a daily basis, thus there is a big influence in terms of a change of the state of mind of people. I will come back to this in the following chapter.

Most importantly, the group's activities are very much connected with ties to the central urban space and to draw attention to neglected areas that are perceived as unsafe:

> *"[...] nobody lived in Athens, in the center of Athens. It was a big decay. So we decided to do actions about the center of Athens to show to other people that it's not that unsafe and it's very rich in history, in buildings, in traditions. We called other Athenians of the suburbs to come and take the center again." (Tasos Chalkiopoulos, Atenistas; Interview 6)*

The participants I interviewed emphasized the positive feeling after each activity of having done *"something good"* (Interview 6) for somebody else or society. *Atenistas* consider themselves apolitical and can be seen as a much less subversive grassroots initiative compared to other groups, regarding criticism about government. As the member Nadia Papadimitriou points out: *"The municipality and the state is everybody."* (Interview 24) Instead, participants criticize the lacking civilian spirit in Greece and that people consider the public space as belonging to the state (which again is considered a negative thing). Thus, they advocate a moral obligation to become active as a citizen.

> *"We are the ideal citizens with what we do [laughs]. We take care for our city. If everyone in the city made this, there would be no problem in general in the urban environment." (Tasos Chalkiopoulos, Atenistas; Interview 6)*

However, just like in all of the groups studied, members of *Atenistas* see a change of mentality, also within themselves.[47] They moreover stress the positive aspect of having found friends with a similar mind-set. The group has become like family.

Furthermore, within the self-conception of the initiative, rather incorrectly, Atenistas consider themselves to be the first movement that started to become active in the urban space of Athens:

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[47] Chapter 7.3 will deal with alternative value systems in depth.

"Before Atenistas there was no civil society in Athens. Now there are many, many groups around neighborhoods, in Kypseli for example." (Nadia Papadimitriou, Atenistas; Interview 24)

Both regarding findings from literature (see chapter 5.2) and interviews with other grassroots groups this statement is incorrect. Apart from numerous activities affiliated to grassroots and/or anarchist groups active in the 2000s already, for instance there has been the "movement of the citizens of the sixth district" *(Κίνηση Κατοίκων της 6ης Δημοτικής Κοινότητας Αθήνας)* from which Kypseli is a part, which has been founded in November 2009 (Interview 9; Interview 26[48]) When I did interviews with founding members of this group they also didn't even know *Atenistas*. However, there can be no doubt that, because of the large size of their events, *Atenistas* had a very significant impact on civic engagement in the city.

Although the group has sometimes used to engage in illegal activities, for instance entering plots without permission in order to clean etc., there have been good relations with the police and local government. Amalia Zepou, now vice mayor for civil society, used to be a core member of *Atenistas,* predominantly during their first year and before she has become active politically. Also other staffers of the municipal citizens network *SynAthina* were members of *Atenistas,* though it needs to be noted that *Atenistas* asked all of these people to stop their affiliation with the grassroots group when they became active within the municipality.

Although it is emphasized that all members are equal, *Atenistas* is managed hierarchically, with one person taking a leading role in each subgroup. Untypically, compared to all of the other groups I have encountered, in interviews there was particular emphasis on the fact that one person, Tasos Chalkiopoulos, is *"head"* or *"director"* (Interview 6) of *Atenistas*. Within other groups, in contrast, mostly the role of the founders was stressed - if at all.

But especially two other factors make clear that *Atenistas* is a particular case compared to other citizen groups: Not only do members of *Atenistas* differentiate themselves clearly from other groups by emphasizing an "*Atenistas*-way" (Interview 6) by getting in action instead of talking about things, the group has also attracted criticism within civil society, a fact my interview partners from *Atenistas* were very aware about. Some of the criticism has engaged with the apolitical character of the group and that it does small-scale aesthetic

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[48] Although I did interviews with members of this initiative, I decided to remove this group from the case study section as I had not done enough participant observation.

interventions within the city instead of battling more the social effects of austerity. One intervention has become particularly infamous when participants painted a public stairway in bright colors in the upper-class neighborhood *Kolonaki*. This action attracted protest from local residents. As a result, other grassroots groups criticized the lacking participatory approach in integrating actual needs of local residents. Moreover, there has been criticism that *Atenistas* do not only have good relations to the city, but that their activities also take over tasks which are actually the duty of the municipality or the state and that they "steal" jobs of professionals. This criticism mostly comes from people with a politically left ideology. In politically left grassroots circles, interview partners told me, *Atenistas* has even got kind of a derogatory meaning.[49] Thus, as they have become in the center of interest due to their mere size, *Atenistas* have exposed a conflict between very different sets of ideologies within grassroots groups. I will evolve on this conflict in a later chapter.

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[49] I can only represent this conflict here but need to point out that I haven't attempted to verify these points of criticism as they are not in the center of my research interest, rather than the discourse itself.

7. Founding and Running Groups: Motivations and Discourses

After having introduced the groups, their specific character and activities, I would like to move on to discuss commonalities and reasons why people decided to become active within these initiatives as well as issues negotiated through the continuing work. For this purpose, it was immensely useful to look at specific discourses within different groups.

It needs to be noted that members of citizens' initiatives who became active in civil society in the past years still perceive themselves as part of a minority within society. However, within movements, participants are very much aware that there are other initiatives and have noticed their increasing number as well as a general eagerness to do voluntary work. The citizens' initiative *Alternative Tours of Athens* has reacted to the growing body of social movements in recent years by initiating a thematic tour for tourists only on this matter while other tours, for example, are dedicated to architecture, street art, nightlife, arts and crafts (ATA 2015). However, certainly there are also fragmentations between groups with a more ideological background like solidarity groups and others who are more active in aesthetic urban interventions, like for example Atenistas.

7.1 Materiality - Locality - Identity

> *"Thus, so emerged the paradox of increasingly local politics in a world structured by increasingly global processes. There was production of meaning and identity: my neighborhood, my community, my city, my school, my tree, my river, my beach, my chapel, my peace, my environment." (Castells 1997:61)*

In previous chapters I have outlined the "urban crisis" of Athens as well as the economic crisis resulting in a material degradation of the city. At first sight, the most striking reason to become active can be found within participants' daily materialities that have suffered under these circumstances and constantly remind to a state of exception. However, there are many more processes active behind the most apparent reasons.

In solidarity groups such as the *Metropolitan clinic of Elliniko, O Allos Anthropos* and *Mirmigi*, factors for participants to become active are very much linked with materialities in terms of material needs (providing food, maintaining health) arising out of the consequences of economic crisis and austerity, in the terms of Castells collective consumption or in Escobar's (1992:412) words *"struggles over economic means of*

survival". This perspective also entails that they are struggling over cultural meanings as well, which is a point that I will deal with later on. However, it became clear that also participants of initiatives who didn't have (large) financial problems themselves, felt very much affected by the crisis. One member of a solidarity group recalled a feeling of shame because she was better off financially than her social environment, which was an important factor to become active. Thus material needs are not necessarily the ones of the participants themselves, unless they are also beneficiaries of their activities. I will go further into detail on issues of mutuality and solidarity in the following chapter, as these prove to be a highly ideological topic within civil society.

Issues of materiality also apply to groups active in urban regeneration, like *Atenistas* or *Place Identity* whose activities are strongly linked to ties with the local and urban space that they aim to reconfigure. But also within groups closely related to their neighborhood like *Mirmigi* and the numerous other active neighborhood movements in Athens*, or within oral history groups, reclaiming rights to their immediate locality in a "Lefebvrian" sense of regaining a right to (their part of) the city play a significant role. As for example *O Allos Anthropos* have experienced, their cooking on the street was not accepted at first.

Gerodimos (2015) has stated that through the activity a process of empowerment takes place and public space attains a dual role. Within the context of crisis, individuals undergo positive situations of social interaction and relaxation, while these experiences are embodied within the collective memory *"[...] which is then projected back onto the place itself. Hence, citizens become co-producers of the community's historical narrative and get emotionally attached to it."* (Gerodimos 2015:97) Through acting in a local sphere the mentioned grassroots initiatives transform urban meanings and affect collective memory. As Castells points out, this effect goes beyond the participants themselves:

> *"[...] in many instances, regardless of the explicit achievements of the movement, its very existence produced meaning, not only for the movement's participants, but for the community at large. And not only during the lifespan of the movement (usually brief), but in the collective memory of the locality." (Castells 1997:61)*

Moreover, I found that these urban regeneration and neighborhood activities negotiate and boost matters of local identity as (building on Castells (1997:60)) participating in local communities and collective action create a feeling of belonging that can become an important source of identities.

7.2 Participation - Empowerment

As I have indicated in previous chapters, grassroots mobilizations in Athens are deeply rooted in a perceived crisis of legitimacy towards how the country used to be governed as well as a crisis of political responsibility (Habermas 1976, della Porta 2015). However, I think these feelings did not only arise in a recent anti-austerity context but they have to be perceived in the light of Greek history. As much as political and civic participation within the Greek state apart from voting, protesting (and clientelist practices) hasn't been the norm, the *possibility* of participatory practices was not very high on the agenda which has to do with the rather short and interrupted history of Greek democracy. Discourses about social justice became very eminent during the 2008 demonstrations in Athens on a broad level, and as Omikron member and political scientist Konstantina Zöhrer points out, again during the protests in 2011 it was this topic and direct democracy that was very much negotiated on public spaces as well as possibilities to participate more within society:

> *"Die Diskussionen, die ich gehört habe bei den Indignados am Syntagma-Platz gingen eigentlich nicht wirklich um die Krise. Es ging um soziale Gerechtigkeit, es ging um: 'Wo sind wir schuld, was können wir machen?'. Und ein Teil von den Leuten tut ja wirklich das, was sie besprochen haben damals. Es sind wirklich nicht alle, aber du kannst ein Land nicht in zwei, drei Jahren ändern."* (Konstantina Zöhrer, Interview 27)

Social justice discourses are highly formative for the groups I have encountered. This did for example show in open approaches to minorities and in general a worldview largely inspired by egalitarianism. Furthermore, all of the groups I have portrayed have a highly participatory approach (as well as a large quantity of other recent civic activity in Greece) and most of them stress direct democracy or consensual decision-making as opposed to delegation of power. Through that, they follow how della Porta and Diani (2006:141) define social movement organizations.

Through becoming active in civil society, members of these groups share their claim for a right to participate; whether it's about cooking a meal, reshaping the neighborhood, participating on a national and political level, or in terms of reconfiguring the historical narrative. Almost all of my interview partners criticized the specific features of Greek mentality, that citizens do not feel responsible for matters around them, and to only care about the private but not the public space. Nevertheless, people who have been involved in *Atenistas* as well as Amalia Zepou, the vice mayor for civil society, emphasized that they have already begun to see a (small but steady) change of mentality within Greek society

resulting from grassroots engagement. This also corresponds with the statement of a member of an international development organization in Greece who said that with the economic crisis many people have started to realize their *"universal identity as citizens"* (Clarke 2015:77). Thus, within the groups a new way of acting within the public sphere on a voluntary level is negotiated.

Moreover, I want to point towards the empowering dimension of participatory practices. During interviews, many participants have recalled a feeling of powerlessness or even "depression" resulting from the crisis or the perceived inability to act before they had become active or founded a group. These statements were contrasted with very positive accounts of the successes of their initiative, and personal feelings of accomplishment. Theodossopoulos (2016:14) speaks about the *"emancipatory euphoria"* of the participatory experience within solidarity groups. Building on Theodossopoulos' (2013) observation that through external blaming tactics within anti-austerity protests the crisis becomes less threatening, I observed that it is the voluntary work in these grassroots groups which provides members with the opportunity to regain agency, empowerment and control over a feeling of peripheralization within the crisis or within the Greek state which is perceived as malfunctioning. However, in some cases (*Mirmigi, O Allos Anthropos, Metropolitan Clinic of Elliniko*) this feeling of peripheralization was tied to austerity and a perceived foreign influence as well. Theodossopoulos' (2016) informants saw their practice of cooking food for people in need as indirect resistance to the crisis in order to escape its paralyzing effects. This also applies for members of solidarity initiatives in my fieldwork.

7.3 Renegotiating Values - Social Bonds - Voluntary Work

> *"[...] people are beginning to think a bit differently about what is important and what is not." (Maria Petinaki, Interview 11)*

The new grassroots groups embody a manifestation of a change of sets of moral values. I already pointed out that the meanings underlying the material activity of these groups all entail something deeper: While urban regeneration and neighborhood activities negotiate and boost matters of local identity, solidarity networks have a deep ideological foundation which goes far beyond material actions, as Rakopoulos pointed out (2014:189) and whose meanings are tied to the very term solidarity.

I found that in all of the studied groups a specific set of values became prevalent. Thereby collective agency is formed. As Snow points out, *"shared perceptions of a common cause, threat or fate"* (2001:3314) that *"motivate people to act together in the name of, or for the sake of, the interests of the collectivity"* (2001:2214) build up collective agency, which moreover can result in collective identity.

While the presented citizens' initiatives might have different fields of activity and different ideological backgrounds, there is not only a set of values shared within groups but between all of these groups, consisting of postmaterialistic values in the first place. However, in order for collective agency, and consequently collective identity to arise, it needs an understanding of a common cause between these groups. In many cases, mostly within solidarity groups, this understanding to be a coherent movement has already started.

Many members of grassroots groups saw their activity or the goals of their initiatives as alternative models for how society can organize itself. For example Giorgos Vichas from the *Metropolitan Clinic of Elliniko* perceived it as a big success that through the fact that solidarity clinics were able to run without money or a legal structure it became apparent that society in general could function on these terms.

But rather than ideologically locating themselves within a political tradition which can be also seen in the fact that all of the groups stressed to work beyond political parties, these new grassroots groups have a more pragmatic approach. Following Leontidou (2015:97) with this in mind, grassroots groups constitute social movements in the sense of Castells, as they favor goals for alternative values and ways of life, rather than political power

Moreover, I argue that people's conceptions of life and the values considered important have changed through their voluntary activity in citizens' groups as well. All of my informants have recounted the personal experience of a change in mind-set, but moreover the observation that the crisis has resulted in a shift of values in their social environment as well. In particular, with a strong belief in the value of meaningful relationships and trust between members as well as new social bonds being made, post-materialistic values and a high feeling of morality came to the fore.

To give an example, one interview partner had become active in three different citizens' projects within the last years, since the economic situation had resulted in significantly less work in her professional job as an architect, and she now found time to engage in these

activities what wouldn't had been possible before. This was something other people involved in grassroots groups reported as well. She said that although she has to sustain herself with significantly less money than before, her life has become much more interesting during the crisis and she was thankful for making these experiences. This example correlates to personal accounts of almost everybody else I spoke to, who was engaged in citizens' projects and illustrates a general change of mind-set. In addition, many participants referred, also self-critically, to a consumerist way of life being replaced by other life-practices and their professional jobs not feeling as meaningful as before.

> *"I think because of the crisis the state of mind of all the Greeks has changed a bit and they try to find pleasure and a meaning in things like connecting with other people and not too much in material, in stuff; getting a new home, a fast car." (Tasos Chalkiopoulos, Atenistas; Interview 6)*

Especially, as the crisis has a deep impact on the social frame, with insecure prospects on employment and social security in the future, and feelings of trust towards political institutions such as the state and/or the European union are shattered, the value of meaningful relationships and social bonds becomes important for members of citizens' initiatives. In light of moral economy, I would like to introduce Andrew Sayer's concept of lay morality. Accordingly, people's well being in life depends on material resources as much as on social dimensions (Bolton / Laaser 2013:516).

In her research on emerging solidarity economy in Greece, Lisa Mittendrein came to the conclusion that in all of the projects studied, members stressed the enormous importance of the factor *community.* Functioning community and rewarding social relations massively contribute to the integration and, indeed the solidarity within the projects. The wish of belonging to a group and to create meaning is particularly essential in the context of the crisis. Consequently, succeeding in this field can help to cope with the psychological and social effects of the crisis (Mittendrein 2013:177).

It has to be noted that in my fieldwork also people who don't see themselves in a specific solidarity context (such as *Atenistas)* pointed out in interviews that their voluntary activity has brought them closer together to people they didn't know before and helped them to create new social bonds and form trust. Members of *Atenistas* and *O Allos Anthropos* highlighted that their groups have become like family. Also based on other fieldwork experiences, it seems that within voluntary activity kinship-like social bonds are formed.

Building on Catherine Alexander (2010:220), I defined voluntary work as a gift of time and effort. Referring to Marcel Mauss (1967[1923]:10), giving a gift always entails giving something of yourself as well. Therefore, the transfer of a possession (in the case of my fieldwork: time and effort) in terms of gift giving can create powerful social bonds (ibid.). Giving gifts and accepting them constitute social relations (Mauss 1967 [1923]:27). Moreover, they *"create alliances and obligations between individuals or groups who might otherwise have nothing to do with one another."* (Graeber 2001:27) This is something that I could observe in Athens as well and that many participants underlined, that people from diverse social backgrounds worked together within initiatives, not only between beneficiaries and participants but in general. For example former EU employees and refugees, leftist intellectual retired pensioners and unemployed construction workers, artists and homeless people mixed up in these initiatives. What's moreover interesting for the context of my fieldwork is that, according to Mauss, gift giving is neither associated with making a profit nor achieving a moral triumph (ibid.).

By observing the particular significance of social relations that were built within (and between) the grassroots groups in my case study, I came to the conclusion that their activities cannot only be perceived as social movement organizations but that they also need to be seen from the perspective of human economies. These refer to a category *"where the primary focus of economic life is on reconfiguring relations between people, rather than the allocation of commodities."* (Graeber 2012:411) In a modern context, economy moved beyond serving the material survival only, which is why cultural needs have been included in its scope in order to *"serve the common good"* (Hart 2010:6) in general. Vathakou observed in her research on solidarity initiatives that because initiatives were perceived as serving the *"common good"* (2015:177) members got a strong sense of ownership about their initiatives, a heavy commitment and a feeling of personal profit.

Amitai Etzioni, Robert Putnam and other scholars emphasized how volunteering in various associations and organizations correlates with high levels of trust which is also central to the concept of social capital (Clarke 2015:72). According to Etzioni, the motivating factors for citizens' voluntary participation lie in a middle way between state and market:

> *"[...] whereas the state has coercive power and the market negotiates agreements, voluntary groups function through shared values and consensual decision-making." (Alexander 2010: 216)*

Of course, the reasons why people participate in voluntary labor are manifold as became clear in chapter 6. On a practical level, Alexander points out that working on a voluntary basis sometimes implicates being unwilling or *unable* to rejoin the mainstream labor market (Alexander 2010:220), the latter being a crucial point given the background of a severe economic crisis with soaring unemployment rates while the first seems irrelevant in this context. This certainly applied for some members of grassroots groups in Athens that they engaged in voluntary activity because they had time due to unemployment, most of them within solidarity networks, but solely having no job obviously can't serve as an explanation.

Several studies have demonstrated that people tend to volunteer when they have feelings of solidarity with victims of a disaster. Furthermore, feelings of solidarity increase if people have been affected themselves or live in close locality to those affected (Clarke 2015:73). The term "everyday communism" coined by David Graeber describes these processes really well:

> *"As an expectation of mutual aid, communism in this sense can be seen as the foundation of all human sociality anywhere; as a principle of co-operation, it emerges spontaneously in times of crisis; as solidarity, it underlies almost all relations of social trust." (Graeber 2010:200)*

In situations of major disasters (*"flood, blackout, revolution or economic collapse"* (Graber 2010:206) everyday communism appears as the baseline of all human sociality:

> *"Anyone who has lived through such a moment can speak to its peculiar qualities, the way that strangers become sisters and brothers and human society itself seems to be reborn." (Graeber 2010:206)*

Particularly food can become a means of maintaining social bonds, as *"[...] sharing food is indeed still considered to be the foundation of morality [...]"* (Graeber 2010:207) which was very noticeable during my fieldwork at *O Allos Anthropos* and *Mirmigi.* Particularly in the first group, eating together became a highly symbolic, egalitarian act which was further underlined through founder Polychronopoulos' emphasis that everybody is invited to join, no matter if they could actually afford a meal or not.

Building on results from social movements theory (della Porta / Diani 2006:142), I am convinced that participatory structures are an important factor why many people stay active in these groups as they foster internal solidarity. As material resources are often scarce, symbolic resources come to the fore, turning collective action itself into the

intrinsic reward for participation. As Taylor and Melucci noted, small groups held together by personal relations last during periods of latency, as much as formal organizations do (della Porta / Diani 2006:141). Moreover, within small, cohesive groups of activists there are often already existing social relationships, a "sense of a common good" develops and in the face of direct, egalitarian relationships among its members emotional support, integration, sharing of sacrifice and expression of shared identities are easier: *"Thus, an all-embracing participation tends to permeate every aspect of activists' everyday lives"* *(della Porta / Diani 2006:142)*

7.4 *Discourse* Solidarity vs. Philanthropy

> *"It's not philanthropy. It's solidarity." (Konstantinos Polychronopoulos, O Allos Anthropos; Interview 4)*

During my fieldwork one specific discourse recurred again and again which turned out to be a highly segregating issue within citizens' initiatives that deal with humanitarian aid and helping people in need due to the crisis: Between philanthropic and solidarity approaches. The importance of this issue became particularly clear as interview partners from solidarity networks emphasized that their activities cannot be attributed to philanthropy. Instead mutuality, participation and a horizontal approach are stressed:

> *"Philanthropy is from up to down. People who have, give to people who don't have. Solidarity is horizontal, Whether you have or you don't have, it is the same. Solidarity is like sacrificing. I sacrifice my time, my money. my sleep. Even the things I have to eat, my food." (Konstantinos Polychronopoulos, Interview 4)*

Philanthropy, with its one-way, top-down character, implies that one party holds the economic power *"providing for those who do not"* (Vathakou 2015:173). Also philanthropic activities of businesses are rejected.

Instead, members of groups endorse an egalitarian, participatory approach where beneficiaries can work or take part in the activities without any distinction as can be best illustrated in the example of *O Allos Anthropos.* Through that, social solidarity attains an ideological approach and becomes part of a wider political movement aiming at constructing alternative forms of social and economic life (Sotiropoulos / Bourikos 2014:52). Groups like *Atenistas* who engage in similar humanitarian activities than their

counterparts but without a specific solidarity discourse and a clear top-down distinction between members and recipients are thus regarded with suspicion by people supporting a solidarity approach.

Laville (2015:51) emphasized that democratic solidarity and philanthropy have often been confused. Thereby, social action is reduced to a voluntary giving that reminds of state and business practices similar to corporate social responsibility. Instead, by proposing a Maussian approach, solidarity should be regarded as resting *"on a particular relationship between reciprocity and redistribution, between the voluntary collective actions of equal citizens and the state's attempts to redress inequalities."* (Laville 2015:52)

Within solidarity groups, rather than understanding themselves as volunteers, members refer to themselves as *"kinimatikos",* a term formerly connected with an anarchist background that following the *indignados* movement was first also used by people who considered themselves as part of a broader social movement. *"Kinimatikos"* can be understood as *"an individual actively involved in social movements and translated as 'activist'"* (Vathakou 2015:177).

Some Greek citizens with a left political background criticize voluntary social action from a Marxist perspective that humanitarianism rationalizes passivity of the state and philanthropy perpetuates the conditions responsible for inequality (Theodossopoulos 2016). One of my interview partners described the discursive fault line like this: That when groups just do voluntary work, they don't put pressure on the government to do it. Following this perspective, voluntary labor can be classified as the process *"producing the active responsible citizen demanded by neoliberal ideology."* (Alexander 2010:220)

7.5 Greek History

Here I would like to come back to discursive processings of Greek history within grassroots groups which prove to be a highly relevant topic in today's Athens as can be seen in the success of oral history groups. Having conducted field research on crisis narratives in Trikala, central Greece, Daniel Knight observed that the crisis has raised narratives of identification with previous historical crises in Greece such as the Great Famine of 1941 to 1943 during World War II, periods of foreign rule under the Ottomans and the Germans or the military dictatorship (Knight 2012a). Apart from the Ottoman era

all of these periods are also issues of research within oral history groups. Moreover, within *Mirmigi* and the movement of the neighbors of the 6th district of Athens parallels between the current crisis and the situation in Athens during the occupation of Germany during World War II had been the focus of an event. As Daniel Knight argues, also past crises can become relevant again in times of crisis and raise issues of polytemporality (Knight 2012b):

> *"Crisis is embedded and embodied throughout generations in the form of collective memory, personal narratives, and state-endorsed historical rhetoric. (Knight 2012a:354)*

During times of crisis or social upheaval past critical events or recollections of former crises turn into general reference points for individual and collective history and are anew called into being. Thus these events suddenly become very close both socially and historically (Knight 2012a:351-355):

> *"Memory is employed as a 'historic resource' that lends meaning to unusual and sometimes inexplicable contemporary events and can also reassure people that the current crisis is 'overcomable'." (Knight 2012a:357)*

This also applies to the grassroots group as also Tasoula Vervenioti has pointed out. The historical research gives people the opportunity to reimagine a better future. While Knight has pointed to the danger that nationalist discourses could arise through such practices (In Trikala people turned to narratives they already knew from their families, which they have learned during their education curriculum or through media representations (Knight 2012a:362)), the fact that within oral history groups participants deal with past events on an academic level certainly makes a difference.

Another group that referred to history, although not in the context of crisis, was *Place Identity* within their project *Politeia 2.0* that aims at boosting democracy and developing a new constitution for Greece through citizens' participation. One of their goals is that Athens should re-establish its title as "Cradle of Democracy", through that referring to the history of democracy within ancient Greece and perpetuating a representation that Herzfeld (2011:25) termed the *"West's image of the ancient glories"*. A *"nationalist undertone"* that Theodossopoulos (2014:502) has often located in such discourses which recur to the Greek ancient past can however be ruled out in this case.

7.6 Crisis Discourses and Identity

It needs to me mentioned that in most cases members of grassroots groups referred to the economic crisis in a different and a more nuanced way than the extreme narratives used by political parties, media or anti-austerity protestors cited in chapter 4.4.4. As much as reclaiming a right to the city seemed to be an important aspect for some groups, reclaiming a right to at least part of the discursive formations around recent events in Greece became another relevant topic. Stereotyping and incorrect media narratives have proved to be very present in participant's minds and were regarded as unfair. (Leontidou (2014) had compared those to Orientalist discourses in Said's terms.) For example within *Omikron Project* or *O Allos Anthropos* it was perceived as unfair that Greek people had become internationally depicted as not working enough, thus being represented as "lazy", although Greeks (sometimes) receive less salary. In fact, as Omikron members pointed out, according to EU statistics the productivity in Greece is low, and not the amount of work.

Building on Hall (2007) and Jenkins (1994), stereotypical representations and externally located processes of social categorization clearly affect how (cultural) identity is constituted, as much as internal definitions do. Moreover, previous research has shown that the nature of civic actions and initiatives are influenced by communication practices and media representations (Alevizou 2015). Giota Alevizou, having done research on representations of the Greek crisis as a media scholar, holds that a large part of media coverage on anti-austerity projects in Southern Europe unjustifiably saw political populism as their moving force and failed to represent emerging citizens' participation as a *"genuinely alternative response to Europe's fiscal Odyssey"* (Alevizou 2015).

As outlined in chapter 4.4.3, the crisis brought deep cracks on notions of identity in Greece and reshuffled matters of cultural identities (Leontidou 2012). Building on Knight (2013), at present, national identity can be defined by crisis. As people's everyday life has been transformed due to austerity measures and recession, this had an impact on identities. Moreover, as Greece came into the focus of global media attention, essentialized media discourses have constituted an attack on conceptions of cultural and national identity.

Thus, I argue that within the citizens' initiatives the negotiation of local (as in neighborhood and urban regeneration projects) and cultural identity has become important. As outlined in chapter 7.3, the voluntary work performed within grassroots group is a

source of identity construction as it gives a sense of collective agency and collective identity.

One source of shared collective identity within the grassroots groups in my sample strongly depend on boundaries to the political right. Building on the identity process of othering (Gingrich 2004), it seems that specifically *Chrysi Avgi* and affiliated (philanthropic) groups evoked a shared collective identity, as groups specifically emphasized that they are open for all members or beneficiaries, independently from their national origin.

Moreover, I could observe that for *Omikron Project*, and to a lesser extent groups like *Atenistas* or *Place Identity* the image of Greece and/or Athens became a motivation to become active. In *Atenistas'* case the (aesthetic) image on inhabitants and tourists in the city and local identity rather seems to be important as well as issues of safety within the city. In contrast, the two other mentioned initiatives were very aware about representations of their country abroad and saw their activities as an effort to correct these (false) discourses. While *Omikron Project* tackles the image in foreign media as such, *Place Identity's* activities in terms of political participation and reconstructing the state reach deeper as they aim to institutionally change the corrupt and undemocratic structures they deem responsible for the (image) crisis of Greece. However, they perceive these institutional problems within the state as relevant factors why the debt and economic crisis has been possible. Ahead of the crisis there has been no public consciousness for them.

Finally, I would like to draw the attention to another aspect of identity. Building on Castells' (1997:7-11) terms, I found that within grassroots citizens' groups *project identities* have emerged from *resistance identities*.

Whereas *legitimizing identities* are introduced by dominant institutions of society, resistance and project identities represent antagonist forms of identity.

Resistance identity emerges when positions are devalued and stigmatized. They are much connected with communities, identity movements and politics. Forms of resistance against oppression are negotiated through resistance identities. Faced with processes of exclusion, defensive identities pop up, as in religious fundamentalism or in nationalism.

Project identities arise when social actors construct a new identity that redefines their societal position and, by that, aim at the transformation of the whole social structure and,

in consequence, the project of a different life. Project identities produce subjects. The building of project identity is sometimes based on oppressed identities as in the example of the feminist movement that steps out of the "trenches" of resistance identity towards a post-patriarchal society. As identities are fluid, they can start as resistance identities, change to project identities and develop into legitimizing identities as they become dominant in the institutions of society.

While within anti-austerity movements resistance identities became apparent through protest, as Himanen (2012) argues, the daily work within the citizens' initiatives represents a shift to project identity as new materialities, new values and new meaning (one could also say a positive narrative, in contrast to mere protest) are produced and reproduced.

Part III: Implications and Conclusion

8. Implications: Between Grassroots, Civil Society and Politics

Already for a long time there has been an extensive theoretical but also sometimes ideological debate on how to define civil society, what it should include, and what its goals are; and the case of recent grassroots activity in Athens illustrate that these discourses are highly up-to-date. This chapter will try to contextualize different theoretical concepts that can be used to present the activities within the introduced citizens' initiatives and deal with ideological and political implications of these activities.

The grassroots initiatives I encountered in Athens operate in the realm of civil society although they can be labeled as social movements or social movement organizations, as they are in conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents. Actors are linked by dense informal networks and actors share a specific collective identity (della Porta / Diani 2006:20). In all of the groups the "opponents" were different and sometimes rather vague compared to classical social movements (In solidarity groups those were the state and/or the troika who are deemed responsible for reasons why groups arose, undemocratic features of society and state in particular within *Place Identity*, unbalanced media discourses (*Omikron Project)*, the former lack of creative potential and citizen responsibility within the city (*Atenistas)* or hegemonic historical narratives (*Oral History Groups))*. It needs to be conceded that oral history groups are thus rather at the brink of being a social movement within this definition.

While it becomes clear that some of the activities of the presented groups clearly can be considered within the social movement-context of anti-austerity protests, they also carry aspects of new social movements, as groups struggle *"[...] for control over the production of meaning and the constitution of new collective identities."* (Canel 1997:189).

Also in my fieldwork it became visible what della Porta and Diani (2006:144) have observed that self-help groups are more often informal, decentralized or totalizing while on the other side associations which offer services to a wider public tend more to a formal structure, hierarchical power relations within the group and a fusion of symbolic and (very seldom) instrumental incentives.

Catherine Alexander stresses that times of economic recession bear possible dangers for the third sector in terms of less government funding and less private philanthropy (Alexander 2010:223). Whereas the first point could be observed in Athens, the latter didn't prove to be true in the case of Greece.

Laville (2010:225) criticizes the hierarchy within public discourse following the dominant theories of institutional choice which rigidly distinguishes between the state, the market and the non-for-profit sector ranking the latter as the second or third option when market or state have failed to provide services. Thus, the context of the Greek economic crisis - where market and state have *indeed* failed to provide services - has a contradictory potential: On the one hand third sector groups will get less public support, but on the other hand governments might rely on them and their social capital in order to get certain tasks done.

Following Laville (2010:234), a crucial question is whether democratic processes within civil society can strengthen the democratization of public institutions - and vice versa. From an institutional point of view, many scholars, mostly political scientists, stress the state's role in strengthening civil society: *"[A] strong, active and supportive state can greatly encourage the development of a vibrant civil society"* (Huliaras 2014:16). According to data from the Civicus Civil Society Index, well-functioning political institutions are a main predictor for strong civil society (ibid.). This finding has interesting implications for the case of Greece where, notoriously, political institutions tend to function inefficiently. Many authors highlight how NGOs (and much less social movement organizations) could successfully combat clientelism and family networks in Greece (Leontidou 2015:85).

On a practical level, scholars indicated that grassroots movements can use their potential of voluntary reciprocity of self-organization in order to restrain the power of corporate capitalism by forming alliances with public policy (Hart et al. 2010:11) and therefore become a corrective to markets.

Drawing on Antonio Gramsci's Marxist conceptualization, civil society is no idyllic condition but rather a contested space, where both bourgeois hegemony *and* resistance against it are organized (Krieger 1993:67). In opposition to the definition of civil society that is prevalent in political and public discourses today, Gramsci includes political parties in civil society (Castells 1997:8-9). It is the space of possible emancipation, where

individual and social subjects are constituted. What happens in the realm of civil society determines whether the majority of the population will support the political and the economical system or not. Still, this doesn't happen without outside influence. The ruling class or group will always try to manipulate civil society institutions according to their use for affirmation and consensus building (Metscher 1993:39-40).This approach suggests that not only specific activities of the municipality of Athens concerning *SynAthina* and establishing a vice mayor for civil society could be critically scrutinized but also *SYRIZA*'s support for solidarity groups.

David Harvey points out that historically non-governmental and grassroots organizations have increased significantly in a context of neoliberalism, suggesting that civil society is the *"powerhouse"* of oppositional politics and social transformation:

> *"The period in which the neoliberal state has become hegemonic has also been the period in which the concept of civil society—often cast as an entity in opposition to state power—has become central to the formulation of oppositional politics." (Harvey 2007:78)*

As mentioned earlier, civil society is indeed difficult to grasp and shouldn't be romanticized or unquestioningly assumed as authentic (Ferguson / Gupta 2002:990) nor seen as a coherent, homogenous, monolithic block without exclusions, dominations and fragmentations. Independence from market or state control can only be a normative goal. In reality, civil society is Janus faced, as Michael Burawoy points out. It can both bolster the expansion of the realm of state and market, but it can also contain it (Burawoy 2015:10).

The political dimension as well as anti-government, anti-consumerist or anti-capitalist ideas play an important role within many groups, although, by that, groups could become monopolized (Sotiropoulos / Bourikos 2014:44), something that I have indicated in the chapter about grassroots groups and political actors:

> *"[...] the fact that such organizations add an ideological dimension to their social solidarity activities creates a risk of a different kind, namely the possibility that they are patronized and coordinated by one of the political parties with which they share an ideological affinity. The risk is that, in this respect, they may be turned into a front organization of a political party." (Sotiropoulos / Bourikos 2014:49)*

This risk was something groups were very aware about. For example, *Mirmigi* or the *Metropolitan clinic of Elliniko* had therefore decided to keep political affiliations outside the initiative's activities.

The concept of community participation seen from the perspective of public policy discourse is particularly interesting. Fostered in the 1990s as a *"counterbalance to the state"* (Taylor 2010:238), it should provide an antidote against ever-more-powerful markets and individualism provoked by a neoliberal agenda (ibid.). According to Marilyn Taylor (2010:240-241), five concerns of policy are significant for the growth of considerations about community participation: First, a crisis of development around the globe led policymakers to draw attention beyond the state to the population. Secondly, radical service reforms caused cracks in the welfare systems, resulting in governments looking towards communities. Originally inspired by neoliberal philosophy, the inclusion of communities and the third sector in the provision of mainstream services has become a key topic in public discourse, resulting in considerations about social economy and social enterprises. Third, community participation is considered to tackle democracy deficits by involving citizens in questions of governance. The fourth concern includes moral aspects and reacts to an increasing fragmentation: More and more populations are confronted with displacement. Immigration in communities increases or provokes tensions. Furthermore, economic restructuring led to the geographical concentration of unemployment, low income, bad health and associated social problems mainly in poor, isolated neighborhoods. Moreover, growing consumerism and individualization resulted in a perceived loss of community and fragmentation.

Perhaps paradoxically, as a fourth factor, globalization fostered ideas about community participation. In an era where nation states gradually lose control *"with supranational institutions sucking power upwards, people are seeking a renewed sense of identity and control at local rather than national level"* (Taylor 2010:241). Meanwhile, observers note a shift from "government", where power is in the center, to multi-level "governance", reacting to the insight shaped in the (neoliberal), globalized era that *"[...] the state no longer has the resources, legitimacy or knowledge to govern on its own."* (Taylor 2010:241), This corresponds to what happened in Athens through grassroots groups. With their knowledge from voluntary activity, citizens upgrade the infrastructure of the city with simpler solutions than the previous ones. This is something the city starts to use.

"At the moment, I have the impression that citizens are more developed than the state and the municipality mechanisms. Those still belong to the past century."
(Amalia Zepou, Interview 2)

Moreover, as can be observed in Athens, groups like *Atenistas* come back to their sites of urban regeneration on an annual basis in order to preserve them, similar to what municipalities would do. For public bodies supporting and co-operating with these groups have historically offered instrumental possibilities:

"Certainly, in forming alliances with the third sector, governments emphasize its grassroots legitimacy, creativity and ability to kick-start local economic development drawing on social capital." *(Alexander 2010:222)*

This insight that the state lacks resources opened up debates on the large potential for communities to participate in policies shaping their neighborhoods. But, of course, this discourse has also triggered criticism for its utopian claim that community participation can achieve anything up to everything. Others criticize that communities shouldn't co-opt into this agenda (Taylor 2010:242). Moreover, observers have pointed towards the fact that some *"community leaders"* act as *"gatekeepers"* (ibid.), rather resulting in an exclusion of the community roots than its inclusion. Leadership, expertise and widespread participation are always in a field of tension:

"They suggest that new processes of governance are creating 'expert citizens', with community leaders or representatives becoming increasingly divorced from their constituencies as they learn the new rules and languages of the game." *(Taylor 2010:242)*

Also della Porta and Diani pointed to the consequences of collaboration with authorities for grassroots groups: While public recognition, access to decision-making procedures and public grants may constitute success or substantial resources for the movement, the integration into established systems of interest can weaken the capacity to mobilize people, alienate supporters, and thus impair the whole movement (della Porta / Diani 2006:146). This became visible when the city of Athens won a prize at the so-called Mayor's Challenge of former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg where members of a NPO had contributed to the tender. Athens was under the first five places and won a prize money of one million euro. After that, group members were confronted with criticism for their collaboration with the municipality and several people, some of them also active within civil society, questioned their authenticity as a politically independent group.

Within theoretical debates, critics also witnessed state players gradually turning against community participation, provoking that community participants in partnerships with the public body feel marginalized or even ignored in their expertise (Taylor 2010:242-243). Founded on Michel Foucault's notion of *governmentality "governing is happening at distance from the state"* (Taylor 2010:243). Still, although no coercive control is applied, "the rules of engagement" are those of the elite.

> *"Thus, Foucault has argued that forms of power beyond the state can often sustain the state more effectively than its own institutions, enlarging and maximizing its effectiveness." (Taylor 2010:243)*

Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari have even called participation *"the new tyranny"*, not only because of its high expectations but also since the concept is often manipulated or misapplied by people who take part in it (Taylor 2010:243). Community participation runs into danger of reproducing the conditions they are fighting against:

> *"[...] they could get sucked into existing patterns of power and influence, losing their distinctive voice and ceasing to represent those who are most marginalized in society." (Taylor 2010:244)*

It appeared that groups with no formal structure or groups dealing with marginalized groups in society such as *O Allos Anthropos* or *Mirmigi* had a continuing influx of new members. In general, della Porta and Diani argue that the ability to mobilize diminishes with growing professionalization, an organizational structure and when social movement organizations have to entirely rely on fundraising and attracting financial resources (della Porta / Diani 2006:146).

Within a community that is gradually becoming a site of governance, in the words of Nikolas Rose, its *"language of resistance"* transforms into an expert discourse (Taylor 2010:243). Governmentality theorists have criticized that community mainly is *"prescribed just for the poor"* (Taylor 2010:243), ironically making them responsible for their own destiny but without providing them with the resources or the control needed in order to substantially change matters (ibid.).

In an era where community actions gradually tend to happen according to an agenda of the state, partnerships with authorities can be questioned (Taylor 2010:245). John Gaventa and Andrea Cornwall coined the distinction between *"invited governance spaces"* and *"created"* or *"popular spaces"*, the latter located by the communities themselves (Taylor

2010:244). In my fieldwork, some grassroots group members (such as from *Alternative Tours of Athens, Place Identity* or *Atenistas*) recalled that they had been asked by the municipality to regenerate urban places, although it needs to be said that a significant amount of these groups' activities has taken place on "created" or "popular spaces" as well and not all of the "invitations" of the municipality had worked out in the end. On the other hand, *Atenistas* have invented a tool through which citizens can call attention to public space that needs maintenance. Taylor argues that negative aspects shouldn't move the focus from the positive potential for community participation and governing "from below" which, in some cases, have arisen from social movement traditions (Taylor 2010:244-245).

Observers and informants have pointed to the development that already economic entrepreneurialism has arisen out of voluntary grassroots activity in Athens (e.g. in terms of tourism), and that this could be a strand of future economic growth in Greece, which goes beyond third sector and social economy development. According to a *New York Times'* list on *"52 Places to Go in 2014"* Athens is *"surging back", illustrating* that *"vibrancy and innovation can even bloom in hard times"* (Williams 2014). In recent months other international magazines like *National Geographic* or the German *Die Zeit* have already compared Athens to Berlin due to the large creative potential of citizens' activity (Nicolson 2015). *New York Times* also pointed towards gentrification processes having taken place in Athens. One interview partner told me that already someone had jokingly pointed to her that the annual carnival parade she and other citizens use to organize in the neighborhood of *Metaxourgio* since a few years had been a contributing factor for gentrification processes in this area. The activity of grassroots groups might have indeed upgraded neighborhoods in public perception in recent years, such as in *Psiri* where a few of the initiatives have been active that I examined. Nevertheless within the scope of the fieldwork done it would go too far to state whether these activities can be seen as directly responsible for gentrification processes in the sense of financial upgrading of properties.

In conclusion, Sotiropoulos and Bourikos argue that both formal and informal civil society groups couldn't cover the large social gaps the receding Greek welfare state has left. However, volunteer citizen groups have been conducive for a rise of social solidarity in Greece (Sotiropoulos / Bourikos 2014:34) as well as overall civil society mobilization has been able to deepen democracy and social cohesion (Sotiropoulos 2014:11). Some authors argue that it is too soon to assess whether these developments within civil society will

continue after the crisis (Sotiropoulos et al. 2015:243). However, Clarke estimates that the number of volunteers will decrease when the effects of the crisis have softened (Clarke 2015:79).

9. Conclusion and Outlook

This thesis had the goal of dealing with citizens' initiatives in Athens which emerged on a grassroots level after the so-called debt or economic crisis had become prevalent in Greece after 2009. I examined why members founded and continued to be active within grassroots citizens' groups, and also investigated the role of the post-2009 crisis for engaging in these initiatives. I tried to look at this crisis in its processual multidimensionality, with several implications on numerous aspects of life which go beyond economic aspects (for example concerning matters of social life or identity). Furthermore, I studied the discourses that were decisive for having become active within respective groups and that were articulated and negotiated within the initiatives' activities.

In particular, I examined seven groups engaging on a voluntary level in different fields of activity: in terms of urban regeneration and cultural interventions (*Atenistas, Place Identity)*, aiming at political remodeling and citizens' participation (*Place Identity)*, media work (*Omikron Project)*, oral history research and the provision of food (*Mirmigi, Allos Anthropos)* and health services *(Metropolitan Clinic of Elliniko)* and, through that, neighborly help as well. These initiatives were selected through theoretical sampling. All of the studied groups are participatory, with a non-for-profit focus, founded by private persons with no political affiliations, with all of the groups depending on voluntary work. The results of the empirical fieldwork are based on a mix of interviews and informal meetings with participants and founding members of grassroots initiatives, political actors and experts as well as participant observation during group's activities.

In the wake of the deep economic crisis in Greece, civil society has seen a historical blossoming, with NGOs and informal citizens' groups appearing all over the country, and a wave of people eager to volunteer or to become activists. Several authors have observed a particularly strong increase in informal movements, grassroots initiatives and groups aiming to provide solidarity in a context of economic recession and austerity, which has resulted in a meltdown of the public welfare sector, particularly health care, and social fragmentation. Especially in Athens many new groups have arisen, which can be explained through the fact that the capital has been affected harder by the crisis than rural areas, but also through an urban crisis of central Athens that started to evolve in the 1970s, deepened in the 2000s, and which has been linked to urban pollution and migration of the core population to the suburbs in the past. As, in times prior to the economic crisis, Greek civil

society had been considerably less pronounced than in other european countries, this is a highly significant development. This earlier phenomenon can be explained through a pre-modern social structure remaining from the period of Ottoman rule with features of segmentary society with strong kinship ties.

Certainly, within all of the studied groups, the economic crisis, experiences connected with it (for instance international political and media discourses on Greece), and the historical period of austerity influenced voluntary civic engagement in one or the other way and opened up a space in which these grassroots groups evolved.

Rather than ideologically locating themselves within a political or a protest tradition, these new grassroots groups all have a pragmatic approach and their activities are based around specific topics. The correlation to the post-2009 crisis appears particularly clear within citizen groups engaging with material needs or, in Escobar's terms, *"struggles over economic means of survival"* (1992:412) that have arisen out of economic recession and/or austerity measures. However, within the whole body of very diverse grassroots groups, and also within other activist's groups engaging with less directly "tangible" matters such as political change or media images of Greece, there are many underlying motives to become active, and issues negotiated within the activities that are similar and connected to the experience of the economic crisis.

The groups I studied that share food and provide health services, *Mirmigi*, *O Allos Anthropos* and the *Metropolitan Clinic of Elliniko,* understood themselves within a context of providing solidarity within the social consequences of the crisis. At first sight, these initiatives react to economic recession with soaring unemployment rates and subsequent austerity which has led to increasing tax rates and citizens dropping out of the health system and former middle class population in poverty. However, members see their actions rooted in a context that goes beyond merely answering to material needs. Instead of applying a top-down approach differentiating between group members and beneficiaries, groups' activities follow a horizontal structure which aims at treating all the people involved equally.

These groups also answer to a growing number of immigrants in Athens, a development that started before 2009, by providing them with goods and non-material support. Thereby, clear boundaries to racism and groups of the extreme right affiliated with the party *Chrysi*

Avgi, which has experienced a considerable boost during recent crisis years, have constituted an important reason to engage in civic action as a source for collective identity.

Particularly within solidarity groups it became clear that participants and founding members became active as an act of empowerment over a feeling of paralysis and peripheralization surrounded by experiences of crisis, either made themselves or witnessed in a direct local and social environment. The voluntary work within groups makes it possible to directly or indirectly exert influence on circumstances that before had seemed difficult to be modified.

Moreover, especially for groups engaging with their locality in terms of urban regeneration, the reasons to become active could not only be found in the post-2009 crisis, but in an urban crisis of central Athens. Thus, participants became active as a reaction to daily materialities being transformed. This applies to solidarity networks as well. Also for groups closely related to their neighborhood, for example within *Mirmigi* or local oral history groups, reclaiming rights to (the history of) their immediate locality play a significant role. Through these activities local identity is reconfigured and experiences a boost.

Other citizens' groups, such as the NPO *Place Identity*, react to institutional problems driven by a lack of democracy within the state and claim more participatory rights for citizens. My interview partners here stressed that the foundation of the group didn't have much or anything to do with the economic crisis, as the problematic issues had already existed before that. Nevertheless, they became particularly apparent during the past years and were also exposed through the crisis.

Accordingly, the lack of participation within political processes is also illustrated by the emergence of grassroots groups themselves. Many current activities within civil society have their ideological roots within anti-austerity protests and the *Indignados* movement that occupied the central Syntagma square in Athens in 2011. Participatory processes of decision making and self-organized groups involved in media work, food supply or medical help were a central part of the activities on the square. Some of their features can be observed within the work of citizens' groups that were founded afterwards. Also participatory democratic processes that were applied within the *Indignados* movement showed in groups within my case study, for example in the *Metropolitan Clinic of Elliniko* or *Mirmigi*.

International media discourses about Greece also constitute a motivation to become active as a citizen. When hegemonic discourses on the (assumed) laziness, corruption or violence of Greek people arose during the past years, which have been compared to Orientalist discourses in Said's terms (Leontidou 2014), Greek cultural and national identity came under attack. Following Jenkins (1994), externally located processes of social categorization are as much decisive for the production and reproduction of identity than internal definitions. Some citizens' groups, such as *Omikron Project*, tackle these hegemonic narratives and the so-called *image crisis* of Greece directly, by means of their media activity. For others, this aspect matters implicitly. In many interviews, respondents problematized stereotypical representations of Greek people that started since the debt crisis had become prevalent. Nevertheless, it needs to be said that participants in my research, and some more than others, addressed institutional problems within the Greek state, such as clientelism, corruption and the "old" political system, which they deem responsible for the current debt crisis. *Place Identity's* work has to be seen in this context. It aims at institutionally changing perceived undemocratic political structures by means of activities in civic urban or political participation, andtowards the development of a new Greek constitution.

One of the key findings of my research concerns the motivations of participants in my case study. For members, becoming active within civil society regains agency, empowerment and control over a feeling of having lost influence on sources of identity, as well as a feeling of *"political peripheralization"* (Theodossopoulos 2013) against foreign forces (such as media or the European Union), but also in regard to the Greek state and its political system. Thus, the activity within the groups also provides the opportunity to reconfigure identity. Building on Snow (2001), as a specific set of values shared by participants becomes prevalent, collective agency is formed, which also has implications on the building of collective identity within groups.

The studied grassroots groups also share a set of values between them. These values have arisen as a reaction to crisis experiences and can be seen as part of a change in the mind-set of participants. These shared meanings embody a high degree of morality, building on post-materialistic values, and the responsibility as a citizen to care about others and/or the environment. This phenomenon corresponds to what Graeber (2010) has termed *"everyday communism",* which emerges spontaneously in times of crisis.

The value of meaningful relationships, trust and new social bonds are highly important factors why people participate in grassroots groups and how they see their particular significance. These developments can be contextualized against the backdrop of the crisis having a deep impact on the social frame, with insecure prospects on employment and social security, and feelings of trust towards political institutions (such as the state and/or the European union) shattered. Voluntary work as a gift of time and effort (Mauss 1967[1923]) creates social relations between members and beneficiaries. Following the approach of human economy, which understands the particular significance of economic life in reconfiguring relations between people instead of allocating commodities (Graeber 2012), grassroots groups can also be regarded as an economic activity.

Moreover it became apparent that for participants of citizens' groups, their commitment within voluntary initiatives triggered the creation of new social bonds that go beyond kinship ties, and bonds that were compared to be as strong as family relations. This indicates that activities within these grassroots movements help to provide a shift away from a social structure of pre-modern segmentary society.

Within grassroots groups, discursive processings of Greek history proved to be a highly relevant topic, as can be seen in the success of oral history groups but also in the fact that some interview partners in other initiatives drew parallels between the current crisis and the situation in Athens during the occupation of Germany during World War II. Here, issues of polytemporality were raised and it could be seen that past critical events become relevant again in times of crisis (Knight 2012b). Thus, collective memories as a historic ressource help to generate a feeling that the current crisis can be overcome (Knight 2012a).

It needs to be noted that most of my respondents and also other members of citizens' initiatives who became active in civil society in the past years still perceive themselves as part of a minority group compared to Greek society at large. However, within the movements in my case study, participants are very much aware about other initiatives and have noticed their increasing number as well as a general eagerness to do voluntary work and social identity tied to it. A larger study focusing on more groups could bring valuable insights in terms of the scope of this development.

Certainly there are also discursive fragmentations between groups with a more ideological background like solidarity groups and others who became known for being active in urban interventions activities which are perceived as merely aesthetic, like *Atenistas* (who, in

fact, also carry out social and humanitarian activities). Particularly ideological differences between citizens' groups' approaches on helping others came to the fore during research, resulting in a binary opposition between the concepts of solidarity and philanthropy. Interview partners from groups which defined themselves along the lines of the first concept emphasized mutuality, egalitarianism, participation of beneficiaries and a horizontal approach. In this respect especially the activities of *Atenistas* can be seen in a context of philanthropy with a top-down approach, a distinction between beneficiaries and members, and with a different frequency of actions (once a month) compared to solidarity structures that operate on a daily basis. Thus, social solidarity groups have an ideological approach and understand themselves as part of a wider political movement that aims at constructing alternative forms of social and economic life.

From the theoretical perspective of social movements, the current developments within grassroots groups in Athens can be considered as a mix between anti-austerity protests claiming the right to participate and new social movements, as groups aim to regain the control over the production of meaning and constitute new collective identities (Canel 1997).

While within anti-austerity protests, resistance identities (Castells 1997) became apparent, the regular voluntary work within the citizens' initiatives represents a shift to project identity, as new meanings and new materialities are negotiated and produced.

The developments within citizens' groups in Athens I was able to observe correspond to a rise of an alternative economic culture, like Castells (2012) saw it, where needs and values become prevalent at the same time, with a historical intersection of two groups: consumers not being able to consume anymore and people who feel a loss of meaning in their previous life. In crisis-ridden Athenian civil society these two categories seem to fuse to a particularly strong degree. Nevertheless, as already mentioned, the activity of the groups that I have encountered goes well beyond economic practices and also entails alternative social cultures.

In conclusion, political scientists have pointed out that civil society mobilization has been able to deepen democracy and social cohesion in Greece. Concerning future developments, it seems impossible to assess whether these tendencies will continue after the effects of the crisis have eased. However, concerning chances for the future durability of groups it became particularly clear that groups which had a legal entity as a non-profit organization

had to struggle very hard in order to be able to pay the required taxes, which have become a threat to their future existence. Thus, a policy implication of this thesis must be located in a recommendation that the amount of tax for non-political organizations in Greece should be reduced significantly if civil society should be boosted.

Regarding other implications, observers and informants have pointed to a slow development of economic entrepreneurialism that has arisen out of voluntary grassroots activity in Athens (e.g. in terms of tourism). These accounts emphasized that this could be a strand of future economic growth in Greece, which goes beyond the third sector and social economy development. Nevertheless it remains to be seen if these activities, which arose out of grassroots groups and during the historical context of an economic crisis will continue in the future. Another transformation tied with this are gentrification processes within certain Athenian neighborhoods that started a few years ago and have been linked to creative urban interventions of grassroots groups. Further research in the field of urban anthropology that could take account of such modifications of neighborhoods over a larger time frame might be interesting.

Finally, I would like to come back to the narrative mentioned in the introduction, that the emergence of grassroots activity changes Greece for the better, as ahead of the crisis civil society and civic engagement was less pronounced and society cohesion was underdeveloped etc. Certainly this approach is not fully incorrect, nevertheless it has to be perceived with ambivalent feelings as (1) there had in fact been (although to a lesser extent) grassroots and civil society activity in Athens ahead of the crisis, (2) the full impact of this movement cannot be assessed yet, and (3) in turn, this approach runs into danger of unintentionally confirming advocates of the discourse which blamed Greek people and Greek society for the crisis. Also reflections on whether the mentioned groups can be seen as a side effect of a neoliberal development since they emerged in the context of a neoliberal transformation of the Greek state and the urban Athenian realm don't seem to bring particular further insight. Marxist-inspired approaches criticizing that through their voluntary work citizens perform tasks formerly attributed to the public body seem factually justified; however, given the context of a state which is latently and notoriously illiquid, participants in humanitarian activities appear to have legitimate reasons to engage in their voluntary activity anyway, if nobody or few else do it.

All of the mentioned groups with exception of the oral history groups, make it clear that they would prefer it if there were no reason or necessity for the founding and the existence of their group. Therefore one could also approach the discourse like this: Under the irrefutably undesirable circumstances of this economic, debt, social and image crisis that resulted in potentially dangerous political and social fragmentation and violent extreme right forces gaining popularity, the current development within social movements and the blossoming of civil society can be perceived as a rare positive aspect of these impacts.

Given the fact that these days negative news from Greece reach other European countries on a more than regular basis, publicly emphasizing these stories of grassroots activism seems to make particular sense, building on the insight pointed out earlier, namely that (external) representations influence social identity. Certainly, more research on this topic, extending beyond an environment of civil society, could provide significant insights.

An extension of the object of investigation from grassroots groups to society at large could also prove to be immensely fruitful in respect to social bonds that are being made through the activity and possible changes within social structures. Moreover, continuing studies on crisis-related transformations that go beyond an urban Athenian civil society context need to be done. With the rise of the left party SYRIZA to replace the government led by *Nea Dimokratia,* another highly interesting political development took place in Greece after my fieldwork had already been completed. This event is also interesting for the context of this research, especially in regard to SYRIZA's support for solidarity groups and its strong activity within the anti-austerity movement. Building on the Gramscian assumption that what happens in civil society determines whether the majority of the population will support the political and the economical system or not, this might indicate that SYRIZA owes its rise to its strong activity within civil society.

Considering civil society activities of another political actor, the municipality of Athens with a vice mayor especially responsible for this issue from 2014, a thorough analysis on direct implications for grassroots groups on the ground and interactions with the city would be an interesting subject of investigation as well. Unfortunately I could not include this in my research, as the vice-mayor was appointed at a time when my fieldwork was already finished.

Another development worth studying has opened up just recently with the increasing inflow of refugees from the war in Syria travelling to or through Greece. Particularly the

Metropolitan clinic of Elliniko and *O Allos Anthropos* have extended their activity towards supporting more and more refugees in 2015. It might be interesting to contextualize research on grassroots support of refugees on a transnational level since during the year 2015 also in Austria (and other countries) civil society and grassroots groups have become very active in this matter.

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List of Interviews and Informal Meetings

ID	Surname	Name	Group/ Institution / Role	Date
1	Vekiarelli	Teresa	To Mirmigi	4.2. & 6.2.2014
2	Zepou	Amalia	SynAthina - Municipality of Athens	7.2.2014
3	Karatza Xydia	Mary Stephania	Place Identity	7.2.2014
4	Polychronopoulos	Konstantinos	O Allos Anthropos	9.2.2014
5	Vichas	Giorgos	Metropolitan Clinic of Elliniko	10.2.2014
6	Chalkiopoulos	Tasos	Atenistas	10.2.2014
7	Xydia	Stephania	Place Identity	10.2.2014
8	Petinaki	Maria	Alternative Tours of Athens, Social Movements Tour	9.2.2014
9	Boge Roubanis	Cornelia Christos	Movement of the citizens of the sixth district	10.2.2014
10	Vervenioti Kavadas	Tasoula Nikos	Oral History Groups	11.02. & 12.02.2014
11	Petinaki	Maria	Alternative Tours of Athens	12.2.2014
12	Katsoulis	Ilias	Citizen's Movement for an Open Society / Emeritus Professor of Sociology & Political Science	13.2.2014
13	Khalili Stratoudaki	Mehran Anna	Omikron Project	13.2.2014
14	Vekiarelli	Teresa	To Mirmigi	11.9.2014
15	Petinaki	Maria	Alternative Tours of Athens	15.9.2014
16	Karydi	Konstantina	Policy Advisor & Head of the Europe Direct Office / Office of the Mayor of Athens	17.9.2014
17	Vervenioti	Tasoula	Oral History Groups	17.9.2014
18	Katerini	Tonia	Solidarity4All	18.9.2014
20	Khalili	Mehran	Omikron Project	18.9.2014

21	Vichas	Giorgos	Metropolitan Clinic of Elliniko	19.9.2014
23	Polychronopoulos	Konstantinos	O Allos Anthropos	19.9.2014
24	Karatza Xydia	Mary Stephania	Place Identity	19.9.2014
25	Papadimitriou	Nadia	Atenistas	20.9.2014
27	Zöhrer	Konstantina	Omikron Project	17.10.2014 *via Skype*
28	Zepou	Amalia	SynAthina / Municipality of Athens: Vice Mayor for Civil Society and Municipal Decentralization	19.10.2014 *via Skype*
29	Huliaras	Asteris	University of Peloponnese / Professor at the Department of Political Science	22.10.2014 *via e-mail*

Abstract - English

This master's thesis focuses on grassroots citizens' groups founded in Athens in the wake of the so-called debt, economic and social crisis that has become prevalent in Greece since 2009. There, civil society has seen a historical growth in recent years which is particularly significant as scholars have considered civil society and volunteering in Greece less developed compared to other Western countries. By means of 29 ethnographic interviews and participant observation and drawing on theories of (urban) social movements, identity and economical anthropology, seven citizens' groups active in multiple fields of activity were selected via theoretical sampling for this thesis. They all depend on voluntary work, are participatory, with non-profit focus and founded by private persons. Activities include urban regeneration and cultural interventions, the provision of food or health services (solidarity groups), citizens' participation and political remodeling, media work and oral history research. In particular, I examined why members founded grassroots citizens' groups, investigated the role of the post-2009 crisis on these processes and studied the discourses that were decisive for having become active and that were articulated and negotiated within the initiatives' activities.

Within these initiatives, civic engagement is mostly influenced by the economic crisis and experiences directly or indirectly tied to it. However, inherent problems of Athens and Greece existing already before 2009 are strong motivations as well, like an urban crisis of Athens that has been evolving already since the 1970s. Moreover, many interview partners have contextualized their grassroots activity in opposition to the traditional political and social system in Greece but also to recent nationalist or openly racist tendencies. The work within the groups boosts agency, empowerment and control over a feeling of political peripheralization against external forces (such as Greece's international lendors or recent media representations that have often been incorrect or stereotype-based) and the state. The activity enables to reconfigure collective identity both on a local scale but also in regard to national identity which has been shattered in recent crisis years. The voluntary work as a gift of time and effort creates strong social bonds, for members amongst themselves as well as with their beneficiaries. A majority of the respondents contextualized their actions within solidarity discourses reaching well beyond the immediate actions as such, in contrast to a philanthropic approach. Thus, these groups embody a high degree of morality and post-materialistic qualities and endorse the value of meaningful relationships, trust and new social relations.

Abstract - Deutsch

Die vorliegende Masterarbeit beforscht partizipative Grassroots-Bürgerinitiativen in Athen, die ab dem Jahr 2009 in zeitlicher Folge der griechischen Schuldenkrise entstanden sind. Im Rahmen einer auf teilnehmender Beobachtung und 29 qualitativen Interviews basierenden ethnographischen Fallstudie wurden sieben Gruppen untersucht, deren Mitglieder vorwiegend auf Basis freiwilliger Arbeit in multiplen Tätigkeitsfeldern aktiv geworden sind. Um die Quantität und Vielseitigkeit der jüngsten Entwicklungen innerhalb der Athener Zivilgesellschaft abzubilden, wurden mittels *Theoretical Sampling* Gruppen mit unterschiedlichen formalen Strukturen sowie Zielsetzungen ausgewählt: Urbane bzw. kulturelle Interventionen, Bereitstellung von Nahrung oder medizinischer Versorgung, Förderung von gesellschaftlicher und politischer Partizipation, Medienarbeit oder *Oral History*-Forschung im urbanen Kontext. Im Zentrum der Forschung stand die Frage warum Mitglieder Grassroots-Gruppen gegründet hatten und in diesen aktiv waren, eine kritische Betrachtung der Rolle der Wirtschaftskrise für deren bürgerschaftliches Engagement sowie diskursive Praktiken, die in diesem Zusammenhang artikuliert wurden. Dabei greift die Untersuchung auf Theorien zu sozialen Bewegungen, Identität sowie ökonomischen Zugängen der Anthropologie zurück.

Die InterviewpartnerInnen sahen die Motivation für ihr ziviles Engagement teils in der Krise oder damit verbundenen Erfahrungen begründet, während andererseits Griechenland- bzw. Athen-inhärente Problematiken, die bereits vor 2009 bestanden, Triebkraft etlicher Gruppen sind. So gab es in Athen bereits ab den 1970er-Jahren Zeichen einer *urbanen* Krise. Etliche Gruppen begreifen sich in Abgrenzung zu rezenten (ultra-) nationalistischen Tendenzen, aber auch zum traditionellen politischen und gesellschaftlichen System. Durch ihr Engagement erlangen Mitglieder (kollektive) *Agency* im Kontext einer wahrgenommenen politischen Peripheralisierung gegenüber externen Kräften (Staat, supra-/internationale Institutionen, aber auch Mediendiskurse). Die Aktivität ist zudem stark identitätsstiftend, sowohl in Bezug auf kollektive Identität innerhalb der Gruppen als auch in Hinblick auf lokale und nationale Identität. Die freiwillige Arbeit als Gabe von Zeit und Aufwand kreiert starke soziale Bindungen innerhalb der involvierten AkteurInnen. Außerdem sah ein Großteil der Beteiligten ihre Aktionen in Solidaritätsdiskursen und über die unmittelbare Arbeit der Gruppen hinausgehenden Werten wie postmateriellen Qualitäten (Vertrauen, soziale Beziehungen) und einem hohen Grad an Moral verankert und distanzierte sich von philanthropischen Ansätzen.