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**Alternative organizing in times of crisis:  
Resistance assemblages and socio-spatial solidarity**

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## **Alternative organizing in times of crisis: Resistance assemblages and socio-spatial solidarity**

### **Abstract**

This paper draws on research conducted in Greece, where, during the last five years, acute socio-economic crisis has led to a number of alternative organizational forms. By foregrounding the term *drasis*, the unexpected unfolding of an event in a specific space and time, we discuss how these alternative forms assemble differential capacities in order to resist the neoliberal ordering of socio-spatial and economic relations. In particular, we focus on two self-organized spaces, namely, a social center and a squatted public garden and discuss two concrete instances of *drasis*. We propose that *drasis* can instigate the establishment and evolution of transformative, prefigurative organizing through three interrelated processes, the formation of resistance assemblages, social learning and socio-spatial solidarity. The paper offers three propositions, suggesting that *drasis* provides the socio-material conditions through which new resistance formations challenge the established productive forces of society and co-produce alternative forms of civic life.

### **Introduction**

The ongoing financial crisis and austerity politics have contributed to the rise of alternative organizational formations, which actively strive to reverse the effects of neoliberal capitalism (Castells et al., 2012; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013). Individuals and social groups try to enhance their capacity for resistance and transformation by

re-configuring creative forces of society in order to organize alternatives (Daskalaki et al., 2015). In the context of this paper, the term ‘alternatives’ will be used to refer to these socio-economic and socio-spatial formations that depart from dominant capitalist arrangements, and include workers' occupied workplaces, art collectives, self-organized cooperatives, squats, and alternative eco-communities (see for example, Daskalaki, 2014; Gritzas and Kavoulakos, 2015; Kokkinidis, 2015). While they try to overcome the social and economic implications of the financial crisis, these alternatives are characterized by a strong orientation towards bringing about social change starting from the local level.

It is crucial therefore to unpack the processes through which micro-political events, enacted locally, can gradually co-constitute the conditions through which wider socio-economic and political change can be effected. We draw from the critical relational geographies turn (Thrift, 2008; Amin and Thrift, 2002; Massey, 2005; Jensen, 2006; 2009) and autonomous and prefigurative geographies (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006; Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010; Mar and Anderson, 2012; Vasudevan, 2014), and focus on ‘the production of new forms of alterity and resistance [...] with a particular emphasis on the processes through which political horizons are made, unmade and remade’ (Vasudevan, 2015: 319). In particular, we explore how, through the performance of *spontaneous* and *ephemeral* events, alternatives enact economic and political experimentation and collectively create spaces of civic engagement. These events, referred to here as ‘drasis’ (in plural, drases), represent instances of alternative organizing during which new socio-spatial assemblages of solidarity and resistance can emerge.

‘Drasis’ originates from the Greek verb *δρῶ* [*dro*], which means ‘doing something about’ (as opposed to remaining passive), and most often is used to describe ‘*δρῶμενα*’ [*dromena*], or ‘things performed’ (Harrison, 1912; see also Dissanayake, 1995; Kershaw, 2007). By focusing on ‘things performed’, we acknowledge that social life is not self-standing or given, but the result of endless performances by (non-) human entities (MacKenzie, 2004; Callon, 1998). During these performances, alternatives are constituted and re-constituted through collective action (Butler, 1993; Gibson-Graham, 2005; 2008). Accordingly, in this paper, we turn our attention to the collective performances of alternative organizing and explore how various drases are enacted in a specific time and space.

By studying drasis in relation to alternative organizing, we contribute to the analysis of ‘how autonomous geographies are made’ (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006; Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010) by unveiling: a) the social and material processes of self-organization that engage diverse constituencies in and through particular urban sites and b) the interscalar connections between assemblages, flows and space-time. Thus, the study of drasis cuts across a range of different fields of activism and raises important questions about the relationship between political (spatial) activity and the translocal, social and political networks through which people and places, ideas and objects are continuously performed.

The paper is structured as follows: First, the concept of drasis is discussed in relation to assemblage, and particularly the performative dimensions of assemblage thinking. In the methodology section, we introduce the self-organized sites and the two specific instances of drasis studied. The empirical section, through the use of two examples,

explores three co-constitutive processes of drasis namely, formation of resistance assemblages, social learning and socio-spatial solidarity. The propositions that follow the discussion of each one of these processes suggest that drases provide the necessary socio-material conditions through which distributed political struggles can be grounded towards the emergence of alternatives that could resist neoliberal ordering.

### **Assemblages and drasis: Collective performances of alternative organizing**

In this paper, the concept of drasis is used as a conceptual bridge between the prefigurative aspects of alternative organizing and the performative dimensions of assemblage thinking. In particular, focusing on what assemblage *does* (rather than what it means), we discuss drasis as the unfolding of a collective performance: an 'event' (Deleuze, 1992) that produces an alternative habitus, a temporary space of social engagement in which participants' interactions produce affects, values and practices that can bring about new modes of being (Gould, 2009; Vasudevan, 2015; Sevilla-Buitrago, 2015). Drases, as the discussion that follows illustrates, co-constitute micro-interventions that become part of a broader process of organizing collective action. Accordingly, through the study of drases, we explore how heterogeneous entities are drawn affectively together through an emergent process that produces self-organizing multiplicities.

By adopting assemblage thinking, originally developed by Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari (1987) and elaborated by others (Markus and Saka, 2006; DeLanda, 2006; Allen and Cochrane, 2010; McFarlane, 2009; McFarlane, 2011a; McCann & Ward, 2011), we will show that during drasis, various alternatives become entangled with

one another, co-constituting heterogeneous assemblages<sup>1</sup>. Unlike more organic wholes, the components of assemblages have autonomy from a totality, something that allows them to disconnect and be re-assigned to other assemblages (Latour, 2005; DeLanda, 2006; McCann, 2011; Anderson, Kearne, McFarlane & Swanton, 2012). Crucially, however, it is this process of constant (re/dis) assembling, enacted by drasis, that transforms alternatives and allows for new potentialities to emerge (Kennedy et al., 2013).

Hence, we recognize that assemblages are not complete 'things' but flows and movements. They belong to a world of becoming which is a world of 'radical ontological openness and heterogeneity rather than an abstract world of closure and sameness' (Introna, 2013). According to this, all acts are performative and crucially, performativity flows in all directions, continually reconstituting the ontological landscape (Foucault, 1980; Butler, 1990; Barad, 2003). Hence, during drasis, new assemblages are formed and transformed: through the differential performance of autonomous component parts, they resist closure and encourage open-endedness around the emergent (Urry, 2003; Sheller and Urry, 2006; McCann, 2010).

By employing the concept of drasis, we study the socio-material conditions through which struggles across different times and spaces can be grounded (albeit temporarily). Moreover, by linking drasis with assemblage thinking, we can capture the situated agencies or subjectivities that emerge and recast collective action. As these agencies are differentially assembled and reassembled during drasis, they multiply the 'spaces of critical intervention' (McFarlane, 2011a: 219) and transformative re-configuration of socio-spatial relations. These transformative

qualities depend on drases' capacity to produce assemblages through differential carvings of space, a process of constant re-arrangement of spontaneous and temporary socio-spatial entanglements of (non-) human actors.

The remainder of the paper discusses how, during drasis, alternatives assemble new socio-spatial arrangements and experiment with new modes of resistance by creating platforms of social learning and socio-spatial solidarity. We will propose that drasis has the potential to instigate (resistance) assemblages by enacting a process of transformation of social relations that holds together heterogeneous urban practices into durable collection of orderings. In turn, the emergence of new assemblages in alternative spaces demonstrates the insurgence of a milieu of resistance formations that challenge the established productive forces of society in an attempt to co-produce an alternative form of civic life.

## **Methodology**

### ***The Context of Study***

This study was conducted in two alternative spaces in Greece which, though established before the 2010 'Greek bail out', have become crucial co-constitutive agents of an emerging self-organizing landscape. These self-organizing initiatives (the majority of them operating in Athens, Thessaloniki and Crete) include individuals, social groups, autonomist collectivities, solidarity networks and alternative organisations, which, in some cases, are temporary and fragile, and in others, more permanent and concrete.



Greece's economic crisis erupted when the Global Financial Crisis hit the US banks and financial institutions in 2008 quickly spreading to the European Union. The country underwent the sixth consecutive year of economic contraction in 2015, and its economy shrank by 30% between 2008 and 2015. Unemployment has more than tripled, from 7.7% in 2008 to 24.3% in 2012. The latest official figures report unemployment rates at 25% with long-term unemployment at 20%, and official rates of youth unemployment 51.9% in January 2016 (Trading Economics, 2016). Responses to the severe austerity policies demanded by the troika of lenders (the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund) and implemented by the consecutive Greek governments, varied from remedial actions aiming to address the consequences of crisis to the questioning of the development model by setting up alternatives.

In this paper, we report from two alternative initiatives, namely *Micropolis*<sup>2</sup> and *Navarinou Park*<sup>3</sup> (in the area of Exarchia), which, though different in terms of how they emerged and are currently organized, both operate as spaces for civic engagement and activism against austerity and neoliberal capitalist ideology. The first initiative, *Micropolis*, is a social center, located in Thessaloniki (second largest city in Greece) and operates as a self-organized, non-hierarchical space in rented premises. The second initiative, *Navarinou Park* is an occupied urban garden, squatted in 2009 during resistance against its conversion into a car park. Both initiatives have shown consistent presence in both social media and local activist communities as part of the wider anti-austerity and self-organization resistance landscape in Greece.

### ***Data Collection and Analysis***

The study, grounded in an ethnographic research tradition (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Bryman, 2012), is primarily based on participant observations and unstructured interviews with members and participants of the two initiatives between 2013-2015. Our first step was to arrange informal meetings with some members in the two sites and build the necessary level of trust required. We then visited the two sites and attended several events such as general assembly meetings of collectives, documentary screenings and music festivals. In addition, we also gathered secondary data through blogs and online materials (see Table 1).

*Insert Table 1 about here*

During participant observations, we also witnessed the enactment of spontaneous events, or happenings (Kaprow et al., 1966; Berlant, 2011) that had considerable impact on how space was experienced and relationships among participants evolved. These events are described here as *drases*. While observing drases, it became clear that they constituted an essential dimension of these alternative spaces since they allowed members/visitors (such as students, academics, workers' collectives, occupations, environmental activists and anarchist groups) to share ideas, organize resistance events as well as build new alliances and solidarities in search for post-neoliberal organizational arrangements. Following this observation, we decided to look closer into drases and use them as the starting point in our discussion of alternative spaces, assemblages and community engagement.

In the first stage of the analysis, we identified relationships among emerging themes using respondents' narrative descriptions (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). We shifted our

focus to a dialogue between theory and data (Langley, 1999; Wodak, 2011) and turned our attention to the enactment and unfolding of drasis observed during the visits of the sites. As drasis occurs unexpectedly, we had not arrived in the two sites to attend a specific event; rather we were there for the arranged interviews and observations. However, while being there we witnessed the enactment of several drases and decided to attend them and make them the focus of our analysis. Also informed by the observations and the interviews in the two sites (2013-2015), drasis features as a decisive component of self-organization (and self-organized sites) by enabling interactions among different initiatives and enacting translocal engagements.

In the following section, we report from two drases, discussing: a) the formation of resistance assemblages; b) the consolidation and diffusion of knowledge and c) the creation of new spaces of solidarity. The extracts from the interviews that are employed are completely anonymized and pseudonyms are being used throughout the analysis.

### **The co-constitutive processes of drasis: The empirical analysis**

*Micropolis* was conceived as a free, self-organized space during the occupation of the *School of Drama* of the *Faculty of Fine Arts* of the *Aristotle University of Thessaloniki* (2008). This occupation was part of the protest movements in relation to an incident that took place on the 6<sup>th</sup> December of 2008, when Alexandros Grigoropoulos was shot and killed by a police officer in the center of Athens. This event proved to be a spark for a wave of protests that spread all over Greece. *Micropolis* since then operates as an open social space, which attempts to promote

and engage local communities with the values and principles of horizontal, anti-hierarchical organization, solidarity and self-management. An open to the public general assembly meeting decides on all operational matters as well as planned activities of the center is held every week.

Although *Micropolis* opened as a free social space before the first ‘bail out’ took place, it has increasingly become a ‘space for civic expression and freedom’, a collaborative laboratory for autonomous groups, students, activists and artists who regularly attend various events related to resistance to austerity policies, self-organization and social change:

‘We understand that we can change the world by changing ourselves. And we do not have the magic recipe - just the will. And seeing around the bankruptcy of the isolated / private subject, submerged in the competition, profits and alienation, we choose to live and create collectively, as a people for whom the collective or the society is an extension of themselves’ (*Micropolis*, <http://micropolis-socialspace.blogspot.co.uk/2009/07/blog-post.html>).

Several alternative organizations regularly hold their general assembly meetings and co-organize workshops, seminar and solidarity events at *Micropolis* (see Figure 1). These assemblies, workshops and events (such as documentary screenings, festivals) are open to the public and as a result, are often attended by the café area visitors as well as other collectivities.



**Figure 1: Entrance of Micropolis (from <http://micropolis-socialspace.blogspot.gr/>).**

In such open spaces, participation structured in ways that give adequate recognition to different local groups, and ensure that diverse values are voiced and listened, is fundamental to the practice of inclusive democratic processes. For example, a member of a collective who regularly visits *Micropolis* commented:

‘We choose to come to Micropolis because it is an open space, a public space; we can do things that are based on a collective democratic practice [...] a collective language can be shared in an anti-hierarchal place’ (Anna, visitor, *Micropolis*, 2014).

The second initiative, *Navarinou Park*, got established in 2009 when local residents in the Exarchia area of Athens were mobilized and spontaneously squatted an empty space at Navarinou Street to obstruct plans to build a multiplex car park. Similar to *Micropolis*, *Navarinou Park* is visited by local activists, artists, community

organizations and residents' groups who usually gather in the park to engage in conversations as well as organize regular general assembly meetings:

'As of the 2nd day of its existence, there were already open meetings that defined its overall character: self-managed, anti-hierarchical, anti-commercial. The operation of these open meetings, which vary in frequency throughout the year depending on needs and availability, is crucial for the evolution of the squat [...]' (*Navarinou Park*, <http://parkingPark.espivblogs.net/englishfrench/about-the-park/>).

In April 2010, one day after arranging the details of a major loan from the troika of lenders, the Greek authorities raided the park and detained about seventy people. This attack, besides an actual attack to a space of political mobilization, also demonstrated neoliberal efforts to control and silence any radical conception of civic resistance and socio-spatial self-organization. Nevertheless, the conditions of the current crisis, the '*Citizens Committee of Exarchia*' (2013) suggested, have affected the community, making them more resilient and more active. In this context of austerity and crisis,

'the park is constantly developing every day, it's a place of creativity, emancipation and resistance, open to political and cultural, anti-consumerist and other forms of activities. It ultimately claims to be a garden of the neighborhood, cancelling (sic) age, origin, educational, social and financial status' (*Citizens Committee of Exarchia*, 2013).

Yet, besides the planned activities and meetings, several spontaneous events are regularly enacted in these two spaces. These events, which resist enclosures and encourage creative, alternative engagements, constitute drases. Drases, which regularly unfold in these two sites, have the potential to mobilize solidarity networks, anti-austerity social movements, refugee communities and various other resistance groups, against social exclusion, unemployment and privatization of public services.

In this context, therefore, *Micropolis and Navarinou Park* become autonomous spaces which enable a number of diverse drases and invite a range of individuals and

collectivities ‘to explore the boundaries of culture, language, collaboration, work and art’ (see <http://micropolis-socialspace.blogspot.co.uk/>). The discussion that follows focuses on two concrete examples of drases which occurred in the two sites, and specifically, reflects on three interrelated processes through which drases are performed: the formation of resistance assemblages, social learning and socio-spatial solidarity.

### ***Enacting Drasis: The formation of resistance assemblages***

The first example of drasis, referred to here as the ‘*CIC Workshop*’, took place in September 2014. Workers from a recuperated, self-managed factory in Northern Greece (Vio.Me) and other self-managed collectivities gathered at *Micropolis* to hold the regular general assembly meeting of the Vio.Me Solidarity Initiative (Vio.Me SI)<sup>4</sup>. On the same day, *Cooperativa Integral Catalana (CIC)*, a cooperative from Catalunya that practices ‘economic and political self-management with equal participation of all its members’<sup>5</sup>, was also visiting *Micropolis* (see Figure 2). The *CIC Workshop* was enacted when the Vio.Me workers, CIC members, Vio.Me SI participants, activists, students and other visitors, all visiting the space of *Micropolis* that day, decided to share their experiences and knowledge and explore possibilities for collaboration and mutual support.



**Figure 2: Poster for the workshop with CIC**

This spontaneous and temporary encounter, which the space of *Micropolis* facilitated, led to the emergence of unexpected assemblages across space and time. CIC is currently directly involved with the *Alternative Festival of Solidarity and*



*Collaborative Economy* (2015) in Greece<sup>6</sup> and actively engages and collaborates with several collectivities and cooperatives, which take part in the *Festival* every year (including Vio.Me SI). CIC also visits Thessaloniki regularly to offer workshops on cooperative organizational forms and post-capitalist socio-economic arrangements, such as decision making in leaderless organizations, alternative currencies, solidarity networks, autonomous organizing and the commons<sup>7</sup>. The *CIC Workshop*, therefore, situated the activities of various multitudes and instituted the emergence of translocal assemblages, which actively seek to create alternative communities of experimentation, cooperation and transformation.

The spontaneous and ephemeral dimensions of drasis are becoming more apparent when one studies the second drasis of this study, referred to here as the '*Emergence of the Park*'. In 2009, local residents in the Exarchia area of Athens were spontaneously mobilized to squat the space of a park at Navarinou Street to obstruct plans to build a multiplex car park. Within hours, they seized the land and begun creating a green urban place. With drills, they removed the asphalt from the parking and brought soil and plants. More than 500 people passed by the park that day, transforming the park into a truly open public space (see Figure 3). The central claims put forward were first, the direct characterization of the land as green space and second, the necessary actions to acquire the land. In the following days the flow of people continued, with around 80 people attending the first couple of meetings with different political backgrounds, from leftists and pacifists to anarchists and anti-authoritarian groups.



**Figure 3: Transforming the parking into the *Park*. Navarinou Street, Exarchia.**

Since then, creative activities, such as free concerts and graffiti, and regular assemblies (that include visitors of the nearby cafés and bars, residents, activists) take place at the *Park*, transforming it into a place for dialogue and engagement:

‘The *Park* is a space for creativity, emancipation and resistance, open to various initiatives, such as political, cultural and anti-consumerist ones. At the same time, it aspires to be a neighbourhood garden which accommodates part of the social life of its resident’ (*Navarinou Park*, <http://parkingPark.espivblogs.net/englishfrench/about-the-park/>).

Regularly, open assemblies take place in situ and are normally attended by diverse individuals and collectives:

‘Today the *Park* is an example of how we can transform the negativity surrounding our city [...] Against all political decisions of dependency, fear and despair [referring to the impact of austerity policies in Greece], we all through collaborative processes and practices, work towards change of life values, assembling in the streets, we invite everyone who wants to come and work with us, in this small garden [...] it is our park of hope’ (John, *Navarinou Park*, regular visitor and activist, 2013).

Therefore, the *Emergence of the Park* facilitated community-led organizing against pressures of homogenization and private control over public assets of communities and penetrated institutional structures of urban planning such as, hierarchical and top-down decision-making processes for the use of public land that excludes local residents. The *Park* has now become a symbolic space that encourages civic participation, and through a continuous process of (re-) assembling multiplicities, maintains its potential for engendering future drases. Vradis and Dalakoglou (2011: 80) also point out that

‘the park has become a new base of struggle for post-December grassroots political activities in Exarchia and beyond. It is not surprising, then, that it has itself become an object of struggle: in the eyes of the authorities the park is an emblematic child of December, which continues to inspire various anti-authoritarian activities and must therefore be suppressed’.

*Navarinou Park* has now entered a process of political negotiation and struggle; the different phases of park organization and the various drases that followed have produced several spaces of inclusion as well as exclusion, a dialectic negotiation and remains ambiguous yet maintains the space protected from state exclusionary practices and corporate homogenization and commercialization. Although, the initial objective was to stop the plans to build a massive car park in a small residential community, various multitudes in the *Park* enacted an evolving praxis that converted a potentially capitalist enclosure (a car park) into a dynamic place for the community.

Both drases, the *CIC Workshop* enacted at *Micropolis* and the *Emergence of the Park* that gave birth to *Navarinou Park*, constituted, albeit momentarily, spaces of otherness, ‘intermediary zones of doubt, ambivalence, hybridity, zones of negotiable values’ (Stavrides, 2010: 18; see also Amin & Thrift, 2002; Massey, 2005; Stavrides,

2013). These drases enabled the formation and transformation of assemblages and, by rejecting ‘the ordinary in favour of the extraordinary’ (Adey 2009: 126), created the conditions through which individuals and groups could actively challenge socio-spatial relations. Hence, *drasis that is enacted in autonomous, self-organized spaces can become the catalyst for the formation and transformation of resistance assemblages (Proposition 1).*

### ***The transformative potential of drasis: Social learning platforms***

The *Emergence of the Park* mobilized and empowered residents, offering a great sense of pride and motivation, and provided opportunities for the enhancement of social capital and social inclusion, community resilience, collective learning and action (see also relevant work by Walker and Salt, 2006; Glover, 2004; Kingsley and Townsend, 2006; Wakefield et al., 2007; Mugerauer, 2009; Firth et al., 2011). The creation of a community garden supported residents in addressing community issues and highlighted the need of a self-organized space where different groups could collectively organize, interact and learn (see Figure 4):

‘We started an urban allotment, a community garden for all...we are trying also alongside to educate people about cultivating the land and sharing seeds; self- organization is very important tool in instituting collective processes in action, transforming the dynamic relationship between urban and rural’ (George, resident of Exarchia, *Navarinou Park*, 2013).



**Figure 4. The Parko: A self-organized space for the community**

Participants repeatedly stressed the importance of knowledge sharing and learning processes enacted by their membership of various drases. When the *CIC Workshop* took place, the members of the solidarity initiative of Vio.Me were holding their weekly general assembly meeting at *Micropolis*. The *Workshop* assisted both the workers of Vio.Me but also members of CIC and other collectivities to de-localize their political activity and struggle and, by assembling different capacities, mobilize and enroll to boarder territories of learning and resistance. A member of the Vio.Me SI and participant of the workshop explained that

‘it was so great that it happened to be here at the same time as CIC. We will finish our general assembly meeting (of the VIO.ME SI) and we will join in the discussion. It is very important to learn from their experience and establish links with them and their networks’ (Nick, *CIC Workshop, Micropolis, 2014*).

Following this, we suggest that drasis instigates ‘learning assemblages’ (McFarlane, 2011b), which experiment with different modes of belonging, re-organize their activities to overcome difficulties, and develop a common understanding of co-

operation, engagement and exchange. Through ‘tactical learning’, individuals begin to mobilise collectively and challenge as well as change their life conditions (McFarlane, 2011b). Nevertheless, given that assemblages are organic social formations, we can only grasp certain aspects of the learning processes, the study of which goes beyond the purposes of the present study. Instead, we stress that drasis functions as a catalyst in a process of assembling alternatives of cooperative resilience. Drasis encourages reflexivity and experimentation with a range of possibilities in order to alter everyday systems that individual live by and often take for granted (Wals, van der Hoeven & Blanken, 2009). The emergent translocal spaces of solidarity and resistance that emanate from drasis become platforms for social learning through different modes of belonging such as engagement, imagination and alignment or mutual co-ordination (Wenger, 2000).

During the *CIC Workshop*, for example, collectivities that participated in alternative spaces of social engagement (the self-organized space of *Micropolis*) translate external social relations and socio-historical systems into mental actions, outcomes, and embodied states associated with both knowledge and skill and mutuality (Wenger, 2000; see also the work of Vygotsky, 1962; 1978). These emergent learning platforms, affected by the interrelationships with complex social systems, encouraged the participation in collective practices of civic organizing. Open discussions, enabled by drasis, permitted the exploration of various aspects of ‘how to build alternative organizations and alternative futures’ through a process of de-identification during which differences are negotiated and re-contextualized:

‘I was imagining it like a square in which different people, from completely different classes, with completely different mentalities, nevertheless with something common to believe in...of course there have been disagreements not only here in other spaces like this [...] this is not

important, we need to discuss, to change not necessarily to agree but to question [pause] to question who we are and how we live' (Helen, *Navarinou Park*, 2014).

In contexts of acute crisis and instability, tactical learning driven by the ambiguities and contradictions, enacts alternative social and economic environments within which resistance assemblages can be formed and transformed. Recently, a new initiative, '*Cooperativa Integral Athens*' was created after extensive discussions of a number of solidarity and collaborative economy collectives in Greece with CIC (member of the CIC Workshop) during and after the *Alternative Festival of Solidarity and Collaborative Economy* in 2015. They stated in their opening declaration (October 2015)<sup>8</sup>:

'We believe that the creation of a cooperative that brings together as many self-organized initiatives as possible will open up a possibility for permanent supportive and collaborative activity in an *agora* - a public space. The monetary autonomy would facilitate the expansion of the new social movement for self-organization of human activities and help convert the ephemeral battle of survival against the new wild globalized capitalism, into new structures and institutions that will allow a life of freedom in a new world of solidarity' (Authors' translation, <https://titanpad.com/OVG1SfUhYW>).

Similarly, after the '*Emergence of the Park*', collectivities and activists insisted in participating in drases at the *Park* and, despite their differences, continue to seek ways to cooperate and collectively challenge structures of exclusion and control in the neighborhood of Exarchia and beyond. Cooperatives and squats are multiplying in the area and the residents remain active, organizing to drive the drug trade away from the central square and its surrounding alleys. Thus, recurrent drasis performed in self-organized spaces such as *Micropolis* and the *Park*, enacts assemblages of resistance to capitalist accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2003) as well as facilitates social learning, crucial not only for the evolution of these assemblages but also for their capacity to establish alternatives to neoliberal organization of society. Hence *drasis*, *through the concentration and dispersal of knowledge, contributes to the formation of*

*social learning platforms that seek to establish alternative modes of organizing with transformative potential (Proposition 2).*

### ***The prefigurative potential of drases: Socio-spatial solidarity***

The activities and/or discourses of alternative communities appear like a crack to dominant views about economic and monetary structures. Yet, a crack is neither a fight, nor a struggle (Holloway, 2010). It works towards challenging the conventional economic structures where a social activity sets the agenda not in response to another social phenomenon, but in an original way, focusing not on reaction to a previous situation, but on exploring the needs of the people who perform the activity. On one hand alternative formations try to resist capitalist control and on the other, prefigure socio-economic and spatial relations.

Within the ongoing political practice of resistance movements, prefiguration describes the transformation of relationships and the construction of alternative communities (Boggs, 1977; Breines, 1989; Graeber, 2002). The collective purpose and orientation of drasis unveils the dimensions of prefigurative politics involved in re-establishing values and community practices in an attempt to transform relations. Drasis actually creates the spaces where a challenge to the mainstream models of exchange, at least in terms of exploration of such possibilities, becomes possible. The *Park*, though occupied by transient social formations that change with time, is a place of relative permanence (Urry, 2002) realized by values of social engagement and solidarity:

‘The park is a space of creativity, self-liberation and resistance but also a garden, a playground, a place for relaxation, communication, engagement and reflection. Mutual respect is very important. We are determined: the park is going to remain [...] solidarity is our weapon’ (Mary, *Park* Activist, 2014).



During the *Emergence of the Park*, various actors reacted to the capitalist appropriation of a public space and spontaneously decided to resist by occupying the park. This embodied resistance tactic subverted state power and created the conditions for new practice fields to be created. These fields unsettle formal ordering relationships and give alternative spaces their unforeseeable, imminent dynamics.

Similarly, after the *CIC workshop*, a participant reflected:

‘I come here because I think we can collectively co-construct moments for the future, to construct and inhabit a place for freedom, to perform direct democratic processes, to embody and embed different social realities, to unsettle things’ (Paul, *CIC Workshop, Micropolis*, 2014).

This drasis, therefore, constituted spaces of ‘heterogeneous affinity’ (McFarlane, 2009: 563), where new socio-spatial arrangements for dis-ordering, solidarity and prefiguration (Boggs, 1977; Breines, 1989) can potentially emerge. By developing socio-spatialities of political, cultural, economic and ecological experience with common concerns, drasis can lead to ‘expanded spatiotemporal horizons of action’ (Routledge, 2003: 346):

‘Those who took the initiative and responsibility for creating this space imagine a different world [...] hegemony tries to fight back after December [protests after the murder of a student by the police, 2008], to intensify control and repression, to cultivate racism and dispossession of people who have arrived here hunted, to curtail human. And this occurs in conditions of a general crisis of capitalism, which want to turn into an opportunity for greater profit, stronger separations, a chance for expanding the desert of meanings’ (*Micropolis*, authors’ translation, <http://micropolis-socialspace.blogspot.co.uk/2009/07/blog-post.html>).

The participants’ discourses of resilience, solidarity and freedom enact a chain of possibilities for future drasis and alternatives ‘yet to come’ (Deleuze, 2000) or in Bloch’s (1986) terms, ‘Not-Yet Conscious’:

‘It is a proposal for an alternative organization of society [...] Together with CIC tonight we had the opportunity to explore different possibilities of organization beyond capitalist relations ... *Micropolis* offers this opportunity for solidarity with those who seek a different, alternative common trajectory’ (Dimitra, *CIC Workshop, Micropolis*, 2014).

Both spaces of *Micropolis* and *Navarinou Park* promote diversity, equality, freedom and direct democracy and these values principally also drive the individuals and the collectivities, which frequently visit the two sites. Solidarity initiatives bring different collectivities together and crucially mobilize the formation of associations and relationships. As a participant of the workshop commented, the initiatives ‘try to define relationships on the basis of solidarity and self-education’ (Carlos, CIC member, *Micropolis*, 2014). Socio-spatial forms of solidarity, therefore, are based on group formations and individuals' similarities in beliefs and aspirations for an alternative way of grassroots, community organizing. Solidarity is a lived condition, which during drasis embodies a ‘spatial expression of antagonistic relations’ to the state and the dominant logic of capitalist production and distribution (Curtis, 2002:88-89).

As they prefigure an alternative society to the one they seek to change, emerging assemblages promote a paradigmatic alternative that is primarily based on caring for the *Other* (the other movement, the other initiative, the other who also resists). Solidarity, in this respect, is enacted during drasis as a collective effort for the democratic realization of individual freedom, trust and reciprocity. Both drases carved prefigurative spaces in the urban fabric, in which heterogeneous practices and ‘nomadic subjectivities’ (Braidotti, 2011) could co-evolve, enacting different values that can give rise to alternative forms of organizing.

Accordingly, drases can create the conditions for developing social and organizational relations that play a pivotal role in terms of mobilization capacities and internal cohesion. They do not only assist the collectives involved to raise their concerns and

share their knowledge, but also, and perhaps even more promising is that, they provide a solidarity space for more collaborative models of production and distribution to emerge. Therefore, temporary carvings of space within already established alternative sites become important for sustaining existing initiatives and for creating new subjectivities that can mobilize collective actions within and beyond localities. Hence, *the un/folding of drasis creates socio-spatial forms of solidarity with prefigurative potentialities (Proposition 3).*

*Insert Table 2 about here*

Hence, as the three propositions formulated in this section (see Table 2 above) indicated, through the performance of spontaneous and ephemeral events, alternatives institute prefigurative assemblages that resist neoliberal reforms and austerity politics and constitute platforms of social learning and socio-spatial solidarity.

### **Conclusion and future directions**

After 2008, the year that formally marked the onset of the global financial crisis, countries, largely affected by uncertainty, precariousness and socio-economic instability, have witnessed the emergence of alternatives that attempt to counteract the effects of austerity as well as resist neoliberal domination. The unemployed, impoverished and dispossessed respond by developing alternatives with new organizing possibilities and collaboratively co-construct actual and virtual places of creative resistance. Alternatives increasingly engage in forms of political activity and re-organization, building new networks of care, inhabiting urban activist/creative places. Via these new organizational forms, individuals and networks express their

discontent and subvert dominant socio-spatial arrangements in response to disintegrating established social/institutional structures and policies. The question however remains as to whether these collectivities can constitute new domains in public life and the re-organization of space/places so to contribute to a new model of citizenship (Hardt and Negri, 2000).

In this paper, we wanted to go beyond a discussion of the negative impact of the global financial crisis and explore what affected communities are doing to counteract this crisis and resist acute neoliberal capitalist reforms. We thus focused on the creative aspects of discontent and indignation and explored how inhabitation of self-organized sites, such as *Micropolis* and *Navarinou Park*, enact what we referred to as drases. Foregrounding the concept of drasis, we focused on a series of differential carvings of space that lead to the emergence of new or the expansion of known fields of practice towards unimagined realms. By linking drasis with assemblage thinking, we focused on the material, situated subjectivities that are differentially assembled and reassembled and the processes through which they enact transformative re-configuration of socio-spatial relations. We suggested that drases become catalysts for assembling alternative life-worlds and articulating new forms of contentious politics.

Thus, as a conceptual tool, drases enables the study how the flows and fixities of different subjectivities become temporarily re-territorialized, reconfiguring the differential capacities of human and non-human agencies and ensuing what Jacobs (2011:5) described as 'eventful differentiation'. This reconfiguration is a political project of self-organization, - what Lefebvre (2009) calls 'autogestion' - that can be extended into all spheres of everyday life; it is a constitutively geographical project to

the ways we produce and use space in order to maximize use value for citizens rather than maximize exchange value for capital (Purcell 2013; Purcell, 2014; Vasudevan, 2014; Vasudevan, 2015).

Through the discussion of two concrete drases, the *CIC Workshop* and the *Emergence of the Park* at *Micropolis* and *Park Navarinou* respectively, we made visible the importance of ephemeral and spontaneous engagements, and discussed them in relation to the immanent potentialities of alternative organizational forms. By stressing the performative qualities of drasis, we suggested that it creates new socio-spatial forms of solidarity by ‘forming canals’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) and linking heterogeneous assemblages in different spaces and times. These assemblages, through the concentration and dispersal of knowledge and skills, contribute to the formation of social learning platforms that seek to establish alternatives to neoliberal capitalism.

*Micropolis* and *Park Navarinou* are similar in that they are both self-organized sites where resistance formations usually gather to either attend pre-arranged events or enact drasis. They are also different: the *Park* is a squatted public space whereas *Micropolis* is a self-managed, yet institutionally embedded social centre (operates in rented premises). Nevertheless, these spaces, while facilitating the enactment of drases, are also transformed by them; drases re-define the relationship that communities have with space, social engagement and collective action. More work is required to explore how differences such as this could affect drasis, and unveil the tensions, ambiguities and variations in the enactment of drasis. Future studies could focus on these tensions and variations and explore the conditions and the processes

through which drasis may be performed differently across diverse sites and fields of action.

New socio-spatial relationships, materially constituted during drasis may be the first step towards developing a benevolent, self-organizing commons that can restrain extreme forms of neoliberalism through the collective action of unincorporated social movements that disorganize the cultural and political dominance of the current market logic (Castells, 2000; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; Sassen, 2006). Yet, we have to also note here that drasis can also be appropriated by forms of neoliberal capitalism, and could produce spaces of political organisation, which fail to bring about transformative practice. Various disciplinary practices of control and appropriation as well as homogenizing commercialization, corporate interests and institutionalization of practices could interfere with what we identified as processes of drasis and limit its prefigurative potential. The appropriation of certain subversive practices can limit or hinder alternatives, re-constituting them as profit territories (Daskalaki and Mould, 2013). Future research agendas could focus on the practices or strategies that have been instituted by these sites and alternatives or could be instituted so as to resist appropriation, assimilation and enclosure.

Finally, future work can focus on technologically embedded drases and explore the process through which social media (like Twitter; see for example, Theocharis, 2011) enact other carvings that open up possibilities for new modes of participation. More importantly, future work could explore how new technological developments like mobile technologies and augmented urban spaces (Leyshon et al., 2013; Aurigi and De Cindio, 2008) can enhance or restrain the potentialities of learning assemblages and their capacity for instigating drasis territories in the future. In addition, more

research is necessary for the investigation of the ways – besides formation of resistance assemblages, social learning and socio-spatial solidarity proposed here - through which drasis can promote disruptions in established, more institutionalized spaces.

To conclude, by foregrounding the concept of drasis, we offered three propositions according to which drasis could enable the disruption of capitalist enclosures and lead to imminent forms of engagement, learning, solidarity and alternative organizing. Through the enactment of drasis, we suggested, self-managed social laboratories encourage interventionary, community engagement and demonstrate the importance of embedding alternative initiatives in heterogeneous assemblages that mobilize collective action. Hence, drasis signifies a possibility that something substantial can be made from things that otherwise may have remained invisible or unimagined.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Assemblages comprise a wide variety of wholes constructed from heterogeneous formations, ranging from molecules to biological organisms, human abstract systems, languages, species and ecosystems (see for example, DeLanda, 2006). See also relevant discussion by Introna (2013: 337) on the ‘accomplishments of heterogeneous assemblages’; these accomplishments describe ‘not acts by pre-existing actors...but one possible outcome within the flow/becoming of the heterogeneous assemblage’.

<sup>2</sup> <http://micropolis-socialspace.blogspot.gr/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://parkingPark.espivblogs.net/>

<sup>4</sup> The Vio.Me Solidarity Initiative (a group of collectives that support the struggle of Vio.Me workers that spreads across Greece and internationally) regularly holds General Assembly meetings at the space of *Micropolis*. These meetings are also held at a squatted space in Thessaloniki, *Scholio*.

<sup>5</sup> <http://cooperativa.cat/en/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.festival4sce.org/>

<sup>7</sup> Another workshop by *CIC* took place in Thessaloniki on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of December 2015 on ‘Cooperatives, self-organizations and autonomous movements’.

<sup>8</sup> Notes from the meeting held in relation to this can be found at <https://titanpad.com/7HuS7Nb9iw> (accessed in December 2015).