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Solidarity and collective forms of social reproduction:

The social and political legacy of Syntagma Square, Athens

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Abstract

The latest encampments in public spaces, such as Occupy Wall Street, Taksim Square and Syntagma Square, have highlighted the significance of public space in shaping social, economic and political struggles around the world. In this paper, drawing on a qualitative study of Syntagma Square in Athens, Greece, we confirm that spontaneous, self-organised movements, such as the Aganaktismenoi (Indignant) movement, could function as intermediaries between protest and resistance, leading to the institution of urban practices of commoning. We argue that the innovative attributes of such movements inspire and trigger the introduction of new decision-making mechanisms, social relationships and political subjectivities and the institution of solidarity and collective forms of social reproduction. We conclude that these initiatives constitute a radicalization of political struggles and have a positive effect both in terms of increased civic participation and the emergence of new collective identities and political subjectivities.

Keywords: social movements, resistance, Squares, Aganaktismenoi movement, commoning practices

Introduction

Despite their spatial restrictions, the movement of the Squares (Varvarousis et al. 2020; Fernández-Savater et al., 2017), for example in Istanbul, London, Madrid or Paris, successfully adopted a cosmopolitan identity, while managing to secure widespread local and global support (Gerbaudo, 2014). These mobilizations constituted collective, bottom-up claims for direct democracy, social justice, and equality (Castells, 2012; Harvey, 2012). Their demands also concerned large scale economic and political restructuring (Inceoglu, 2015; Madden and Vradis, 2012) and were pursued through the development of solidarity practices established in the ‘enemy’s territory’ (Aalberts, 2012; Stavrides, 2012). Previous research suggests that such mobilizations facilitate the emergence of new organizational modes, which advance the importance of public space by making it a field for commoning and political engagement (Stavrides, 2012; Schipper, 2017; Karaliotas, 2016; Leontidou, 2012; Kaika and Karaliotas, 2016).

In this paper, we focus on Syntagma square, one of the most emblematic public spaces in Athens, which has historically hosted events and actions of key significance to the Greek political life during the 19th and 20th centuries. The square and the Aganaktismenoi movement became recognizable worldwide as a field of struggles against the austerity measures, implemented by all Greek governments since 2010 and imposed by European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Syntagma Square constituted a territory defined by capitalist social and economic relations but through the presence and practices of the Aganaktismenoi movement, became a space that inspired several bottom up practices, processes and socio-spatialities outside the established institutional structures.

We will argue that the Aganaktismenoi movement did not use public space solely on a material basis (Mitchell, 1995; Ruddick, 1996); instead, by addressing participants' social reproductive needs, the movement also inspired new socio-spatial relations and collective forms of resistance, outside the logic of affiliation with conventional political parties and networks - what Kaika and Karaliotas (2014) describe as 're-territorialization of democratic politics'. Resistance, in this context, will be discussed as a collective and contentious process that not only challenges austerity and related state policies but also proposes and creates new political and cultural identities and subjectivities that directly confront the narrations, conditions and effects of such policies. For example, protesters' experimentation with new, innovative ways of defining and addressing health care needs gradually diffused in the form of local initiatives to residential Athenian districts. This process of self-organization or in Lefebvre's (2009) terms, 'autogestion', can be extended to all spheres of everyday life and produce spaces that maximize use value for citizens rather than maximize exchange value for capital (Jeffrey et al., 2012; Vasudevan, 2015).

We thus propose that new organisational forms (for example, solidarity initiatives) operate as social resilience forces, co-constituting collective forms of social reproduction. Social reproduction refers to 'that complex of activities and relations by which our life and labor are daily reconstituted' (Federici, 2012: 7), including taking care of ourselves and others, providing emotional support, growing / cooking food, organizing and attending to political meetings and classes and accessing/providing healthcare and welfare (Jeffries, 2018: 579). That is, it incorporates all those waged and unwaged activities that 'make living possible and bearable' (Jeffries, 2018: 579). Materialist feminists (Dalla Costa & James, 1972; Weeks, 2011, Federici, 2012), as early as 1970s, have argued for placing social reproduction at the centre of analyses of capitalist society but also at the centre of rethinking of a new politics that moves between the

wage and the commons. It could be argued that the Aganaktismenoi movement inspired and triggered the emergence of collective forms of social reproduction that attempt to resist the contraction of the welfare state, especially in the early stages of a multi-leveled crisis.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that ‘the square managed to create a powerful collective imaginary of solidarity and resistance and a type of symbolic capital that acted as a generative force and a catalyst for the dispersal of the spatial practices of the occupation’ (Arampatzi, 2017: 731), certain factors mediated its transformation into a public space of radical politics. In this context, we consider important to study the historical and political attributes of the Aganaktismenoi movement that allowed Syntagma Square to operate as an intermediary space between protest and resistance and enable the diffusion of solidarity initiatives outside the square.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: We first discuss squares as places of protest and particularly refer to collective actions organized at Syntagma Square before the 2011 mobilizations. We propose that the Aganaktismenoi movement constitutes a shifting point concerning protest and resistance in Greece, relating to modes of participation and organization. Then we describe the methodology and methods employed for the collection of data. The empirical section that follows explores processes through which Syntagma Square was re-constituted as intermediary space, marking a passage from protest to resistance, in the form of establishing collective forms of social reproduction and local networks of solidarity. The paper concludes by inviting future research that will focus on the exploration of the diffusion process through which the Aganaktismenoi movement may have affected the emergence and evolution of numerous urban social movements, grassroots organizations, and solidarity initiatives that currently operate around Greece (Arampatzi, 2016; Daskalaki and Kokkinidis, 2017).

Squares as places of protest: The Syntagma Square prior the 2011 mobilizations

Public space is incorporated in differentiated ways and with varying importance in social movements' practices and claims. As a result, not all struggles influence or are influenced by public space in the same ways. For example, discussing spaces designed for leisure, Arora (2015) stresses their contradictory character: Although these spaces are designed to contain mass politics, they often operate as fields of protest. Places and spaces are objects and sites of politics. Accordingly, space is conceptualised 'as built environment and as a depository of social relations and political actions' (Auyero, 2006). Marom (2013) argues that protest in public space constitutes not a claim to the right to the city but the articulation of various social, political and economic rights through the city, providing voice and visibility to a wide range of social groups. However, at the same time, space can pose limitations, enhance potentialities and offer varying levels of visibility and access to public sphere and realm. Subsequently, the transformative effects of urban social movements – in terms of instituting new organizational forms and spatial practices – can significantly vary, depending on the movements' processes of evolution and objectives (Pettas, 2019).

Four ideological models of public spaces have been identified in prior studies: ceremonial, community, liberal and multi-public (Iveson, 1998). The attributes of ceremonial public spaces include a relation to imaginary constructions and notions as well as historical events, a large size and central position. Moreover, they function as spaces that host major events organized by a variety of actors such as the State, agents of the economy and social movements. Syntagma square, following Iveson's (1998) description, has functioned as a field of struggle comprised by ceremonial and planned demonstrations organized and carried out by highly heteronomous political subjects (Pettas, 2017). Similar to Gül et al.'s (2014:71) description of Taksim Square,

Syntagma Square ‘underlines the myriad of values, symbols, ideologies, associations and meanings such places hold and the passions they can ignite in the minds of people’. In particular, the area around Syntagma Square constitutes an important field of economic activity, as well as one of Athens’ distinctive tourist landmarks. Additionally, administrative buildings such as the ministries of Economy and Education, embassies and luxurious hotels are located in the surrounding area, including a key infrastructural feature, the Metro station that operates since 2000. Syntagma Square, on the level of everyday life, constitutes a territory controlled by the state and the market and, despite frequent demonstrations and protests organized there, remains unchallenged (Pettas, 2017).

In Athens, urban social movements emerged in a large scale around the mid-1990s, primarily as a response to development plans related to the 2004 Olympic Games which were held in Greece (Hadjimihalis, 2013). These mobilizations have failed to influence everyday life in the square significantly and change its character, due to external and internal dynamics of these mobilizations reflected in both the political subjectivities involved and the interests associated with the use and (re-) appropriation of public space. It is worth mentioning however that autonomous, anarchist and libertarian groups - despite the fact that they partake in central and massive demonstrations - do not assemble in Syntagma Square. Instead their radical political interventions are dispersed around the city and particularly, the neighborhood of Exarcheia (in proximity to Syntagma Square), which constitutes a symbolic neighborhood for the anarchist movement in Greece¹. The lack of organizational relationships among anarchist and libertarian groups and the subsequent limited – compared to general strikes, for example – participation to protests is a major reason for not choosing Syntagma Square as a field of political action. This fact, along with the strong ceremonial character of the central piazzas, did not lead to any long-lasting resistance infrastructure.

However, the social movements for alter-globalization, the anti-war movement and the Greek students' mobilizations in 2006-2007 led to the rise of new collective subjectivities, a 'new kind of radical *we*' (Hadjimihalis, 2013, emphasis added), which matured in December 2008 after Grigoropoulos' murder. In particular, we have seen a range of changes that relate to partial disengagement from official political parties and organizations such as the development of horizontal, anti-hierarchical structures, autonomous modes of organizing, solidarity with global movements with radical characteristics, advanced role for new technologies and virtual spaces for both organizational and promotional purposes (see for example, Leontidou, 2012; Hadjimihalis, 2013; Petropoulou, 2014). The attributes that characterized the events of December 2008 were also significant for the emergence of the Aganaktismenoi movement in 2011. Resembling several international scale movements of protest such as the Arab Spring, Indignados and Occupy (Kaika and Karaliotas, 2014; Leontidou, 2012; Petropoulou, 2014; Prentoulis and Thomassen, 2013), Aganaktismenoi was a bottom-up movement, which comprised diverse group of participants who organized outside formal channels (Leontidou, 2012; Petropoulou, 2014)², and expressed disapproval towards political parties and bureaucratic unions (Kaika and Karliotas, 2014). On the contrary to Mullis' et al. (2016) or Schipper's (2017) findings concerning the Blockupy movements in Frankfurt and the Israel in J14 protests, the Aganaktismenoi movement, neither evolved from a pre-existing network of urban social movements nor included issues of urban collective consumption in its claims. Those participating in the mobilizations of 2011 contributed to the development of bottom-up, direct democratic political processes, which emerged in a spatial and symbolic juxtaposition with the 'traditional' place for politics, namely the Greek parliament. During this period, Syntagma Square became recognizable worldwide as a field of struggle against the austerity measures, implemented by all Greek governments since 2010 and imposed by European Commission, the

European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Those measures included extensive privatizations, cuts in salaries (in both private and public sectors) and pensions, cuts in welfare provision and ‘major, anti-labour and anti-environment institutional changes’ (Hadjimihalis, 2013: 118).

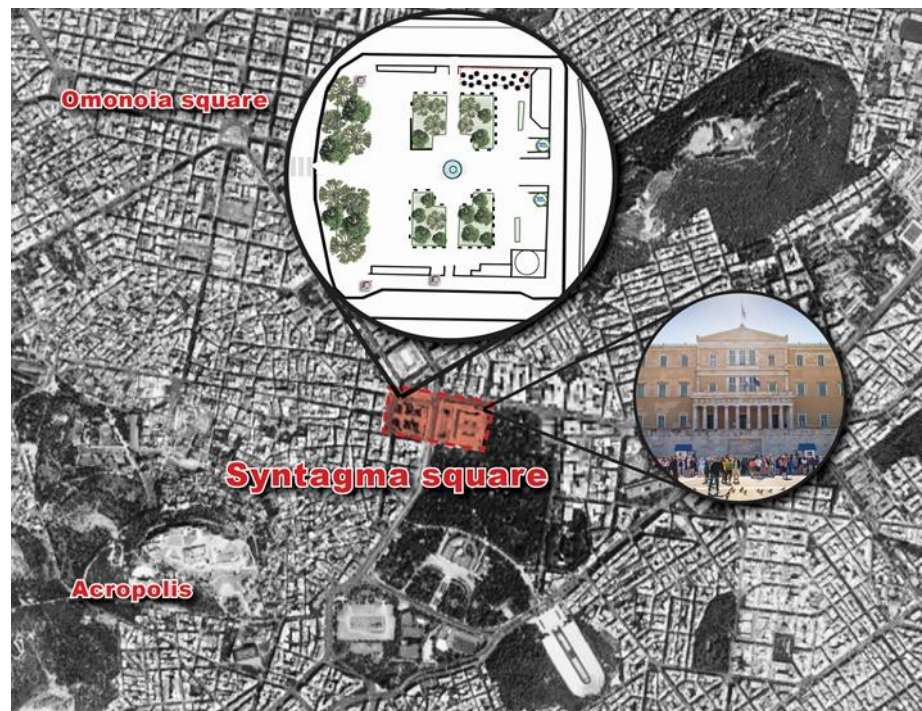


Figure 1: Syntagma Square in Athens

Contrary to earlier mobilizations that protected the public character of urban spaces in Athens (Pettas 2019, 2018), the squares movement provided marginalized groups with the ability to challenge the hegemonic discourses and the economic and political elites related to ceremonial public spaces (Tarrow, 2012). Building on earlier accounts of the transformative impact of commoning social practices (Bresnihan and Byrne, 2015), we argue that organizational innovations, such as care networks that emerged in Syntagma Square, triggered collective engagement with social reproductive practices in the square and beyond. In this sense, the Aganaktismenoi movement constituted a critical moment in a chain of events that led to increased civic participation and the emergence of new political subjectivities.

Methodology and Methods

We draw on extensive qualitative work and more particularly: a) participant observations of the Aganaktismenoi movement in 2011 and other collective actions and protests that took place in Syntagma Square, including the period from May to September 2014 before the SYRIZA political party was elected in government; b) 14 in-depth, unstructured interviews (conducted in May and June 2014). with members of major parties and organizations who regularly participated protests in Syntagma Square (SYRIZA, KKE, ANTARSYA, two anarchist assemblies)³, as well as with three participants of the Aganaktismenoi movement. In particular, we included participants of political parties and organisations (apart from KKE) that participated in the movement, and participants that were not associated to collective political bodies. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The general thematic categories that participants were invited to reflect included: their role in the square movements, experiential factors, interactions and alliances as well as organization practices. A reflexive analysis of the transcribed interview material and fieldnotes taken during participant observations led to two key themes: Syntagma Square as in-between space that marked the passage from protest to organizing social relations differently, and the role of the anarchist movement and principles in this process.

From protest to organizing differently: Squares as intermediary spaces

Most of the participants we interviewed stressed both the proximity of the square to the Parliament (where austerity policies are becoming Greek law) and its function as a space where oppositional forces can assemble. Political struggle was viewed not as a continuous process, on the level of everyday life but a spatially bounded clash mediated by political parties and

organizations. Thus ‘traditional’ conceptions of power as a tool in the hands of the ruling classes and their institutions were raised:

‘We organize political actions at Syntagma Square because of its centrality and proximity to the parliament. It is the basis of the government and it is there that we directly challenge and confront its power’ (Member of political party, KKE).

The symbolic and spatial dimensions were crucial in most of the mobilizations that emerged in 2011 and after that⁴:

‘There (Syntagma Square), one is –on the imaginary level- directly challenging authority and power. Syntagma Square represents authority and power, the government, the state. Syntagma is the place where power and opposing forces meet’ (Member of political party, SYRIZA).

Yet ideological differences among political parties become the most common source of confrontation and lack of collaboration of various actors and often translate in different street practices. Both participative observation and in-depth interviews with participants uncovered the limitations of these practices concerning associations to public space. For example, in some cases, decision-making processes in relation to the organization of protests were formulated within ‘closed doors’:

‘Concerning demonstrations and protests, PAME (the trade union of KKE) and its executive secretariat arrange the details of our presence in a protest, the demonstrators’ blocks’ line up etc. Moreover, in every block there are specific people in charge, safeguard, banners [...]’ (Member of political party, KKE).

In addition, the development of a collective identity among the participants and attempts to redefine broader concepts, such as democracy, were obstructed by the participants' positionalities and enclosures (such as political 'blocks', parties and organizations). These enclosures prevented possible interactions and the development of new identities and narrations through social interaction, knowledge exchange and political reflexivity. In several cases, political organizations' pursuit of ideological hegemony upon the newly emerged movement, did not allow them to re-negotiate their agendas, as well as tactics. However, slight shifts were traced in their effort to hold a central role in the everyday reproduction of the Aganaktismenoi movement, through partaking in the movements' organizing processes:

'In the last three days, five people that are known to me and are part of political organisations of the Left talked in the assembly without revealing this engagement. Moreover, it seems that they talk differently than in other kind of public events and meetings in the past, as if they really made an effort to simplify their arguments to be more understandable by another, more diverse crowd' (Fieldnotes, June 14, 2011).

Finally, for actors that participate in electoral procedures or are associated to parties that do so, the high levels of mainstream media coverage of Syntagma Square constituted an important point of entrance in the public sphere. Consequently, their actions are highly shaped according to external rules of the 'spectacle' (Debord, 1967). These circumstances, that traditionally characterized Syntagma mobilizations, constituted obstacles for the development of commoning practices. However, during the Aganaktismenoi movement, efforts were made to question and challenge and overcome these obstacles (see recent work by Bosco, 2004). The autonomous character of the movement became crucial and led to increased participation and

inclusion. Its grassroots origin was welcomed by a variety of participants, including Maria, a postgraduate student with limited previous involvement in social movements and Ilias, a 47 year old pharmacist who –despite being organized in political organizations of the Left in his 20's and 30's - stated that he has been politically 'inactive' for a long period of time before participating in the Aganaktismenoi movement:

'The majority of people that started the assembly were not politically organized and they strongly claimed the adoption of a decision-making procedure through the general assembly in order that the movement would not be taken over by specific parties and organizations' (Maria, Participant in the Aganaktismenoi movement).

'The Aganaktismenoi movement was a big surprise for me, as I was used to the 'classic' left demonstrations and I saw a crowd that was diverse, colorful and happy. For me, this was a deep breath. I consider this movement as the foundations of new cultural model for exercising politics. This new model was obvious even in the way people kept the square clean. Especially after clashes with the police, people used to go back to the square in order to clean it up by their own initiative' (Ilias, Participant in the Aganaktismenoi movement).

The analysis of spatial practices in Syntagma Square refers to the creation of two differentiated places: the 'upper' and 'down' Squares. According to Leontidou (2012) the division is based on distinctions in terms of the political orientation of the participants, as the 'upper' square attracted people of the Right ideology, contrary to the 'down' square that attracted those of the Left one. Building on that, we argue that the division between 'upper' and 'down' square was also based on protesters' willingness to participate in collective procedures. This led to different

modes of physical presence in the Square; in the ‘upper’ square, there were no elements of organization, while in the ‘down’ square, there was the operation of Syntagma Square’s assembly that both asked and exercised differentiated modes of democracy. During this process, collective political imaginaries, especially concerning people without any prior participation in political formations, were also articulated:

During the first days of the assembly, the main topic was ‘why do we harrumph’. However, as the process evolved, the main topic was ‘what can we do from now on’ (Ilias, Participant in the Aganaktismenoi movement).

Moreover, social activities and events, such as concerts and screenings developed in the logic of solidarity and support, contributed, altogether, to the development of an alternative ‘park culture’ (Ozduzen, 2017). The aforementioned activities led to increased levels of inclusion, as differentiated needs, desires and skills were met and employed towards building opportunities of involvement for a diverse range of people. Through everyday arrangements concerning various aspects of the square’s everyday social reproduction, the Aganaktismenoi movement managed to attract participants beyond the ‘usual suspects’ that participated in political events on the square until 2011. Moreover, the outcomes of such arrangements, opened new ‘entry points’ concerning political engagement and protest. Vicky, a 34 years old nurse who participated in the health committee, underlines this ‘politicization through process’, especially concerning individuals with limited previous involvement in social movements and events of protest:

‘Apart from events organized by the assembly, groups of people or individuals were welcomed to participate in whatever activity they wished. During those days, Syntagma Square was a space of free expression and creativity [...].

There were loads of people who had not been in any protest before – but they became gradually more militant; you did not expect them to turn up with protective equipment, like anti-tear gas masks!’ (Vicky, Participant in the Aganaktismenoi movement).

Thus, the Aganaktismenoi movement expressed a massive discontent concerning the Greek political system, communicated through the condemnation of mainstream political parties and trade unions. However, this dissatisfaction was expressed through two major narrations: first, disillusionment and discontent with the Greek formal, parliamentary political process:

‘People in front of the parliament, through chants, bans, signs and discussions, expressed their discontent with the political elite, and the two major parties that governed the country in the last decades [...]. Chants such as “scums, traitors politicians”, and the presence of Greek and Byzantine flags (associated with more conservative and right-wing ideologies) created a feeling completely different from the one gets in the assemblies’ (Fieldnotes, May 25, 2011).

The second narration culminated a growing concern with dominant forms of democratic participation, arguing for the institution of more direct democratic processes (Prentoulis and Thomassen, 2013), as a form of resistance to structural capitalist developments. The practices that emerged during the Aganaktismenoi movement were not driven by individual ideological and political motives. Instead they were triggered by the demand for increased participation in the formation of the organizational structures and decision-making procedures. This shift, we argue, signalled processes through which Syntagma Square was re-constituted as in-between spaces that marked the passage from protest to organizing social relations differently (that is,

collective forms of social reproduction). Protests are commonly perceived as a form of collective political action that expresses disapproval, dissent or objection (Weitz, 2001). They are short-lived and outcome orientated. Resistance, on the other hand, ‘learns to live with conflict [...]’. Even if the resisters’ goals are achieved, their practices continue because they build up community over time. Intertwined with history and each participant’s biography, resistance becomes part of their life’ (Bonnin, 2017: 4).

The organizational and structural shifts in the ways social movements organized in the square, as expressed in the Aganaktismenoi movement in 2011, created the conditions through which at least the internal barriers to autonomous and horizontal organizational organization can be mediated. Within this environment, all aspects of social reproduction, as experienced in the square, were addressed by distinct structures and committees. In these arrangements, emotional and physical safety for members of the movement played a crucial role:

‘A “calmness group” is operating in the Square. They undertake safeguarding duties among other things. I talked to X, who told me that the same group has got a “safety plan” in case police forces attacked the camp’ (Fieldnotes, June 13, 2011).

Hence the Aganaktismenoi movement, we argue, had two distinct yet interacting roles: a) during its short existence, it moved beyond political party-driven actions of protest and dissent and instituted new decision-making mechanisms and structures, new social relationships and political subjectivities; b) inspired the development of collective, non-hierarchical solidarity initiatives which resist the ongoing neoliberal restructuring and its consequences on the local and translocal levels (Arampatzi, 2017, 2016; Daskalaki and Kokkinidis, 2017; Rakopoulos, 2014; Stavrides, 2014; Vaiou and Kalandides, 2016).

Autonomy, collective organizing and the role of the anarchist movement

Building on the above, our analysis of the Aganaktismenoi movement is based on the procedures that took place in the so-called ‘down’ square, arguing however that the division took place around issues of organization, rather than issues of ideology. Having said that, the General Assembly of Syntagma Square was the first material and functional agent that was established within this specific public space, upgrading public space to a place where decision-making takes place and politics is exercised. The massive participation in the demonstrations and assemblies brought the ‘traditional’ agents of such events in front of a rather hostile environment⁵. For example, we quote from our fieldnotes an incident when the Youth Syriza party branch was self-marginalized due to its adoption of exclusionary party politics:

‘A hundred or so youngsters from the youth branch of Syriza were regularly assembling in the upper’ square; they had a banner, chanting anti-government slogans. Yet they were in a circle facing inwards, they were closing themselves down to others. They were not even facing the other fellow protesters’
(Fieldnotes, June 5, 2011).

According to Castoriades (1975), narrations and practices that occur from the pursuit of autonomy oppose external regulations not exclusively because of the content of the regulations, but because they originate outside the political subject. Social movements that encompass hierarchical structures are heteronomous by definition and hence find it difficult to evolve in terms of ideology and structure due to the reactive characteristics of the dominant sub-groups (Rao et al., 2000). The pursuit of autonomy and the non-institutional procedures are thus central elements of anarchist organizations’ and assemblies’ structure. These attributes were also key for the Aganaktismenoi movement, signifying the increasing influence of the anarchist

elements of the Greek movement, not only in terms of ideology, but also in terms of structures and procedures.

Interviewees from central anarchist assemblies showed that, during the first days of the Aganaktismenoi movement, anarchist groups assumed that the mobilization was controlled by political parties; as a result, they were extremely reserved to participate in the movements' practices of organizing. Effie, a 26-year-old member of a social enterprise and participant of a small-scale anarchist assembly in a central Athenian neighborhood, described anarchists' initial hesitation concerning their participation in the Square movement, but also their support of smaller initiatives that emerged in the same period and operated by similar principles:

‘Initially our group observed the developments in the Square at a distance. However, by keeping a close eye to the procedures many of us – individually – decided to participate. Moreover, there was an even more intense participation from anarchists in similar initiatives in neighborhoods all over Athens’ (Effie, Anarchist Assembly 1).

Gradually, the everyday Assembly that was taking place in Syntagma Square attracted anarchist members who joined and positively contributed to decision-making practices. It was important that the adoption of procedures and practices relating to anarchist ideology took place prior to anarchists' participation. This happened despite the fact that members from Left-wing political parties (who played a central role in forming the framework of decision-making procedures) were not accustomed to such practices within their political organizations:

‘The main reason for not participating during the first days of the movement was that it lacked continuity; there was no antecedent. However, the structures

that were developed, and our presence and direct involvement were crucial...namely, the open assembly in which everyone could speak in every way possible and the fact that opinions that in other structures could have been considered as 'extreme' were allowed; this brought the anarchists closer to the Aganaktismenoi movement' (Effie, Anarchist Assembly 1).

Anarchist groups assumed that anti-hierarchical, direct-democracy procedures and non-institutional action secure both the autonomy of the movement and a renewed role for individuals who are not members of collective political entities. Yet, as interviewees from several structures of the Aganaktismenoi movement argued, the adoption of such practices did not simply reflect anarchist ideologies (participants of the Communication and Health Committees). As Vasilis, a 23-year-old student describes, anarchist movement contributed to the institution of the open, participative, inclusive and non-hierarchical organizing principles in the assemblies:

'We came closer to the Square movement because of that. The everyday oppressive presence of the police always brought us closer the movement. I think though that the most important outcome of the Square [movement] was the neighborhood assemblies and what came after that, their evolution' (Vasilis, Anarchist Assembly 2).

The pursuit of autonomy and the adoption of anti-hierarchical structures and direct democracy procedures constituted participants' call for the transformation on the ways through which protests and commoning practices are performed. This shift, apart from major effects in the political dimension of the movement, leads to the advancement of the importance of public space in the movements' practices as well as the emergence of the square as an intermediate and indeterminate space: 'Gradually the square became as space not of indignation but of

possibility, it had social characteristics [...] a possibility for real change' (Maria, participant in the Aganaktismenoi movement). As Harvey (2012: 73) argues, 'the common is not to be constructed as a particular kind of thing, asset or even social process, but as an unstable and malleable social relation between a particular self-defined social group and those aspects of its actually existing or yet-to-be created social and/ or physical environment deemed crucial to its life and livelihood.' The public space is no longer the virtual arena within which pre-determined strategies are carried out by heteronomous structures. Instead, public space constitutes a political forum that functions similar to the ancient *agora*: a place in which decisions are made through direct and inclusive processes.

Crucially, in addition to that, the non-institutional development of the movement created the need for the development of supportive structures that operated in the public space of Syntagma Square: health care, physical infrastructure and communication structures were situated and organized in public space; and it was the first time that Syntagma Square hosted infrastructures of non-commercial nature. These structures contested the hegemonic constructions of financialized spaces (like the Square), as state-managed, privatized or enclosed, engaging in a movement that brings about temporary inhabitation of place identities, de/territorializes social formations and constitutes new organizational forms. Thus, by actively rejecting statist politics, these social arrangements enact the affective dimensions of collective action, constantly de/(re) territorialize activist subjectivities towards potentially new modes of political organization: 'they are not simply a spatial category, output, or resultant formation, but signify doing, performance and events [...] these relations within and between sites may require different kinds of labour and are more or less vulnerable to collapse, or to reassembling in different forms' (McFarlane, 2009: 564).

Discussion

In this paper, we focused on the impact and legacy of the practices of commoning developed during the Aganaktismenoi movement following the December 2008 protests in Greece. Those movements experimented with new organizational modes that increased individual participation at all stages of their development, facilitated the emergence of new collective political identities and –consciously or not – elevated the role of public space into a field of decision making and politics through the institution of practices of commoning. Nevertheless, the strong ceremonial character of Syntagma Square, along with internal weaknesses of the Aganaktismenoi movement, restricted its role as a field of struggle and commoning. The movement did not manage to sufficiently challenge and offer an alternative to the logic of assignation that allowed its political capitalization from the party of SYRIZA. Syntagma Square was deployed as a virtual arena for individualistic pursuits, extending from businesses to collective social entities (including media representations of the Square during protests and assembling). In particular, the established power relations in favor of the state and economic forces, and the opposition of the users of the Square towards collective actions constituted the major external barriers opposing the evolution of the square to a radical political space with transformative potential. In addition to that, there was a lack of presence of social movements that were accustomed and experienced in the institution of commoning spatial practices.

However, during the square mobilizations, the influence and power of traditional political parties diminished. At the same time, the notion of autonomy appeared through the development of horizontal structures and rejection of representational procedures. Emerging forms of co-operation driven by grassroots, community engagement, inspired new socio-spatial relations (see relevant work by Bosco, 2004). The ‘creation of a social infrastructure of alternative (re)productive projects in the form of commons’ (Varvarousis et al. 2020:1) was

accompanied by a shift in spatial practices and associations to public space. Syntagma Square operated as an assemblage (Quian, 2020) that brought together people, ideas and organizational innovations. The square became, albeit temporarily, a primary field for political action and transformation.

Crucially, in the following years, the movement's heterogeneous elements were reterritorialized in several Athenian districts, partaking in numerous initiatives such as solidarity structures, cultural initiatives and neighborhood assemblies. These collective and inclusive ways to address issues of social reproduction at the local level, as Varvarousis et al. (2020:1) rightly stressed, 'constitute political and politicizing actions for activists and users for their effects on everyday life, for their capacity to link their practices with broader, structural dynamics of injustice, inequality and exclusion, and for their selective engagement with counter-austerity politics'. Thus, commoning spaces of social reproduction represent an alternative to the degradation of welfare state and help vulnerable parts of urban population to deal with everyday needs.

Conclusions

Prior research has focused on the direct interaction between social practices of protest and the urban spaces in which they develop. Building upon this work, the paper discussed the Square as a critical intermediary space between protest and organized practices of creative resistance. We argued that the impact of social movements on urban and public space should be explored in terms of their capacity to collectively create and propose new, innovative assembling arrangements that, through practice and negotiation, experiment with alternative commoning spaces of social reproduction. The innovative attributes of Aganaktismenoi can be traced in the

emergence and establishment of bottom-up, collective practices, extending from horizontal political processes to cleaning and recreational activities. The emergence of innovative, transferrable and collective knowledge and experience, desires and identities produced dynamics and potentialities that constructed an unprecedented (at least for Syntagma Square) sense of place (see also Drainville, 2004), temporarily creating new emotional landscapes and cultural codes. The diffusion of squares movement does not signify new ways of protesting but new ways of collectively defining and addressing social needs. The social reproduction dimension of these new ways of organizing creative resistance to capitalist forms of production and consumption was crucial: temporary, small-scale structures, addressed social needs that were also persistent in residential districts all over Athens. The most emblematic example, the social medical centers, which were inspired and built upon collective knowledge gained in Syntagma Square before diffused in numerous Athenian neighborhoods.

The occupation of public space was an essential, but not sufficient condition for the creation of these transformative subjectivities. Local solidarity initiatives, that emerged in Greece in the years that followed, adopted certain organizational attributes that allowed and reinforced the emergence of new individual and collective identities and increased participation beyond pre-determined ideological frames (Daskalaki and Kokkinidis, 2017). Nevertheless, the Aganaktismenoi movement signalled a transition from at times violent protests - actions of dissent and opposition- to the co-construction of new political subjectivities, narratives and imaginaries that developed and became the basis for a decentralized enactment of resistance initiatives, networks and practices all over Greece (for examples see the work of Daskalaki, 2017; Daskalaki et al., 2018). In Castoriades' terms (1975), these initiatives constitute an institutionalized mode of resistance⁶ through the establishment of new modes of organizing socio-spatial and economic relations on the local and translocal levels. For example, the

organizational practices of the Aganaktismenoi, *Indignados* and *Occupy* can be traced in the development of subsequent movements, such as the *Nuit Debut* movement in Paris (Sitrin, 2016) in which we witness the revitalization and enrichment of practices of direct democracy through the operation of general assemblies and other organizational characteristics. These movements continue the legacy of instituting social structures and procedures that redefine the notion of democracy through a plan for collective action. Thus, previous and ongoing mobilizations constitute a radicalization of political struggles and show that such developments can only have a positive influence in contemporary social movements both in terms organization of collective forms of social reproduction and constitution of new socio-spatial relationships and political subjectivities.

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Notes

¹ Whenever massive protests with a clear anarchist background take place, the starting point of choice is Monastiraki Square (also located in central Athens, near Acropolis Hill).

²The Aganaktismenoi movement started from calls in social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, similar to the movements of the Arab Spring and *Indignados*.

³ Concerning political parties incorporated in the research, we note that SYRIZA was organized (2014) as a coalition of the euro-communist party of SYNASPISMOS and organizations of the radical left. KKE is the Greek Communist party, while ANTARSYA is a coalition of ex-parliamentary organizations of anti-capitalist, communist backgrounds. KKE did not partake in the Aganaktismenoi movement but had a strong presence in anti-austerity mobilizations of the same period, a great percentage of which took place in Syntagma Square.

⁴In Athens, as in most cases all over the world, those mobilizations faced police brutality and suppression (Mavrommatis, 2015; Koutrolidou, 2016; Leontidou, 2012; Hadjimihalis, 2013).

⁵Within this environment, KKE decided to abstain from the movements' procedures accusing it as non - political. SYRIZA members participated individually but during interviews they admitted that internal party procedures were taking place within local SYRIZA organizations so that the party members develop a common rhetoric and presence. This is also the case for the extra-parliamentary party of ANTARSYA that had an active engagement with the Syntagma Assembly's organization and structure.

⁶According to Castoriades (1975), 'institution' is every collective structure that fulfills societal needs, independent of its juridico-political status.