

# Exploring the urban political in times of crisis: Urban politicising movements and solidarity networks in Greece

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## Background

A coupling of austerity urbanism with efforts to suture the institutional and public spaces for the expression of political disagreement is largely scripting urban politics and everyday life throughout Europe. And yet, in the aftermath of the squares and Occupy movements of 2011, European cities are also witnessing a cycle of novel forms of urban political organisation and experimentation. While geographically variegated in their niceties and divergently experienced throughout Europe, such transformations are most palpable in Greek cities.

Indeed, local assemblies, solidarity initiatives and self-managed co-operatives take root in the Greek urban landscape and articulate versatile, local and trans-local, solidarity networks. Such experiments and networks foreground a re-politicisation of the urban by expressing their antagonism to dominant politics, whilst also generating incipient new forms of urban being and doing in-common.

Despite their proliferation and importance, however, there is a dearth of empirically-grounded research around such urban political initiatives and solidarity networks as well as on how particular urban and political contexts shape re-politicisation in distinctive ways.



## Research Questions

- In what ways are urban political movements and solidarity networks contributing in re-politicising and re-imagining urban life in times of crisis?
  - What are their discursive, spatial and organisational repertoires?
  - What political possibilities do they open up and what are the challenges and limitations they face, including their tensions and alliances with the state at various scales?
  - To what extent are trans-local national and international networks of solidarity formed and how far can they influence and challenge institutional politics in Europe?



## Conceptual Background and Contribution

The project engages with the rekindled debates around the 'urban political' in two distinctive ways by:

- ✓ charting the multiple spaces and times of re-politicisation, moving beyond the prevailing emphasis on urban uprisings.
- ✓ staging a dialogue between Rancière's conceptualisation of politics (1999) and the conceptual apparatus of social movement and resistance studies.

In this, it transcends the focus on identity and strategic considerations in readings of urban movements to explore the opening of spaces for *the political* as opposed to institutionalised politics (Dikeç, 2012, Swyngedouw, 2014). Simultaneously, it adds to debates around the 'urban political' by mapping the organisational, spatial and discursive repertoires of urban movements and solidarity networks (Featherstone, 2012).

## Research Framework and Methodology

Collaborating with movements in Athens and Thessaloniki, the research analyses three movement practices:

- the self-organisation and self-management of urban commons
- grassroots initiatives supporting vulnerable urban dwellers
- local and trans-local solidarities between movements.

through an ethnographic methodology combining:

- 1) in-depth interviews with activists, policy-makers and politicians;
- 2) participant observation in movements' activities;
- 3) participatory video for research to creatively document movement experiences;
- 4) investigating the role of online tools in movement organising

## Outputs, Knowledge Exchange and Impact

The research addresses diverse stakeholders: from urban movements, to the voluntary sector to academic peers and policy-makers. Its projected academic outputs include:

- ❖ Four academic papers on the themes of urban political movements, urban political infrastructures, urban commoning and geographies of solidarities.
- ❖ A research monograph provisionally titled *Partitioning the urban: Spaces of post-democratisation, artifices of equality*
- ❖ A two-day conference on 'Re-thinking the Urban Political' at the University of Manchester bringing together academics and activists.

In parallel, **public engagement and knowledge exchange** are pivotal and will occur through multiple routes:

- ❖ An interactive website as a convergence space for activist-academic exchanges;
- ❖ Public "Research Cafés" assembling activists, academics and publics
- ❖ Participatory research videos hosted on the project's website and serving as a means of story-telling and wider public engagement.