

Summary of the Second COMPARE meeting in Thessaloniki, Greece

October 8-12th 2014

Participants: Panayotis Antoniadis, Ileana Apostol, Iva Cukic, Paolo Dini, Alexandros Kioupkiolis, Philipp Klaus, Brett Scott, Irene Sotiropoulou

Introduction

The second COMPARE meeting took place in the city of Thessaloniki, and it was organized with the help of our partner Alexandros Kioupkiolis, from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. On this occasion we explored other forms of self-organization than complementary currencies, which were the focus of the first meeting that was hosted by Sardex in Sardinia, such as social solidarity movements and urban cooperatives that appeared after the crisis in Greece. In addition to the project meeting, including presentations, discussions, and guided visits, we also organized a one-day symposium titled "Sharing experiences of self-organization" with the participation of local academics and special guests.

Following the style of the project meeting in April 2014, where the participation of our special guests Laura Sartori and Valeria Federighi was very much appreciated, we invited this time three researchers-activists whose interests and expertise were relevant for the type of self-organization that we would explore in Thessaloniki. More specifically, our guests were Iva Cukic, Brett Scott and Irene Sotiropoulou. Iva Cukic is an architect, activist and co-founder of the Belgrade-based collective called Ministry of Space. Their team organized the 2014 INURA conference in Serbia¹. Brett Scott is an activist with expertise in alternative finance, fellow at the Finance Lab² and author of the book "The Heretic's Guide to Global Finance: Hacking the Future of Money"³. Irene Sotiropoulou is an independent researcher, interested in empirical research on complementary currencies in Greece, which she inquired through her doctoral studies (PhD, Economics Department, University of Crete)⁴.

Unlike our first meeting, where the main focus was to provide plenty of time to the project partners to introduce themselves, this time we listened more to our guests for whom we scheduled two different slots. Iva, Brett and Irene were given 45 minutes to present their background, research interests and related activities to our COMPARE group during the first two days, and also participated in the international symposium organized during the third day of the workshop. In the next sections we present in more detail the program of each day, which was structured as follows: the first two days were divided in a morning session for presentations and discussion, and an afternoon session for guided visits to local initiatives. The third day was devoted to the international symposium, including additional guests: Karolos Kavoulakos, George Gritzas, Georgios Agelopoulos, and Athina Vitopoulou, who are faculty members of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, and Theodoros Karyotis, an independent researcher and activist in Thessaloniki.

1. Presentations and discussion

At the first morning session, the participants made brief presentations of the various related events that some partners attended since the last meeting in Cagliari (April 2-4, 2014). In reverse chronological order, these events are: the Inaugural Conference of the World Interdisciplinary Network for Institutional Research (WINIR) in London, UK, September 11-14, 2014; the 2020 Green Academy Summer School on the Island of Vis, Croatia, August 23-30, 2014; the EINS Summer School in Volos, Greece, July 7-12, 2014, for which COMPARE partners organized a special session on complementary currencies; and the 2014 INURA Conference in Belgrade, Serbia, June 22-25, 2014.

WINIR, London, September 11-14, 2014

Paolo Dini reported on the participation of the COMPARE team members at the Inaugural Conference of the World Interdisciplinary Network for Institutional Research (WINIR), September 11-14th, 2014 in London, UK, with three different papers, presented by Laura Sartori, Panayotis Antoniadis, and himself. He focused on the two papers on the topic of complementary currencies and especially Sardex, one on political theory, by Dini and Kioupkiolis, and the other on the economic sociology perspective, by Littera, Sartori, Dini, and Antoniadis. Both papers were presented in the same session and they dominated the interest of the participants during the discussion session, including some of the well-known scholars in the field of economic sociology such as Geoffrey Ingham and institutional economics such as Katharina Pistor, but also people active especially in the area of complementary currencies such as Leander Bindewald

1 <http://inura2014belgrade.wordpress.com/team/>

2 <http://thefinancelab.org>

3 <http://suitpossum.blogspot.ch/>

4 <https://rizikaoikonomika.wordpress.com/>

from the New Economics Foundation (<http://neweconomics.org>), who showed interest to participate also at our upcoming symposium in Zurich. What was revealed through the numerous clarification questions regarding the details of its operation is that the Sardex model, although based on the Swiss WIR, is not well-known and understood. We agreed that part of our future work in the area should be on getting through the main aspects that made Sardex so successful, and we should contribute to establishing an appropriate framework for studying in more depth the possible social, political, and economic consequences of the replication of this model inside and outside Italy. Hence a part of the symposium to be organized for our last gathering in Zurich – the home of the WIR complementary currency system – will be devoted to exactly this question.

Green Academy Summer School, Island of Vis, August 23-30, 2014

Ileana Apostol presented the outcomes of the 4th edition of the 2020 Green Academy that took place on the Island of Vis, Croatia. During the last week of August, Ileana Apostol and Iva Cukic participated in a related Summer School with the topic "Ecommonize: ecological transformation and governance of the commons", that aimed to devise policies for ecological transformation through green economy and participatory democracy. During the keynote talks, panels, and group workshops, various forms of grassroots and self-organized initiatives were discussed as alternative exits to the current multiple crises in the European context. Increased social participation was seen as a means to foster community action, to 'commonize' benefits, or to design participative tools for financing ecological transformation at the local scale. To this end, participatory budgeting was one of the practical tools that was explained through case studies, together with alternative financing tools like complementary currencies, crowd-funding or peer-to-peer banking, ethical banking etc. Successful stories like the Mondragon cooperative in Spain were brought to the fore in more detail, also as an inspiration for future action. The school concluded with a public presentation of the three work modules on nature, society and economy, and the conversation continues within the network of the Green Academy⁵.

The EINS Summer School in Volos, July 7-12, 2014

Panayotis Antoniadis and **Alexandros Kioupiolis** presented the outcomes of the 2014 EINS Summer School with the topic "From smart cities to engaged citizens", in Volos, Greece. At the Summer School several project members and invited guests participated with different roles: Panayotis Antoniadis and Ileana Apostol as organizers, Giuseppe Littera as lecturer, Brett Scott as tutor, and Alexandros Kioupiolis and Laura Sartori as participants in the complementary currencies work group. This group also included Chris Cook from University College London, and Christos George Koutitas, professor at the University of Thessaly with expertise on collaborative smart grids, and the co-founder of TEM, the complementary currency system in Volos, one of the most successful in Greece, which is still struggling to survive. More specifically, they developed a concrete proposal for an upgrade of the local initiative, which was presented by the students in front of a committee of local authorities.

As described in the final report of the complementary currencies working group, "Our key innovation in achieving our aim is for the Volos public authority either to directly provide, or to facilitate provision of idle land / buildings within a partnership framework agreement. In return for the use of land & buildings we will create an electronics repair hub on the site. The contributors scavenge for broken electronics and bring it to the repair hub while the electronics repairers fix the electronics and offer them for sales to the consumers. Contributors and repairers are initially paid fully in TEM while consumers pay in euro, TEM or even both. From this base the TEM starts rolling and has a strong foundation for future explorations. In the long term the repair hub will act to reduce unemployment by increasing the skill set of the Volos people thereby increasing the total social value of the project and reducing unemployment benefits paid by the public authority."

Detailed documentation of the outcome of the summer school, including the work on complementary currencies will be soon available at <http://internet-science.eu/summer-school-2014/>.

The 2014 INURA Conference in Belgrade, June 22-25, 2014

Philipp Klaus and **Iva Cukic** presented briefly the INURA 2014 Annual Conference that took place in Belgrade, with the topic "Between Big Ideas and Life's Realities". The premise of this topic is that a city's development is inseparable from the life of the people inhabiting it, and the aspirations to arrange everyday life according to the local environments and its particularities. In context, the city's realities lie between the visions of a future society and ordinary life, between the neoliberal expansion of large capital interests and a variety of resistance practices and social alternatives in the attempt to establish more equitable social relations. The conference presented Belgrade as an "urban collage", created through an interplay of large, formal development narratives, and the informal practice of housing development, cultural creativity and social activism. Only in the last fifty years, changes in the paradigm of development went from a socialist, centralized model of management and planning, via the chaotic illegal construction and its legalization, only to end with surrendering to (financial) market-driven development rules. Different examples of housing policies and

5 <http://unlocking-the-future.com/novosti>

construction, cultural politics and practice and social activism graphically represent the intricate relationship between the formal paradigm and the informal practices. The large array of development projects that were presented, discussed or visited, together with alternative solutions to the dominant paradigm in the Balkan region, were an opening to a wider debate on possible new development strategies.



Figure 1: The poster of the INURA conference next to a photo from the public event organized to create public awareness of the “Belgrade on Water” project

The main discussion that followed the short summaries of these highly relevant events was about the identity of our network in light of the upcoming visits and the International Symposium, where we would have to introduce ourselves as a group. We all agreed that we are a loose and open network of diverse individuals all interested in the concept of self-organization from different perspectives. There was a general feeling that we would like to keep expanding this network during, but most importantly also after, the duration of the small COMPARE project. And this is what we did the following days during our interactions with people in Thessaloniki with similar interests.



Figure 2: COMPARE partners (Panayotis, Ileana, and Paolo) together with our special guests (Irene, Iva, and Brett) during a guided visit through the city of Thessaloniki

During the morning of the second day, we had the presentations of Iva and Irene on the background of their current activities related to urban struggle through artistic interventions in Belgrade, and social solidarity movements in Greece, and in Crete in particular.

Iva Cukic told us briefly the story how, by following her feelings and main interests, she ended up spending most of her time organizing social and cultural actions in the city. Iva graduated from the Faculty of Architecture in Belgrade. After working as an architect in architectural design practice she understood the huge gap between the custom-designed projects, which mostly addressed a very narrow population range in post-war Serbia, and the necessities of the everyday life. Hence she made the decision to start together with other three friends a Belgrade-based activist group – Ministry of Space (Ministarstvo prostora) – through which to address the urban struggle of ordinary people, of those disempowered and those without a voice. In urban activism and research, Iva draws practical wisdom and theoretical knowledge from her background in architecture, art and urban studies.

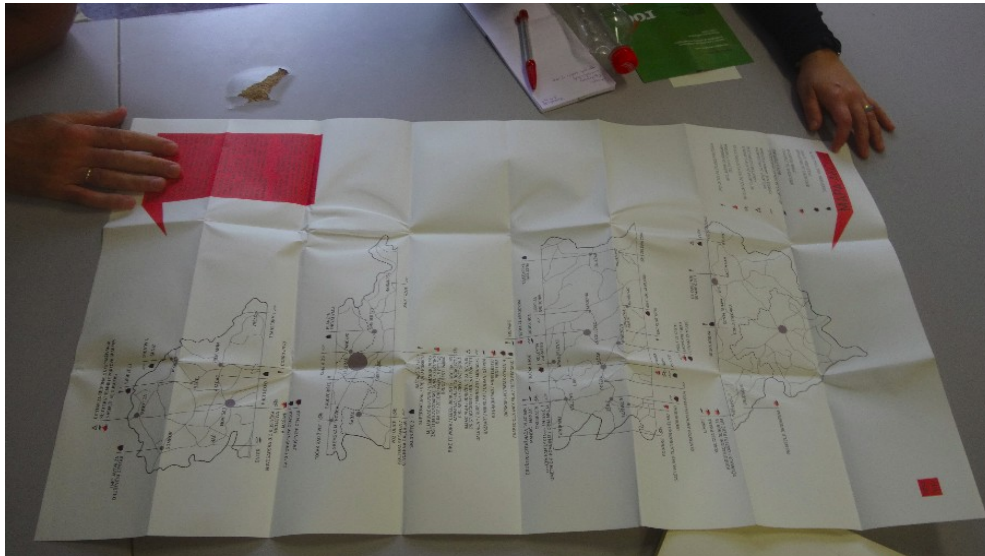


Figure 3: A map designed by Iva depicting the various self-organization initiatives in Serbia

Irene Sotiropoulou presented also her research work in progress. In addition to giving a brief presentation of her background and the PhD research, she presented her field research for the Labour Institute (Athens, Greece) and for several other projects concerning grassroots economic thinking and practice. Her actual research work is inspired by grassroots movements and everyday culture, which contain popular perceptions about the economy and practices, whether organized or not, that defy the mainstream economic structures. The research is influenced by feminist and post-colonial theories and is conducted within an interdisciplinary framework where in addition to economics, she uses anthropological, psychoanalytical and grounded approaches.

The initiatives and schemes she has worked with for research during her doctoral and post-doctoral projects vary from parallel currency networks, exchange networks where no specific accounting unit is used by all members but rather barter or multilateral barter is preferred to free bazaars and free online networks where people give for free what they do not need anymore (and this stuff is not only used but it can be stock that was left unused) and take items they need; and from schemes where people use or develop new skills as individuals and social beings, like time banks or collective cultivation groups to solidarity structures where people organize and provide for free services which are (and/or should be) public goods, like food, healthcare and education. All those initiatives have as common characteristic, among other things, that they are important examples of self-organisation in the economic and financial spaces. Moreover, they appear to provide new forms of organising production but also of collectively re-structuring modes for allocating resources and sharing produce.

After dinner, at a vibrant Greek taverna, **Brett Scott** told us his personal adventure of what he calls financial culturehacking, the process of immersing oneself in a system that you are critical of, in order to internalize its internal workings and probe for how to change it. This is something Brett Scott has decided to do. That is, coming from a left-wing background he decided to work for two years as a financial derivatives broker. Brett elaborated on how this gives one knowledge of systems, but also empathy for those working within particular systems.

This process also allows one to 'immunise' oneself against these systems. Many traditional activists and radicals appear shocked and dismayed at how large corporate beasts work, feeling angry, overawed, powerless and poorly resourced in

comparison to them. The problem though, is that large corporate entities – such as huge banks – rely on civil society being somewhat overawed by them, whether it be in the form of disgust or of reverence. As he argued, what we really need, though, is people with a critical mindset, who are able to walk freely on the ‘dark side’ without getting distracted. As a light-hearted analogy, Brett used the analogy of the film Blade, in which the vampire council is particularly fearful of a ‘daywalking’ human-vampire hybrid called Blade, who is able to interact with both humans and vampires. The critical culturehacker is thus one who seeks to deliberately internalize the DNA of mainstream finance, from which one can then choose to challenge it, as he did through this participation in various alternative projects described in detail in his book "A heretic's guide to finance: hacking the future of money".



Figure 4: A moment from Brett's night talk on his adventure as a critical culturehacker

During his analysis, Brett had to answer numerous questions on how he managed to enter in the 'dark side', how he was feeling, and more. He explained for example how he kept applying for jobs for which he had no proven skills, trying to learn from the interview process and improve every time his story, until he was finally successful. Regarding the psychological aspects that he had to deal with during this "personality split" process, he referred to even more extreme forms of anthropology, whereby the anthropologists immerse themselves in systems and lose objective distance. He gave his aunt Penny Bernard as an example of such an extreme. She is an anthropologist who became a Zulu diviner (shaman) and started using her dreams to guide her research. The mainstream of anthropology finds this ‘unscientific’, often being called "going native", but the point is that researchers like Penny get levels of access and intuitive understanding of cultures that few more ‘objective’ researchers would ever be able to acquire.

2. Guided visits



Figure 5: The entrance to the “Ungoverned cities” self-managed bookstore

In the afternoon of the first day we visited two of the self-organized initiatives namely the (cooperative) self-managed bookstore/coffee shop "**Ungoverned Cities**"⁶ and the so called "social space for freedom" by the name of Micropolis, which serves as a gathering place "to create moments of the future". During the bookstore visit we received detailed information about the formation of the cooperative and its activities from Christos and Eleni.

Our very hospitable hosts explained briefly their main principles including the participatory decision-making process, the selection of books according to their own values, and the limits set on individual profits from their cooperative. As the most important source of disagreement they identified their attitude toward external sources of funding that could challenge their independence and self-determination. That is a dilemma that cropped up again during our discussions with local actors, and perhaps one of the central challenges for self-organized initiatives.

Micropolis⁷ hosts the operation of a self-organized café/bar/concert hall, a kindergarten that is co-managed by children, parents and pedagogues, an assembly room, a library/reading-room, and a food cooperative. The path of this social space is guided by the realization of the values of direct democracy, solidarity and freedom, and their diffusion outside their ordinary circles. The visit was instructed by two of the members of Micropolis, **Giorgos** and **Theodoros Karyotis**, who is a sociologist, activist, and translator, and who offered his time to explain how the social space is organized, and discussed also about other social movements in Thessaloniki. It is important to note that the cooperative grocery of Micropolis is one of the places that sell the products by VIOME (a bankrupt factory managed today by its workers after the model of self-management in Argentina), which is one of the "flagship" self-organization initiatives in Greece. We were lucky that Theodoros is also a member of the solidarity committee of VIOME⁸, which had its monthly assembly during our visit at Micropolis. He described briefly the history and the main principles behind this workers cooperative. He gave us also his own point of view on the challenges that are faced today by the VIOME workers, which led to a very interesting, and sometimes heated, discussion on what was called "the worker's mentality" and how it can become an obstacle when people are given the opportunity to move from a hierarchical to a rather flat governance structure at their work place; another important issue that we added to our list of the challenges of self-organization in practice.



Figure 6: The entrance of Micropolis: a social space for freedom

Another interesting source of tension inside Micropolis had been its political character. Having being initiated by members of the anarchist movement, but willing to reach beyond the confines of this community, it has encountered many challenges related to stereotypes and misconceptions. For example, Panayotis asked about the possible effect that the anarchist flag decorating the main entrance to this social space could have for people that do not share the radical political narrative of anarchism, but are willing to become a part of a more humane and collaborative society. Theodoros confirmed that this was indeed one of the questions that are being posed again and again during their assemblies. How inclusive and neutral should one be when the aim is to change the societal structures from the grassroots?

We had also the chance to assist at a public presentation by three representatives of the Catalan "Cooperativa Integral", a very interesting initiative aiming to combine different types of cooperatives under the same umbrella, including a novel digital currency system called FairCoin. Brett Scott who was present in the room had been asked to review the proposed model initiated by Eric Duran, for which he talked in detail during his intervention at our symposium (see below). Unfortunately the presentation was in Spanish (translated in Greek by Theodoros) and it was difficult for our

⁶ <http://akybernitepolitieies.org/>

⁷ <http://micropolis-socialspace-en.blogspot.ch/2009/07/micropolis.html>

⁸ <http://www.everydayrebellion.net/self-organized-factory-viome-in-thessaloniki-greece/>

English-speaking guests to follow, therefore after the main presentation we left, without participating in the discussion that followed long into the night.

In the afternoon of the second day we visited **Bioscoop**, the Social Consumer Cooperative of Thessaloniki, a Nonprofit Cooperative Grocery: "We take our food in our hands!"⁹, where we met Antonis, a member of many cooperatives and social movements in Thessaloniki. Antonis gave as a brief overview of the history of the cooperative, which is associated with the ecological movement in Thessaloniki, its foundation and ongoing actions. We listened to his talk surrounded by huge piles of fresh nuts and other food items from local producers such as the "green cola", a healthy drink tasting almost like Coca-Cola, or even better.



Figure 7: Moments from the presentation of bioscoop

During the discussion we were alerted to another important challenge that this and other cooperatives have to face. Various members of the cooperative seem impatient to activate in the name of democracy a rotation scheme in the governance structure, a little bit "too soon" though as commented by Antonis. With his humorous and genuine style, Antonis highlighted also the problem of high prices that are attached to hand-made products of high quality. His example was a frozen spinach pie made by a local women's association, which as he said is "really delicious, but expensive". Is it the responsibility of producers to drop the prices of such precious products, or of the consumers to support their production by paying the required premium? Again, a difficult question.

What is very important to note is that many of the issues raised by our hosts in the guided visits are emerging in theory and practice in recent years and we must admit that academic literature, to the best of our knowledge, is lagging behind current activities and the questions the activities make visible to everyone. We felt privileged to hold this Meeting in Thessalonike and be educated by our hosts and we think that many of those issues could be hints for constructing new research paths and projects in the future.

3. International Symposium on "sharing experiences of self-organization"

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, October 10th 2014

As mentioned in the public description of our symposium, self-organization is a term that evokes images of freedom and independence, and many people place a lot of hope for positive change in the world in bottom-up, grassroots, self-organized movements around the world. However, successful self-organized communities or networks often rely on a common vision and a set of rules; and unfortunately there is not a recipe for success. Sometimes, a charismatic leader, a crisis, and a combination of diverse factors play a key role. There are also many important decisions that need to be taken regarding the position of a self-organized network in relation to the "outside" world in terms of inclusiveness and compatibility. Both the complexity and the importance of the concept of self-organization have attracted the attention of most scientific disciplines, from biology and physics, to engineering and social sciences. However, it is not always clear whether the scientific study of such initiatives is supportive of their objectives and which should be the limits of scientific enquiry and involvement.

9 http://www.bioscoop.gr/p/the-purpose-of-cooperative-purpose-of-c_22.html

The symposium brought together two small groups of people from Greece and abroad, to share their experiences in self-organization as researchers and/or activists and to respond to the following questions:

- Can research and action reinforce each other?
- Which lessons can be drawn from past and recent examples of self-organization?
- Can we offer tools, best practices that can facilitate self-organization?
- Is there a meaningful and useful way to describe the trade-offs between inclusiveness and exclusiveness, alternatives and complements, inside or outside the system?
- How self-organization structures deal with pressures from mainstream economy and/or authorities?
- What model(s) of social transformation is proposed in practice by initiatives in the social solidarity economy and how effective can that be under the present conditions of crisis, globalized markets etc.?
- How can self-organization secure access to public goods which should be available to everyone (adequate food, housing, healthcare, education, etc)?

Karolos Kavoulakos and **Giorgos Gritzas**, opened the first panel on the situation in Greece by providing a very informative historical overview of the evolution of social movements in Greece after the crisis that started in 2008, providing in parallel a theoretical analysis drawing on the theory of Gibson-Graham (2006) on alternative economies and the concept of alterity used by Roger Lee to describe different degrees of transformative power that an alternative venture could involve. More specifically, Roger Lee identifies 6 such categories with an escalation of the transformation of power from lower to higher one. As they explained, although in pre-crisis Greece only a few alternative ventures had been developed, a rapid proliferation and dynamic development of alternative ventures took place during and crisis. They then argued that the bloom of alternative ventures should be attributed not only to the effects of the crisis that disengaged a significant part of the citizens from the mainstream economic, social and political practices, but also to the reframing processes, the formation of a collective identity and the collective experiences that were enabled by the development of social movements against the austerity measures and especially the "squares movement" in 2011. Moreover, the "squares movement" revealed the "closed" political opportunity structure that led many movements and civil society organisations to orient their action towards the establishment of alternative ventures aiming not only to address the impacts of the crisis but also to develop bottom-up a perspective of social and political change. They included in their presentation a description of the effects of the crisis, of the actions taken by social movements during the crisis and a case study that shows the process of emergence of one of the most interesting types of alternative spaces, that of alternative exchange networks.

Paolo Dini presented then a summary of his work with Alexandros Kioukiolis that complemented perfectly the theoretical framework laid by Karolos and George, with the Sardex complementary currency, presented as a 'laboratory for institutional learning'. After a short introduction to the Sardex model, which is not known in Greece, he argues that mutual credit systems such as Sardex appear to grow and remain sustainable for long periods of time without the need for fixed and strong ideological commitment by its members. This kind of market appears to operate successfully and productively as long as the principles of money capitalism are minimized or absent altogether. Finally, the rules of the non-capitalist market contain and presuppose particular conceptions of money as a deliberate social construction that can be collectively managed, norms of reciprocity, and trust in communal autonomy, among others. For these reasons, he concluded that such credit systems offer a significant promise in enabling economies at the margins to strengthen their self-sufficiency, economic autonomy, collective empowerment, and market power through a participative, conscious, and reflexive institutionalization process. See also Dini and Kioukiolis (2014) and Littera et al. (2014).

Georgios Agelopoulos, an anthropologist from the Department of History and Archeology, offered us a different perspective through a personal story in the context of the so called "potato movement" in Greece. As he made clear from the beginning, "Anthropologists tell stories. By using narrations they build up an argument." His story took place in the police department of Thessaloniki, where Georgios and his friend Theofilos were taken in custody after a call from the lawyer of the Union of Open Markets of Thessaloniki claiming that their "without middlemen" farmers market is illegal. Interestingly, his analysis of solidarity economy initiatives in Greece addresses them not from the view of those who support them but from the view of those who are critical to them or who clearly oppose them. As he argued with the help of his very vivid and amusing account of the interactions with the policeman at the station, social and solidarity economy goods create a special kind of social relationships. Simultaneously, these social relationships do not only create goods but they also transform the already existing ones. As the policeman told him when they met a few days later, 'Mr Agelopoulos, those were the most tasteful potatoes I have had since my childhood years'.

Theodoros Karyotis added to his analysis on Micropolis and VIOME the previous day his experiences with the referendum on the privatization of the water public system: "It was an empowering moment, where Thessalonikeans felt that they have recovered a bit of the dignity taken away from them in four years of austerity and dispossession. Many people, disillusioned by the electoral process, went out just to vote in the referendum; it is unbelievable to see what great effect making one's voice heard on an important issue can have in a political system that systematically treats

voters as clients and promotes apathy and resignation."..."But of course the way to reach this ideal of engaged and active citizens that have taken their lives into their own hands passes through direct involvement with the local community, awareness-raising and education in solidarity and cooperation, through breaking loose from a lifelong learning in individualism, consumerism and social isolation. This is another aspect where the referendum has been crucial: in creating political consciousness and collective empowerment." ... "staying humble at this moment means: Recognizing that the movement is diverse and multitudinous; that no one person or group can represent or speak on behalf of the whole movement; that no one political party, mayoral candidate or group can claim credit for the outcome of the referendum; and most importantly, that the big common "NO" to the privatization is only a preamble to an open and democratic discussion about the future of water management and about the best possible way to ensure democratic participation, environmental protection, transparency and social justice in the provision of this valuable resource."¹⁰

Since his book "The Heretic's Guide to Global Finance" was published in 2013, **Brett Scott** has been approached by many people who would like to express 1) critiques of the global economy, 2) a sense of what needs to change and 3) a mechanism by which they think this change will be achieved. In particular, though, he gets approached by people who have ideas for new currencies. What is interesting is that many of these people do not necessarily have a deep understanding how currencies work, but they nevertheless have an intuitive sense that currencies offer some means of economic reform. Alternative exchange systems feature prominently in many imaginings of a better global economic system. In his talk, Brett sketched out his interactions with some of the groups that he spent time with, which gave us a glimpse of the state of the art in alternative currency projects around the world. He started with the TEM Mutual Credit System from Volos, Greece, with whom he had the opportunity to work with during the recent EINS Summer School (see above). He described TEM as an example of a local community currency project aimed at revitalising the local economy and reducing unemployment. It is underpinned by a strong anarchist/autonomist notion of a solidarity economy, in which people attempt to collaborate rather than compete. By nature it is a small, interpersonal system, and unlike normal startup entrepreneurs, the founders do not fetishise the idea of 'scaling' the system to a greater size. They accept the limitations in order to keep the principles intact.

We also discussed Sardex, one of the COMPARE partners, which is similar to TEM in being a mutual credit system, but differs in that, instead of focusing on individuals, it operates a Business-to-Business network. Sardex has greater scale, and is more integrated into the mainstream economy, but retains the solidarity principles and aims to be countercyclical, offering a means of support when the mainstream economy is slowing down. Brett also mentioned the Echo Timebank in London. It is based on a similar model to Sardex, but instead of using the Euro as the means by which to measure obligations, it uses time. It is thus a business-to-business timebank, which is unusual in the world of timebanks. Echo is an interesting example of how an alternative economy project can be integrated with local political imperatives, receiving funding and support from the London Olympic legacy funds. One currency that will never receive government support is Faircoin. It is an attempt by Enric Duran and others to create an anarchist cryptocurrency system with co-operative principles, which in turn will form the basis of a subsequent mutual credit system. Brett mentioned that he has had misgivings about how the project is planned to work, but in essence it involves collecting and then attempting to boost the value of Faircoin to establish it as a stable cryptocurrency, and then using this as a unit of account for the FairCredit mutual credit system. It is interesting in that it is an example of a radical left-wing attempt to use crypto-currency for social justice. Similar proposals are floating around from others, such as the Macau Commoncoin project, which proposes to design a cryptocurrency system with a basic income scheme built into it to support artists and other precarious workers.

Digital currency schemes are sometimes prone to having conservative overtones. For example, Brett was approached by the World Dollar Foundation, a small studenty explain how every person on earth was supposed to receive this equal distribution and how it would interact with the existing, highly unequal, economy.

At the Symposium **Irene Sotiropoulou** delivered a presentation titled "Grassroots economic initiatives in Greece: challenges under neoliberal advancement" where the main scope is to put non-mainstream and solidarity schemes within the general political economic context of European economy and the Greek "crisis". By discussing the evolution of those schemes since the outbreak of "crisis" in 2008, she tried to show the utmost necessity for more appropriate theoretical tools, historical research and field research, in order to address the issues the scheme members and their communities are facing, particularly under the pressures exercised by the neoliberal policies adopted in Greece during the last few years.

Within the context of heterodox economic approaches, she showed how lack of access to resources and time for the most disadvantaged inhibits their participation in grassroots self-organised initiatives. Moreover, the provision of public goods like healthcare and education certainly cannot be covered adequately though grassroots solidarity schemes like social medical centres or social educational institutes, because this type of goods require vast amounts of investment in materials, buildings and personnel education in order to satisfy the needs of an increasingly impoverished population. Finally, given the issues that emerge from the actual function of all those self-organised initiatives she has done research

10 <http://www.autonomias.net/2014/05/people-vs-corporate-rule-some-personal.html>

with, she remarked that we need better theory and more in-depth research for academics to be able to support the people who so inventively create economic structures from scratch and enable academic institutions to gather and disseminate knowledge which is relevant and useful to people and their communities.



Figure 8: The COMPARE symposium on self-organization

Iva Cukic delivered at the Symposium the talk "Ministry of Space: Self-organization in the city" addressing the socially engaged campaigns of the collective Ministry of Space in Belgrade. On the one hand, the Ministry of Space explores the possibilities that art opens up, as a medium to raise public awareness, toward solutions to important social issues. On the other hand, as this collective connects social activists, socially engaged artists, architects and citizens, it mobilizes citizens to engage in building a more just society. The four members of the Ministry of Space come from various academic backgrounds namely architecture, political science, anthropology, construction engineering etc. Of course, often in their work they partner with other similar initiatives and with the academic community. Iva presented some of the most visible through the media activities of Ministry of Space, giving detailed information background, including informal stories, and discussing the trade-offs in the implementation of their projects.

Expedition Inex Film is a do-it-yourself action that reconverted an abandoned building into a space for work and cultural production, and into a representation venue for numerous groups and individuals. After some years of managing the reconverted Inex Film space, the collective had passed the responsibility to other groups, but remain an important actor in its operation. The cinema action "The Written Offs Return" is a campaign to turn public attention to dubious privatization of a large number of cinemas that de facto resulted in their closing down, with the subsequent lack of cultural spaces in the city. The Street Gallery is a pioneer venture that reconstructed and revived a neglected public space, turning it into a vibrant open art gallery, and managing and operating this new cultural space with the resources of the collective. That implies a significant effort from the four members of the Ministry, which is mainly voluntary and based on their commitment to provide an alternative and self-organized stage for cultural activities in Belgrade. In addition, they are actively engaged with the Spatial Network, a network of groups advocating the reuse of neglected, abandoned or not properly utilized public spaces, to provide venues for the local social and cultural needs. Another type of project in the Ministry of Space is the planizacija.rs web portal, which seeks to improve access to information regarding new plans of detailed regulations and construction projects, and to provide also a space for debate among interested citizens. From the presentation it emerged that, through their activities, and the organization of events and participatory processes, the four members of the Ministry of Space – Iva, Radomir, Marko and Dobrica – play a necessary role in shaping an active and engaged civil society that has as well material consequences in the city, and thus leaves an important trace on the contemporary urbanity of Belgrade.

Philipp Klaus gave a talk on cooperative housing in Zurich, in which he presented Kraftwerk1 Genossenschaft as a self-organized housing alternative. Kraftwerk1 is a grassroots social project located in the former industrial area of Zurich West. It started as an experiment in the real estate crisis of the 1990s, departing from the vision of a worldwide movement of appropriation of brownfield areas and former industrial spaces, toward shaping "a new civilisation beyond work." Kraftwerk1 became a collective, self-organized, environmentally and economically sustainable urban

alternative, within a mix of residential, social and commercial spaces. The project was completed in 2001 and is housing around 350 people in 81 residential units (suites) of various compositions and sizes, from individual housing to collective living (2 to 13 room suites), which are self-financing and define their own social structure. As Kraftwerk1 was not supposed to become an island disconnected from its larger context, there are multiple ways in place to connect it with the city, the outside economy, and the countryside (e.g., through exchange of agricultural or industrial products). Its members maintain a direct link with farmers in the proximity of Zurich, through food supply and temporal engagement at the farms. For visitors, there is guest room provision, and the commercial and office spaces on the premises establish further networks. Through the process of development and (daily) living, Kraftwerk1 contributes to the renaissance of traditional cooperative movement in Zurich. Its members developed environmental standards, operational concepts, and collaborative activities in dialogue among themselves and with the elected cooperative bodies. After Kraftwerk2 in Zurich, currently the Kraftwerk4 cooperative housing project is being developed at Zwicky Areal in Wallisellen, in the proximity of the Zurich Airport.

The symposium ended with a discussion session, where we took a first step towards understanding to what extent all these experiences from abroad can be useful for Greece, in light of its cultural, economic, and political particularities. Following on our experience in trying to bring some knowledge from Sardex to support the TEM currency in Volos, we wondered which are the main obstacles that prevent such initiatives from being easily pursued in Greece, despite the crisis. Panayotis Antoniadis commented that as an expatriate he sees the high levels of polarization in Greece as one of the key reasons why milder, long-term, approaches like Sardex are difficult to implement in practice. Then we discussed about the role of research in this context. Irene was provocative in saying that researchers are the main beneficiaries during their interactions with activists. Alexandros Kioupkiolis was more dialectical in his position, highlighting that researchers can play a significant role in knowledge sharing, when they stay humble regarding the general applicability of their theories, being aware of the importance of context and local wisdom. Panayotis also added that as an engineer he sees the role of research also as a provider of concrete tools that can facilitate self-organization processes such as the use of peer-to-peer systems. Finally, Ileana Apostol brought up also the special role of the family and kinship networks as key support mechanisms during crisis, mentioned in the talk by George Gritzas. The discussion was interrupted by the mobile phone of Panayotis who was called by his mother. The room burst into laughter. It was time to go for dinner.

Conclusion

The second COMPARE meeting in Thessaloniki was very successful in bringing us in touch with a different, and very interesting, form of self-organization than the one we explored in Sardinia. Social movements and cooperatives which are more politically colored, and more in conflict with the state, are the most notable reactions to the deep economic crisis in Greece. Our interactions with some of the protagonists of these movements, and the discussions that followed during the International Symposium, gave us only a glimpse of the current situation, but helped us to identify some high-level challenges and corresponding decisions that need to be taken by people that wish to work together in self-organized ways. For example, this is a simplified list of trade-offs which we will analyze in more depth in future gatherings:

- complementarity vs. scale
- short vs. long-term effects
- inclusion vs. identity
- efficiency vs. participation
- context-specificity vs. transfer of knowledge
- quality vs. market competition
- theory vs. practice
- academic approaches vs activist approaches
- autonomy vs. incorporation in state or market mechanisms

As Irene Sotiropoulou mentioned after the end of the meeting, the fact that participants representing a variety of academic and activist backgrounds spend three days together, created not only an environment for so-necessary networking and for exchange of ideas and experiences, but also it fostered an understanding of each other's research agendas and the exploration of common aims and grounds for further collaborative research. In her own words "By comprising both axes of interdisciplinarity and of academic-activist collaboration, the Thessaloniki COMPARE Meeting enabled new ideas to emerge based on social needs and seeking to have a positive impact on people and communities."

Our experiences and thoughts generated will be an important input to the last project meeting in Zurich, where we will compare the new experiments on self-organization that we witnessed in Sardinia and Thessaloniki with the already mature practices in Zurich; a place where a wide range of success stories on self-organization, like cooperative housing and complementary currencies, and a unique tradition of direct democracy and culture of diversity, co-exist with a high level of quality of living and a very powerful banking system.

Acknowledgements

The COMPARE project is partially supported by the EINS Network of Excellence in Internet Science, FP7 grant 288021.

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