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Redefining the concept of sharing: Emerging bottom-up initiatives in crisis-era Athens

Mr Konstantinos PETRAKOS

National Technical University of Athens PhD Researcher
VATATZI 41 11472 Athens Athens Greece
kostaspetrakos31@gmail.com 6973039454

Mlle Sofia AVGERINO-KOLONIAS

National Technical University of Athens Professor
Thiras 61 11252 Athens Athens Greece
skolonia@arch.ntua.gr 6977610235

Mr Ioannis SPYROPOULOS

National Technical University of Athens PhD Researcher
Sevasteias 47 17122 Athens Nea Smirni Greece
iospyropoulos@gmail.com

Mlle Anastasia TOUFENGOPOULOU

National Technical University of Athens Dr. Urban Planner
Kyprou 95 15343 Athens Agia Paraskevi Greece
a.toufegopoulou@gmail.com

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B2 - Social and territorial capital OR B7 - Sustainable Cities

Résumé / Summary

The role of “sharing space” in the historic formation of both culture and political progress in the urban sphere is remarkable as cities have always relied on collective and collaborative activities. In the 21st century city, the range and diversity in what is being shared, and how it is being shared encapsulates and/or extends over multiple practices such as co-production and collective consumption of goods and services, reclaiming public space, shared infrastructure and environmental resources.

This paper strives to contribute to the investigation of the challenges relating to the “sharing city” concept, and its role in enabling urban sustainability.

Despite economic successes like AirBnB which promote cities as venues for sharing, many better

opportunities exist to enhance sharing and ensure social innovation and solidarity acting. Informal sharing systems, in which those on lower incomes tend to participate, are also absent from the current sharing dialogue. In order to redefine the concept of sharing, we draw on the social, environmental and economic goals which constitute the product of collaborative activities and solidarity actions. These are solidarity food distribution networks, shared commercial kitchens, informal healthcare, cooperative housing, goods and services from cooperatives. The concept of informal sharing describes sharing activity such as communal, inclusive, collaborative and participatory.

During the crisis era, an increasing number of communities in urban areas establish effective alternative methods for accessing housing and working spaces, and healthcare and food networks. In particular, Athens displays a variety of present or emerging sharing and solidarity initiatives and collaborative consumption experiments. Through this work, a new "paradigm of sharing" is introduced which exceeds beyond the unilateral view of the sharing economy's commercial boundaries and visualizes communal approaches and grassroots and unconventional practices in the urban context of Athens. Spatial Planning in its turn can enhance sharing by supporting everything from shared workplaces and community facilities to house dense diverse populations.

Additionally, this work is aimed at investigating the approaches which is based on local communities' action (i.e. communal approaches) and the concept of urban commons, as commons that are managed and maintained by collective activities in the urban area. In this context, sharing offers an alternative response to the 'age of austerity' and support extension of common property rather than its enclosure and privatisation. Through this examination we want to argue that real social innovation can be found in these informal ways and disputative practices of collaboration and co-acting, that influences urban spaces and acts as an antidote and a protective environment against the commercialization of the public realm.

Keywords: Crisis, Sharing City, Urban Planning, Bottom-up Initiatives

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