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| **Proposal’s Category** | **Category 2** |
| **Proposal’s Title** | **Redefining spatial justice in Athens as a city of crisis: contesting the urban common** |
| **Proposal’s Acronym** | **JUST** |
| **Scientific Area** | **Social Sciences** |
| **Scientific Field 1** | **Social and economic geography** |
| **Scientific Field 2** |  |
| **Project’s Duration (in months)** | **36 Months** |
| **Total Budget (€)** | **196000** |
| **Principal Investigator (PI)** | **Stavros Stavridis (Stavrides) Manasis** |
| **Host Institution** | **School of Architecture, National Technical University of Athens** |
| **List of Cooperative Organization(s)**  *(if applicable)* | **Autonoma University of Barcelona (Prof. Giorgos Kallis) University of Trento (Dr. Cristina Mattiucci)** |
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**Part 6.A.: Research Proposal**

**1. Excellence**

**1.1 Proposal’s main goals, objectives and challenges**

The main objective of the proposed research project is to study urban policies and practices concerning spatial justice in Athens as a characteristic example of a city facing a multifaceted crisis. Our hypothesis argues that such a crisis has triggered antagonistic responses as well as claims concerning the definition and management of urban commons. The dominant austerity policies have increased social inequalities and withered hopes for a more just distribution of urban resources. On the other hand, practices of resistance and of collective survival of those threatened by the crisis reinstate demands of spatial justice, but they also often enact rights that are violated or abolished. Both kinds of political practices place the role of urban commons at the centre of urban conflicts and thus directly shape the limits and potentialities of spatial justice.

**1.2. State of the Art**

***Research Focus and Questions***

In order to explore the interconnections, interactions but also possible synergies between policies on the one hand and citizen initiatives and urban movements on the other we will focus on two distinct areas of inquiry that are crucial for the redefinition of spatial justice in contemporary Athens:

(1) antagonisms revolving around the **right to housing** in the light of the rising ‘touristification’ of the southern metropolis and

(2) endeavours of alternative **cultural production** compared to dominant city policies concerning culture.

We argue that examples drawn from these two areas of investigation illustrate exemplary spatial processes of contestation, thus revealing the underlying conflicts between acts of the dominant political authorities and acts of alternative everyday life organization and inhabitation.

More specifically: The recent rise in short term rental demand (with its main protagonist being the Αirbnb platform), coupled with the increasing promotion of the city as a tourist destination, seems to be a considerable driving force behind the organization of land uses, forms of inhabitation, rents and policies concerning the central district. Tourist packages, that promise experiencing originality and locality to visitors, following a universal trend (Guttentag, 2015), have triggered upwards fluctuations in rent rates and a decline of affordable housing in the historical centre of Athens (Colomb and Novy 2017).

This tendency particularly affects low/middle-income residence areas within the radius of the historical centre, thus transforming their social composition and creating deep changes in the ways different inhabitants may enact their “right to the city” (Lefebvre 1996). Concerns over this new urban cartography have brought forth instances of mobilization by local residents and collectivities (either in the form of public dialogues and grassroots and -solidarity initiatives, or in the form of platforms such as Fairbnb), claiming the re-appropriation of the city –space.

Concomitantly, we can detect a major shift in the agents involved with contemporary cultural production. Major cultural actors tend to accumulate in mega-structures such as the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, Benaki Foundation and Onasis Cultural Center, involving significant capital investments, as well as large scale spatial operations that “convert into symbolic the accumulated economic power” (Souliotis, 2012: 66). As, in the case of Athens, cutural industries seem instrumental in the construction both of city image and urban policies (Karachalis and Deffner, 2012), the organisation of cultural production poses new spatial questions. Furthermore, this concentration acts as a means of culture redefinition, creating a standard model of art and aesthetic production, shaped in terms of market demands and the corresponding dominant discourses. In contrast, multiple self-organized social centres became active during the last years especially focusing on alternative cultural production. Defying a centralized product-oriented culture model, they create new forms of co-existence and everyday practices, which actively reclaim culture as a crucial area of commoning.

Thus, **critical research questions** that emerge are:

* How do dominant urban policies redefine (or directly enclose) the public domain?
* How can the concept of urban commons and its associated practices redefine the terrain and the stake of urban struggles?
* How do urban claims relate to the grassroots enactments of spatial justice?
* Do the numerous grassroots initiatives constitute emerging networks of spatial justice?

In order to address these questions our proposal builds upon **two key concepts**:

**Spatial justice** and **Urban commons**.

### *a. Spatial justice*

In the past decades, and even more so in the last ‘crisis’ years, issues of inequalities, oppression and domination are increasingly discussed and debated, particularly regarding social paradigms, policies and developmental models (MacLeod and McFarlane, 2014). Thus, the sense and the realities of injustice, as well as its amelioration, have become significant stakes not only for legal justice but for the broader terrain of social policy (Young, 1990).

The concept of spatial justice is in many ways important for the proposed research. On a first level, it is a useful tool for measuring inequalities in an urban context: if spatial justice simply means an equal access to those goods and services that the urban condition potentially provides, then inequalities indeed can be studied as they are expressed in practices of inhabitation. As Edward Soja claims, “Justice has spatial dimensions and the equitable distribution of resources, services and access is a basic human right” (Soja, 2010). UCLA’s Critical Planning group categorizes injustices as they are represented in space (Bassett 2013). This conceptualization of socio-spatial justice incorporates issues raised by UNESCO concerning poverty as a violation of human rights, and aims at expanding the notion and practice of rights by rooting them to the urban terrain (Carmalt, 2018; Delaney, 2016).

On a second level, connecting justice to space may be a gesture that re-conceptualizes both justice and the meaning of space (Marcuse et. al. 2009). Instead of merely adding spatial aspects to the functioning of justice, instead of projecting the results of social injustice on cities, spatial justice may become the term through which justice may be rethought (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2007; Dikeç 2007; Iveson 2011). We know that laws are specific space-bound forms of regulation of human acts and behaviour. Jurisdiction is an immanently spatial term; it describes the area in which a certain law is valid and in which a certain authority has the power to enforce it. But justice and injustice are not simply *expressed* in space. They *shape spaces and are shaped through* *and by space*. Space is both a stake to be claimed and distributed through demands and acts of justice but also the means through which demands, claims and acts are shaped (Fincher and Iveson, 2012).

Spatial justice may thus help us study the different ways in which space is both shaped by claims and struggles for justice but also shapes ideas, dreams and models for justice. This will “shift focus from spatial manifestations of injustice to structural dynamics that produce and reproduce injustice through space” (Dikeç 2009; Marcuse 2009; Brawley, 2009). Spatial justice or injustice (or various grades of them) are being expressed and shaped through *the spatiality of policies and the spatiality of agency*. This is why we choose to follow a line of reasoning and research inaugurated by Henri Lefebvre’s notion of the “right to the city” (1996; see also Harvey 1996). This is not simply one more right that may be added for example to the right of privacy or to the right to health care or cultural dignity. It is not the right to live in cities and to enjoy what cities may theoretically provide to each and every one. It is the right to collectively reshape the city as a commonly produced work of art –as an “*oeuvre*” (Lefebvre 1996: 157,174) and not as a “product”. Lefebvre’s “right to the city” idea retains a crucial potentiality of the term of spatial justice: justice has to do with space but, more than that, justice is being shaped through practices that give form to space (also Mitchel 2003).

***b. Urban Commons as a core issue in redefinitions of spatial justice***

Reclaiming the city through practices of collective creativity, in line with Lefebvre’s reasoning, means reclaiming the city as commons. Movement struggles, organized citizen initiatives and alternative municipal policies are, in such a context, focused on an understanding of the city both as something to be shared (rather than appropriated by the most powerful) and as a means to develop practices of sharing.

David Harvey argues that commons is not “a particular kind of thing” but “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” (2012: 73). Building on this, Stavros Stavrides (2016: 54) argues that “Common space, however, may be shaped through the practices of an emerging and not necessarily homogeneous community which does not simply try to secure its reproduction but also attempts to enrich its exchanges with other communities as well as the exchanges between its members. Common space may take the form of a meeting ground, an area in which ‘expansive circuits of encounter’ intersect (Hardt and Negri 2009: 254). Through acts of establishing common spaces, the discriminations and barriers that characterize the enclave urbanity may be countered” (2016: 55).

Common space thus is the kind of urban space that emerges when city inhabitants enact their power to produce, define, develop and maintain spaces of sharing instead of spaces that exclude or discriminate. In common spaces urban commons are enacted. Any practice claiming spatial justice (including practices made possible due to specific urban policies) is necessarily related to claims about the urban commons.

Practices of defending the commons, “lead to collective experi­ences that reclaim the city as a potentially liberating environment and reshape crucial questions that characterise emancipatory politics” (Stavrides, 2015). In this way, the city becomes not only the setting for social mobilizations but, at the same time, the means for collective experimentation with alternative forms of social organisation in search for a more just world.

In sum, the proposed research aims to study the specific form of spatial justice that characterizes Athens during the years of crisis as a form dependent on the dynamics of urban claims and on the ways they interact with relevant policies. Placed at the intersection of the debates concerning spatial justice and urban commons our research questions may be shaped as follows:

How do policies connected to different definitions of urban resources as commons promote certain aspects of spatial justice in Athens?

How do urban movements and citizen initiatives reclaim their role in the shaping of common resources and the city space as commons?

How do both policies and citizen practices intersect or clash in their effort to define and control the urban commons (and the urban-as-commons) in order to implement or limit spatial justice?

**1.3. Scientific methodology & novel aspects**

**(a) Research Design and Methodology**

The proposed research aiming to diagnose how its analytical pillars—the economic crisis, the governmental policies and the activity of urban social movements—have influenced the current content and form of spatial justice in Athens, will apply a specific **comparative empirical scheme**. In line with Jennifer Robinson's view that cities are better understood when analyzed through other urban experiences and within broader conceptualizations and conversations (2015), the project will be constructed over three urban case studies. However, instead of simply focusing over a unique case or over three equally weighted case studies, the proposed research will combine the specificity of a case study—Athens (Greece)—with the comparative ‘learning from elsewhere’. This ‘elsewhere’ will be comprised by the cities of Barcelona (Spain) and Naples (Italy). In this respect, the project utilizing a multilateral comparative process will realize and form a learning and reflective process through which insights and further questions (or even answers) about Athens might emerge.

Furthermore, this research, while understanding urban space as a terrain where the social, the spatial and the political (in the sense of power relations) are intrinsically articulated in the urban (Massey 2005), will examine policies, claims and practices as expressed in the fields of housing and culture in Athens in comparison to the other two urban paradigms. It will, thus, particularly study how top-down policies respond to questions posed by those seeking spatial justice, how bottom-up practices materialize/implement their own spatial justice and how negotiations and conflicts among the two are expressed within those urban spaces.

Cities in crisis, and Athens par excellence, have for the past years been treated as major laboratories for austerity-driven policies and restructuring. In the case of Greece, the imposition and implementation of austerity actually meant the implementation of structural adjustment programmes involving public sector reduction and restructuring, minimization of the already limited welfare state, strict budgetary control, privatizations of public assets (land and companies), and increased taxation. The repayment of the debt was prioritised and thus all state incomes and policies were primarily targeted towards that. These choices have resulted in a redefinition of the public (as much of the notion of public goods as of that of the public interest) which has exacerbated inequalities and severely impacted on socio-spatial justice.

Municipal authorities (as much as central governments) have mostly complied with austerity programmes and international priorities regarding the management of austerity’s repercussions to society. The discourse of resilience is accompanied with a minimum of welfare policies focusing mostly on highly vulnerable groups. Nevertheless, in some cities in Europe, there have been cases where municipal authorities have promoted an agenda more closely connected to demands from social movements, as in the case of Barcelona (during the *Barcelona en Comú* administration) and of Napoli (during the administration of the independent mayor Luigi de Magistris). In both cases, that are included in the so-called *New Municipalism* wave, emphasis was put on the notion of urban commons, on the redefinition on public interest and on how these notions can be operationalized in urban policies. The priorities of both municipal administrations centred on the active engagement of citizens and on the defence of rights deemed as crucial for spatial justice in the respective cities.

Athens, Naples and Barcelona belong to a group of Southern European countries which is characterized by the highest governmental deficits, the highest governmental debts, the highest inflation rates and the lowest employment rates of the countries within the European Union and the Eurozone. However, all three cities have traditionally enjoyed a considerably high influx of tourism, which lately, has been perceived—by both their respective governmental authorities and individuals—as a source of income that could function as a counterweight to the current economic situation (Eurostat, 2018). Due to this propensity, these three urban centres have recently been through a grandiose touristic development, which resulted in their one-sided economic development.

These three cities share one more common attribute: the presence of considerably large and vital urban social movements, solidarity initiatives and grassroots actions (MOVOKEUR 2014) which systematically challenge and oppose austerity policies and spatial inequality. Noticeably, the activity of those social movements has gradually influenced the ways city politics and governance operate, enhancing bottom-up exchanges and initiatives.

In Naples and Barcelona, local governments coalesced with urban movements employing the language of the commons, while trying to respond to spatial injustices. This is what makes those cities important examples to be compared to Athens, a city in which municipal policies have not been shaped by claims for the protection of urban commons.

In Barcelona, an ongoing debate over housing policies was triggered due to the rising values of downtown property and strained urban resources, in the context of the increasing tourists' influx (Municipality of Barcelona 2015). In Naples, the municipal authorities through a series of legislation acts from 2015 to 2018, prompted by local initiatives' mobilization gradually supported “sustainable tourism”. Also, in a series of resolutions spanning from 2011 to 2017 Naples municipality gradually recognized social centers as spaces “run by groups or committees of citizens by the logic of self-organization and experimentation” (Municipal Resolution n. 258/24.04.2014). These citizen initiatives were officially labelled as “urban commons” (Municipal Resolution n. 893/29.12.2015).

Though based on locality, spatial practices explicitly or implicitly focusing on spatial justice seem to overspill the boundaries of specific neighborhoods, setting a broader perspective about urban space. The growing disengagement of citizens with formal politics, as voting data demonstrate, renders visible a crisis of representation. As many have pointed out, the Eurozone’s economic crisis and its management, the increasingly securitized and phobic management of migration by the EU and states alike and the dismantling of the welfare state, have increased the alienation people feel from their political representatives and have triggered significant albeit divergent reactions. Residents' organization, citizens' platforms and grassroots initiatives seem to emerge on the grounds of local agendas that nevertheless surpass the limits of exclusively local demands, proposing new conceptualizations of the city and alternative organizations of common existence. Anti-austerity movements and the subsequent solidarity initiatives became a fertile ground for re-connecting material, relational and governance demands concerning spatial justice. *They thus seem to present through locally oriented claims alternative visions of the urban space and life in general*.

*The fields of housing and cultural production operate in a complementary way*. While the former refers to practices that originate from the private sphere, the latter presupposes some kind of already existing social relationships and affinities. In the first instance collective actions (and the feeling of belonging to a collective) may be the outcome of conflicts over private space, while in the second one collective actions (and the feeling of belonging to a collective) result from processes of cultural co-production. Yet the formation of shared common spaces and practices of inhabitation is instrumental to both.

Urban struggles and citizen initiatives are not exclusively focused in demands towards the government or the local authorities, but *rather attempt to set an alternative framework for everyday inhabitation*. They thus favor processes of direct action, which address concrete and immediate issues of reproduction, resource management and allocation, social relations rearrangement. Anti-austerity demonstrations and movements brought to the forefront different claims and forms of organization that want (and go) beyond traditional politics. Rather than asking solely for a more general/abstract right to the city, initiatives, movements or coalitions of both have claimed different political and social relations, power arrangements and management of resources. In that sense, these diverse mobilizations are not just reactive to imposed policies and political projects, but they are also developing *new forms of political imagination and action focused on a more just society people wish to live in*.

In sum, this research essentially aims at exploring the possibilities of reshaping the contested terrain of spatial justice in Athens by profiting from the experiences and accumulated knowledge that emerge within the context of New Municipalism in Naples and Barcelona. Implicitly or explicitly referring to Bookchin’s ideas of libertarian municipalism (Biehl and Bookchin1998, Bookchin 1991), New Municipalism reflects some significant changes in the ways city politics and governance operate in the issues at stake and in the relations among movements, grassroots initiatives and political power. Notable characteristics of these changes include (but are not restricted to):

1. Commons as a language and as a crucial aspect of shared political imaginaries
2. Negotiations (alliance formation and its challenges) between institutional actors and collective agency.
3. The presence of forms of political prefiguration within forms of alternative everyday life organization.