

CHAPTER 13

Tensions around Housing in the Collaborative Economy: Resisting against Platform Capitalism in Athens

Dimitris Pettas

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellow, Institute of Urban and Regional Planning, Technical University of Berlin

Penny Travlou

Edinburgh College of Art, University of Edinburgh

Abstract

In this chapter, we explore how different sets of practices that have been framed as ‘sharing’ and ‘collaborative’, coexist in the central Athenian district of Exarcheia. We mainly focus on issues related to housing and touristification and the ways the ‘platform capitalism’ side of sharing economy (through digitally mediated short-term rentals) operates in tension with grassroots, anti-gentrification initiatives that rely upon the rich political landscape of the district and involve the sharing of materials, knowledge and experiences, while evolving around the notion of caring for the most vulnerable parts of local population that are facing direct and indirect displacement. More specifically, we look into the sharing praxis itself: what is shared, by whom and how, while further elaborating on the labour and gendered dimensions of sharing.

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We argue that, despite their common framing as parts of the sharing (and/or collaborative economy), ‘platform capitalism’ and grassroots collaborative practices constitute the materialization of different, often contrasting, broader visions concerning the organization of production, consumption and social reproduction, providing engaged actors with different capacities and possibilities of empowerment.

Introduction

Sharing and collaboration have long been common societal practices, especially among groups and communities whose rights (i.e., access to housing, education, work, health) are constantly under attack (Schor, 2014). Since the 1970s, feminist scholars (e.g., Dalla Costa and James, 1975; Federici and Linebaugh, 2018; Fraser, 1992, 2009; Gibson-Graham, 1996) have introduced in academic debates the multiplicity of practices and modes of sharing, collaboration and care involved in everyday social reproduction that were largely neglected in both mainstream and critical strands of scholarship. Such theorizations shed light upon the role of alternative modes of labour, and non-monetary transactions emerge and operate in parallel – and often in tension – with capitalist socio-economic ones. Recently, a series of insightful works renewed the interest in transformative sharing and collaborative practices, focusing on their development through grassroots initiatives and networks. Within this body of literature, topics of interest include the production, as well as the collective management and sharing, of resources (Gorenflo, 2015; Santala and McGuirk, 2019; Scholz, 2016), the provision of healthcare and educational services (Bagayogo et al., 2016; Grove and Fischer, 2006), modes of collaborative consumption (Rowe, 2017), environmental innovations (Smith and Stirling, 2018), the social reproduction of the commons (Chatterton and Pusey, 2019), and social and solidarity economy networks (Daskalaki et al., 2019).

However, during the past decade, the notions of sharing and collaboration re-emerged as popular buzzwords in public discourse. In this context, market actors have partly re-coded these terms, after dissociating them from the aforementioned transformative practices. More specifically, for-profit, particularly large corporate actors in the gig economy (e.g., Airbnb, Uber, Deliveroo) exploit notions of sharing and collaboration while accounting for the commodification of social practices that have been traditionally considered to develop beyond the reach of the market (i.e., hospitality, transport, delivery services). Relevant activities, often regarded as ‘platform capitalism’, account for a series of negative externalities related to the deterioration of working conditions for engaged actors (Drahokoupil and Jespen, 2017; Walker, 2015) and the deepening of racial and gender discrimination (Edelman et al., 2015; Cansoy and Schor, 2017; Shade, 2018). At the same time, their negative impacts on urban settings may also be substantial. For instance, digitally mediated short-term rentals

(STRs) account for the creation of rent-gaps, and play a pivotal role in processes of touristification and displacement (Brousseau et al., 2015; Lee, 2016; Pettas et al., 2021; Wachsmuth and Weisler, 2018). However, the employment of sharing- and collaboration-related terms and narratives on behalf of large corporations has been highly controversial. Considering that these terms are also employed by corporate actors, the question arises as to what extent sharing and collaboration are notions compatible with profit-oriented goals and capital-intensive practices. Belk (2007) and Martin (2016) argue that sharing practices, by definition, cannot include monetary exchanges, while Kalamar (2013) came up with the term ‘sharewashing’ to argue that the exploitation of the positive associations of the notion of sharing have been largely deployed to hide self-interested activities. Morozov (2013) described platform economy as ‘neo-liberalism on steroids,’ arguing that related practices commercialize aspects of life and social activities that were beyond the reach of the market. Moreover, according to Frenken and Schor (2017), similar practices undermine social cohesion through the commodification of previously non-monetized modes of sharing.

In this chapter, we explore how different sets of practices that have been framed as ‘sharing’ and ‘collaborative’ coexist in the central Athenian district of Exarcheia. We mainly focus on issues related to housing and touristification and the ways in which the ‘platform capitalism’ side of the sharing economy (through digitally mediated STRs) operates in tension with grassroots, anti-gentrification initiatives that rely upon the rich political landscape of the district and involve the sharing of materials, knowledge and experiences, while evolving around the notion of caring for the most vulnerable parts of the local population that are facing direct and indirect displacement. More specifically, we look into the sharing praxis itself: what is shared, by whom and how, while elaborating on the labour and gendered dimensions of sharing. We argue that, despite their common framing as parts of the sharing (and/or collaborative) economy, relevant practices constitute the materialization of different, often contrasting, broader visions concerning the organization of production, consumption and social reproduction, providing engaged actors with different capacities and possibilities of empowerment.

Methodologically, this chapter is based on qualitative research that the two authors carried out independently. The first author carried out 22 semi-structured interviews with actors engaged in the everyday social reproduction of STRs through various roles (hosts that are either also the dwellings’ owners or hired for that role, cleaners, photographers and architects) while the second author carried out ethnographic fieldwork with an activist grassroots initiative against gentrification and touristification in Exarcheia. The two research projects were conducted between January 2019 and June 2021. More specifically, the first author conducted his interviews from January to June 2021 while the second author’s ongoing ethnographic fieldwork started in early 2019. It is also worth mentioning that both authors have been residents of the neighbourhood for several years.

The remainder of the chapter is structured as follows: we first delineate the implications of the 2008 austerity crisis for the Athenian housing landscape, placing emphasis on the central district of Exarcheia; then we explore two contrasting sets of practices that developed and coexist in tension in the aforementioned district, namely digitally mediated STRs and anti-gentrification and solidarity networks that attempt to reverse the unfolding gentrification processes and also operated as infrastructures of care during the recent pandemic outbreak; finally, we discuss the multiple framings of sharing and collaborative practices and their implications for the urban environment and urban actors in Athens.

The housing context of Athens

During the past decade, Greece has experienced the harsh implications of a multi-level crisis, including the shrinking of the welfare state, anti-labour institutional change, substantial cuts in salaries and pensions, high levels of unemployment (especially among young people) and a deepening of inequalities (European Data Journalism Network, 2021; Hadjimichalis, 2013; Statista, 2021). Housing was one of the sectors worst affected by the austerity crisis through processes that disrupted the – up to then – widespread access to affordable housing, enabled by the high rates of homeownership and the diffusion and segmentation of land property, despite the lack of either housing policies that protect the rights of tenants by regulating the rental market or a provision of social housing for low-income households. Since the 1950s, as the country was rebuilding after WWII and the Civil War, and the people were migrating en masse from the countryside to the urban centres, housing has been one of the key economic drivers, and home ownership has been widespread across social classes.

Recently, however, and particularly during the austerity crisis, there has also been a growing number of people renting properties in the centre of Athens. These people are mainly younger and low-paid, and thus unable to afford to buy property: migrants, young families, etc. At the same time Athens has also experienced a massive touristification of its centre and the gentrification of many of its central neighbourhoods. Between 2015 and 2019, Athens became one of the top tourist destinations in Europe – a development in which the recurrent presence of Athens in the global media narrative about the austerity and refugee crises and their discontents probably had a role. In 2018, the city received over 5 million tourists as it transformed into a year-round tourist destination (Travlou, 2021). Athens is now considered an ‘affordable’ tourist destination, one of the most affordable European capitals to visit, with a world-branded history and a vibrant city life.

During its time in office (2015–2019), the left-wing Syriza government saw tourism as the economic sector that could possibly ameliorate the country’s

austerity crisis; it thus encouraged further investment in tourism-related businesses. Airbnb and similar short-let accommodation platforms offered homeowners the opportunity to boost their finances and secure some extra profit. At the same time, foreign property investment was encouraged through initiatives such as the Golden Visa scheme, with Greece offering the lowest rate EU-wide (€250,000) to non-EU investors. This made Athens an attractive location for individual investors, property developers and international investment funds. Within a very short time, the socioeconomic demographics of Athens' central neighbourhoods changed dramatically: many local residents were forced to move out of rented homes as owners sold these homes to overseas investors or converted them into short-let accommodation. The number of evictions also increased, as existing tenants could not afford to pay the skyrocketing rent and utility bills. These changes in the housing market, along with gentrification, have had a direct impact on central neighbourhoods such as Exarcheia, where many local residents have been displaced. Airbnb short-lets and new cafes, bars and restaurants have turned these neighbourhoods into night economy hubs and made it impossible for many of their earlier local residents to afford to live there. Exarcheia was particularly affected by this touristification and incipient gentrification. Its 'bohemian' reputation and nightlife, and the presence of many social spaces and self-organized initiatives, together with its central location, made it appealing to many, mainly young, foreign visitors (Pettas et al., 2021; Travlou 2021).

Sharing, caring and collaboration in Exarcheia: From platform capitalism to solidarity

Digitally mediated STRs expanded rapidly in Athens, especially from the mid-2010s to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, initially as a spontaneous, bottom-up, individual activity. On the demand side, a series of conditions and trends contributed to the transformation of Athens from a one-day-stop destination to a year-round, city break destination: the framing of Athens in international media as the city that made it through the crisis through means of grassroots solidarity practices (Henley, 2015; Kitsantonis, 2017) and as the new arts capital of Europe (Da Silva and Dickson, 2017; Sooke, 2017), the expansion of low-cost flights that increased Athens' connectivity, the political instability in 'antagonistic' destinations and policies designed and implemented by the Municipality of Athens and the Greek Ministry of Tourism that explicitly aimed in rebranding Athens as a vibrant urban landscape that could meet the demand for 'authentic' experiences. On the supply side, contrary to the housing landscape of other European capitals, the high levels of home ownership enabled even lower-middle- and middle-class populations to engage in STRs, largely as a survival strategy during the crisis. The emergence of STRs as a large-scale touristic accommodation infrastructure was further supported by a wide range of professionals

who were experiencing high levels of unemployment and precarity during that time. Beyond the owners, mostly young professionals and unskilled workers participated in the everyday social reproduction of STRs through various roles: hosts, cleaners, architects, interior designers and photographers are among the occupations that supported the STR infrastructure. Gradually, large companies, funds and investors got more involved in the STR market (Balamanidis et al., 2019) and, through the creation of scale economies and the increased professionalization of STR-related practices created an environment in which small owners were unable to compete. Within this frame, precarity, exploitation and self-exploitation defined labour conditions in cases of owners with limited numbers of dwellings and – and providers of ‘peripheral’ activities.

We initially focus on small-scale STR networks (involving owners with one or two housing units) and build on informants’ narratives: the vast majority of engaged actors entered the STR market out of necessity, as they were facing unemployment or labour precarity in their professional lives. ‘Small’ homeowners experienced the transformation of home-ownership from an advantage to a burden (due to increased property taxation and inability to respond to housing costs) and, in this environment, STRs constituted their exclusive or major source of income. The same applies to people operating as hosts (e.g., undertaking the overall management of the listings, including online posting and communication, reception of visitors, cleaning or coordinating cleaning activities, etc.), professionals (architects, engineers, interior designers, photographers) and cleaners. However, although this provided an alternative within a harsh socio-economic environment, the conditions of exploitation that prevailed in most economic sectors in Greece during the crisis were also reflected in the STR market. First, labour relations within STR-related activities develop within the shadow economy, leading to an overall condition of precarity due to the lack of contracts, social and health security, etc. As a result, informants were also concerned about the impact of this unofficial engagement in their future work opportunities, due to their inability to prove their work experience. Second, concerning labour exploitation, despite the unofficial status of their engagement and the consequent evasion of taxation for ‘employers’, the jobs offered to ‘peripheral’ actors were largely underpaid, especially those of unskilled workers. On many occasions, cleaners mentioned that they were paid €1.5–2 per hour or €500 per month for a six-day working week. Even for small owners who undertake large parts of STRs’ everyday operation themselves, self-exploitation is widespread. Informants mentioned that unstable and extended working hours and multitasking (communication with visitors, cleaning, shopping, etc.) created stressful working conditions that rarely were combined with high earnings. The harsh labour landscape in the STR market is confirmed by the fact that most informants chose another professional path when they came across alternatives. Finally, the informal and precarious labour relations posed disproportionate challenges to female participants, who often

faced wage discrimination and, in some cases, aggressive behaviours that they perceived as gender-based.

Within this context, practices of sharing and collaboration were nowhere to be found in the landscape of STRs in Athens. 87.8% of the total Airbnb listings in Athens concern renting out whole apartments, constituting a departure from the initial logic of apartment-sharing facilitated through platforms such as Couchsurfing and Airbnb during their first steps. More importantly, the resources and goods (house, furniture, electronic equipment, etc.) as well as the labour (cleaning, communication, etc.) involved come exclusively – through either personal labour or outsourcing – from the provider’s end, who bears the cost of their purchase and maintenance as well as the risk that is inherent in their commercial exploitation of dwellings. Then, a special form of sharing is developed between the provider and the platform, as they jointly exploit the resources, goods and/or labour of the former, while what is offered by the platform is the ‘networking’ i.e., the provider’s access to a large pool of possible users. At the same time, the possibilities for developing relationships beyond those contained in the formal framework of the provider–user relationship are minimal, due to both the very nature of this relationship and the impact that certain features of the platform (such as the rating system and reviews) have on the ‘attractiveness’ of and future demand for the product provided. Based on the above, the activities included in the ‘platform capitalism’ side of the sharing economy not only are detached from sharing but are produced and reproduced through individualized and fully commercialized practices that constitute aggregated versions of the mainstream capitalist economy.

The above discussion raises further scepticism towards the sharing economy, its links to platform capitalism, and its impact on the local economy and communities in Athens. Airbnb and similar short-let accommodation platforms have been considered as partly responsible for the worsening of the local housing crisis (Skopeliti, 2018; Balampanidis et al., 2021). Since the early 2010s and during the austerity crisis, housing became one of the core causes that local social movements focused their actions upon, resisting neoliberal politics on the issue and actions such as evictions, repossessions and auctions. Inspired by Henri Lefebvre’s (1996) ‘right to the city’, they called for ‘the right to housing’, opposing any legislation and/or state politics that endanger this fundamental right of citizens. Resisting the state meant that the tactics of mobilization for housing activist groups were mostly focusing on direct actions – such as street demonstrations – to acquire visibility for their cause. It became apparent by the mid-2010s, though, that the housing crisis was getting worse and more complex as the touristification and gentrification of central neighbourhoods intensified. Housing activists had to confront not only the state but a complex system of private investors, international real estate funds and sharing economy digital platforms such as Airbnb. The last of these has been the most problematic and difficult to fight against, as it is regarded as a digital service provider rather than

an individual online business. For this reason only, Airbnb has so far avoided onerous national regulations across Europe, with very few exceptions (such as Barcelona and Berlin), as it has been recognized as ‘an information society service, a status that comes with the right to operate freely across the EU’ (Boffey, 2019). Arguably, it is the first time that housing activists, neighbourhood groups and local social movements have an opponent that is beyond their territory and outside national borders. Traditional forms of resistance such as those described earlier cannot be effective anymore. The question to pose here is how to resist a global phenomenon and a stateless (digital) enterprise with unprecedented impact on local communities.

In January 2019, Action Against Regeneration and Gentrification (AARG), an activist collective, assembled in Exarcheia to resist the touristification and gentrification of the neighbourhood, and the rise of property values and displacement of less affluent residents (see <https://www.facebook.com/aargathens>). AARG is a group of anti-authoritarian activists, residents and scholars who came together to study and understand the transformation of Exarcheia in recent years and find ways to mitigate and resist it. Until the Covid-19 outbreak in early 2020, AARG’s core cohort of around 10 members met in weekly open assemblies in the free social space ‘Nosotros’ in Exarcheia; afterwards they continued to hold regular open assemblies online. Since its formation, AARG has organized a series of public events (roundtables with international and local academics and activists, film screenings, etc.), neighbourhood mapping activities and anti-gentrification demonstrations alongside similar grassroots initiatives in Athens. Its activism has also included campaigns against Airbnb and anti-eviction actions (see Figure 13.1).

From its inception, AARG positioned itself as a platform for resistance at the intersection of the long-term austerity crisis and the housing crisis that it drove. The connection between these two crises is not simple and straightforward; however, AARG members and other housing activists in Greece could clearly see that the unprecedented economic recession resulting from the implementation of the EU-dictated austerity measures had a dire impact on many people’s livelihoods. As the country’s economy collapsed in the early 2010s, the state became increasingly unable and/or unwilling to provide organized relief, while many people lost their employment, income and homes and/or became excluded from the formal economy.

In these conditions, many turned to each other for help in building infrastructures of care. From the onset of the austerity crisis, local activists from different factions of the left and the anarchist/anti-authoritarian movement mobilized to build self-organized networks that provided medical, housing, and other support to those affected the most by the economic recession (Rakopoulos, 2014; Cabot, 2016; Arampatzi, 2017). The emergence of numerous solidarity economy initiatives across the country (from time banks and agricultural cooperatives to urban free markets, collective kitchens and social clinics) exemplifies practices of solidarity and socio-economic alternatives based on non-monetary and/or non-capitalist economic models (Margariti and Travlou, 2018; Travlou



Figure 13.1: AARG anti-Airbnb campaign with stencil in Exarcheia. Copyright permission: AARG/Penny Travlou.

and Bernat, 2022). By matching the use and exchange value of goods and balancing pressures of offer and demand, these projects strengthened community relations. The vibrant grassroots movement that emerged in austerity-ridden Greece in the early 2010s planted the seeds of informal, solidarity economy infrastructures that would play a crucial role during the subsequent arrival of large numbers of migrants and refugees in the country (from 2015 onwards). It is worth noting that, by early 2015, the grassroots solidarity movement was internationalized as activists from abroad came to Greece to experience first-hand the sociopolitical change that the newly elected government, headed by the radical left Syriza party, had promised to foster, and the response of the anarchist/antiauthoritarian movement to these changes.

Although AARG's original scope was anti-gentrification actions, it soon focused on the impact of short-let accommodation in Exarcheia. One of its key actions was to map the Airbnb apartments in the area as a tool for understanding how the platform reshapes the housing market, produces a shortage of available and affordable rental properties and, thus, affects local residents. The research carried out by AARG members revealed the close correlation between the increase in the number of Airbnb flats and evictions. A case that illustrates

this was that of an elderly tenant who had rented a flat in Exarcheia for more than 20 years. The tenant was asked by the new landlord – an international real estate company – to vacate the place within 15 days as they were planning to renovate it and convert it to short-let accommodation. To prevent the tenant's eviction, AARG organized an anti-eviction campaign and offered legal support. The campaign attracted local and foreign media coverage. As a result, the new landlord, apprehensive of further negative publicity, permitted the tenant to remain in the property for a longer period. Cases like this, nonetheless, where local residents are forced to leave their homes with only a short notice, have become more common in Exarcheia and other neighbourhoods in Athens recently. The lack of a housing bill that protects the rights of tenants has obviously contributed to this situation (see Figure 13.2).

To make matters worse, during the Covid-19 pandemic, rents in a number of Athens' central neighbourhoods increased despite the measures announced by the conservative government to mitigate hardship. In response to this, AARG joined the Rent Strike 2020 campaign organized by the International Tenant Solidarity Network (from the US, UK, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Germany, Netherlands) and the local Initiative for Housing Action and Solidarity to resist the housing crisis during the pandemic (Travlou, 2021). The network had online assemblies to first plan an international day of action on social media and then discuss actions at local level to demand a rent freeze. 'Through these assemblies, we became aware of how national lockdowns and neoliberal policies were conflated into a catastrophic housing crisis worldwide' (Travlou, 2021: 71). Although the campaign was successful in a number of cities in the US (about two million rents and mortgages paused in San Francisco and New York in 2020) and in the UK (the Scottish Government banned all evictions following the Living Rent



Figure 13.2: An anti-gentrification campaign organized by AARG. Slogan on banner: 'Our neighbourhoods are not a commodity for your profit. STOP gentrification and Airbnb.' Copyright permission: author/Penny Travlou.

campaign), in Greece it did not manage to achieve a wider resonance beyond the network of housing activists. As part of this campaign, AARG demanded the suspension of all evictions and house repossessions, the immediate closure of refugee camps, the decriminalization of housing squats and the expropriation of hotels and Airbnb flats to house homeless and those in need of housing during the pandemic. By the end of the second lockdown in May 2021, *Nosotros Free Social Space* – the venue hosting AARG’s assemblies and events – was embroiled in a dispute with the building’s owners, who wanted an increase in rent. At the end of the summer, *Nosotros* closed down amid rumours that the owners wanted to sell the property to real estate investors. *Nosotros* and AARG members were concerned that this building – a landmark for Athens’ anti-authoritarian movement – would be converted to a boutique hotel or short-let accommodation.

The ethnographic work with AARG identified the issue – common with activist groups – of resource shortage and dependence on relational infrastructures. It is very difficult to respond promptly to the changes that happen at a neighbourhood level, especially when this response places AARG against aterritorial digital platforms such as Airbnb. Yet, in the two years of its operation, AARG has organized a number of events and actions at the local level that brought together local residents, activists and academics. AARG’s organization is based on regular open assemblies. These alone require a level of infrastructure and planning that can slow down AARG’s activity. An additional challenge that AARG as a self-organized activist group has to overcome is the use of communication technologies. The different levels of digital literacy within the group made communication and the organization of specific actions and events (e.g. hybrid roundtables with invited speakers from abroad participating via digital platforms) difficult. These challenges were accentuated during the Covid-19 lockdown, when the assemblies had to move entirely online.

These issues made it difficult for AARG to keep pace with the aggressive changes in Exarcheia, where the housing crisis has deepened even further for all the aforementioned reasons and resulted in what the group considers ‘displacement’ of local residents. Stemming from an anti-authoritarian political discourse and praxis, AARG also rejects the authority of the state and hence is not pursuing change in the legal framework that could regulate housing. For the group, the solution lies in direct action at neighbourhood level and in dialogue with the local communities.

Recognizing the unprecedented health crisis and its impact on the most vulnerable, AARG together with members of *Nosotros Free Social Space* set up *Kropotkin-19*, a mutual aid initiative based on solidarity economy and relational infrastructures. ‘As a (local) network of care and solidarity’, *Kropotkin-19* provided food, essential goods and legal advice to those most in need (i.e. refugees and migrants including mothers with toddlers, unemployed, elderly) (Travlou, 2021: 75). On the one hand, AARG was faced with the challenge of fighting an uneven struggle against Airbnb; on the other hand, it successfully mobilized to provide assistance fast and efficiently to those in need across the city (see Figure 13.3).



ONLY SOCIETY CAN SAVE ITSELF

SOLIDARITY TO RITSONA CAMP- COLLECTION OF FOOD AND BASIC ITEMS
Ritsona camp as in all other camps in Greece is a living hell. There are many families who do not have access to even the most essential necessities, including mothers with small children without milk and diapers. There is an urgent call from the residents of Ritsona for immediate support through the collection of dry foods and other basic items. As Kropotkin-19, we support this effort.
Solidarity is our weapon!

WE ARE COLLECTING:
Dry food (rice, flour, beans, lentils), cooking oil, sugar, tea, canned tomatoes, biscuits, dried nuts, dried fruit, milk powder for babies (number 1 and 2) and diapers (all sizes).
We also collect notebooks, pens, pencils and markers for the self-organised school in Ritsona.

PLACES AND TIMES FOR COLLECTION:

Exarcheia
Friday 18.12 and Monday 21.12, 3-7pm @ Nosotros (Themistocleous 66)
Saturday 19.12, Tuesday 22.12, Wednesday 23.12, 6-9pm @ Skala (Koletti 29)

Kato Patisia
Saturday 19.12, 12-2pm @ Patmou and Karavia Squat (Karavia 23)

Petroupoli
Saturday 19.12, 6-9pm and Sunday 20.12 12-3pm @ Botanical Garden Squat (Square St. Dimitriou)

Figure 13.3: Kropotkin-19 Mutual Aid Group: Collection of food and other basic necessities for a refugee camp near Athens. Copyright permission: Kropotkin-19/Penny Travlou.

Discussion

In Athens, as in many metropolitan areas around the globe, the two ‘extreme’ and contrasting sides of the sharing/collaborative economy coexist, each enabling processes that involve competing sets of actors, networks, political and economic visions and goals, while leading to differentiated effects on the urban environment and creating diversified socio-economic, political and cultural ecosystems. The case of Exarcheia and the emergence of, on the one hand and through digitally mediated STRs, exploitative relations that reproduce and aggravate capitalist conditions of production and consumption without involving gestures of sharing and collaboration and, on the other hand, networks of solidarity, care and support that involve the sharing of goods, resources, physical spaces and infrastructure while being on the borderline of mainstream socio-economic practices, renders this gap evident.

In this frame, the question arises as to which actors and networks are ultimately entitled to be considered agents that foster meaningful and socially beneficial transformations in the fields of production, consumption and social reproduction in contemporary urban contexts through practices of sharing and collaboration. In both academic and policy debates, small but impactful initiatives and networks that are proposing and realizing alternative ways of reorganizing labour, welfare provision, production and consumption channels and, more broadly, social reproduction and everyday life remain largely neglected, while large, for-profit companies are solely ‘entitled’ to be considered as agents of collaboration (as well as innovation and entrepreneurship). Given the fact that most activities that fall within the description of sharing/collaborative economy are in a state of limbo between these two extremes, as they are often rooted in social movements while at the same time interacting with circuits of the market, it is crucial that meaningful and socially transformative sharing/collaborative practices are further explored and also supported through both formal and informal institutionalizations and relevant policy frameworks.

Additional crucial issues within the current sharing/collaborative economy debates concern the response of social movements to spatially diffused processes facilitated by platform capitalism, which have severe impacts on specific local settings, as well as the capacities and potentials of social and workers’ movements to reappropriate digital tools and infrastructure towards their empowerment. Concerning the former issue, it becomes more and more evident that ‘traditional’ actions of protest on the neighbourhood level cannot solely create the conditions for the subversion of the direct and indirect implications of platform capitalism for various fields (e.g. housing, labour), given the global topologies of relevant networks. Instead, further actions will create new spaces for asserting claims concerning the strengthening, adaptation and extension of relevant regulations to activities that develop in the frame of the platform economy. Concerning the latter, relevant initiatives are already taking place in the form of platform cooperatives, hackerspaces, digital commons

and other grassroots initiatives and networks that operate in the digital realm. Further attempts and experimentations that promote alternative, bottom-up reconfigurations of labour, production and consumption can operate as paradigm shifts on the antipodes of platform capitalism. Moreover, within the recent pandemic outbreak and, as mobility restrictions applied in most cities around the globe, solidarity movements rapidly incorporated digital means and tools towards establishing communication channels among participants, promoting and disseminating their actions, and acquiring resources and finance. Thus, the ways in which more 'traditional' grassroots initiatives and networks enrich and expand their digital and virtual components are of great interest for future research within the debates of bottom-up sharing and collaborative networks.

Conclusion

In this chapter, by combining their distinct ethnographic research projects in Athens, the two authors have provided a multifaceted view of collaborative economy: from sharing to caring practices. As presented earlier in the chapter, digitally mediated short-rentals such as those listed on the Airbnb platform offered at first new opportunities for small-scale entrepreneurship and economic stability to people affected by the financial crisis during the first part of the 2010s. By the mid-2010s, larger companies, funds and investors had entered the STR market, where neoliberal state policies on housing made it easier for them to invest in local properties, pushing out of any profit-making the smaller businesses and individual short-let accommodation owners. At the same time, the prices of renting and/or buying property have increased to such a level that low-income tenants couldn't afford to live in a number of central neighbourhoods that have turned into gentrified tourist enclaves. Apparently, while tourism is recognized (by both the former and current governments) as one of the key sectors of the economy to help the country out of the financial crisis, it has been linked to a number of other issues such as those presented in this chapter and specifically the housing crisis in the centre of Athens. The latter has been addressed as a counter-argument within local activist circles, suggesting that economic prosperity through tourism is a fallacy and its real consequences are shown in local neighbourhoods via mass touristification, aggressive gentrification, and airbnbization resulting to residents' displacement (i.e. a rise in the number of housing evictions, auctions and reposessions). The fundamental question to raise here is twofold: what the real impact of digital platforms such as Airbnb is on local communities, and who shares within this model of sharing economy that by now is mostly associated with platform capitalism.

Solidarity and the care economy lie on the opposite side of the spectrum of collaborative economy. This has been manifested in various forms in Athens since the early 2010s, responding to the various crises that impacted the city (and the country at large). The ethnographic study of the anti-gentrification

activist group AARG in Athens has revealed how the solidarity networks that emerged within the austerity crisis have quickly responded to later crises such as the refugee, housing and recently health crises. Solidarity, self-organization and affective (relational) infrastructures as manifested within the local activist social movements offered alternative ways of doing through commoning and caring practices. AARG responded to the unprecedented housing crisis as experienced in the central neighbourhood of Exarcheia. As activists with close links to Exarcheia, AARG's members saw the changes in their neighbourhood that came with gentrification and touristification. Their struggle against at-territorial digital platforms (i.e., Airbnb), real estate funds and investors has been uneven: it has proved too difficult to fight against a transglobal business. On the other hand, they successfully organized, at a local level, mutual aid initiatives to help those in need during the pandemic and anti-eviction campaigns to support their neighbours from losing their homes. These actions are representative of a much wider understanding of an economy of care. Building on the case of Exarcheia, and as digital mediations are rapidly incorporated in most aspects of cities' economic, social and political life, tensions among practices that are currently commonly framed as part of the 'sharing economy' notion are expected to escalate, bringing out the contradictory visions of engaged individual and collective actors.

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