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HETEROPOLITICS

Refiguring the Common and the Political

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Introduction

Entering the field: Relevance of the Greek case studies to the objectives of Heteropolitics

Embarking on our journey in the field, our aim was the critical anthropological elaboration of the radical political imaginary discovered in our field. Our intention was to trace the local responses to global predicaments that belong to 'the larger universe of social movements' (Schönwälder 2002: 11), they propose alternative ways of doing politics in Greece, Italy and Spain and they are potential agents of social change. The Greek case studies, namely the wireless community network Sarantaporo.gr and the Cooperative Ecosystem of Karditsa (CEK) afford us the possibility to challenge our own subjectivity in regard to our conceptions of the political, a criterion that was taken seriously into consideration when choosing to locate our fieldwork. The nature of each case is closely intertwined with recent developments in global political economy and the growing need for digital literacy and communication. Hence, the ethnographic case studies were selected a) as responses to wider political developments; b) as part of a larger universe of similar responses and not just as isolated case studies; c) as successful attempts at overcoming structural hindrances and even at benefiting from the 'queereness' of the capitalist state; and d) as cases of commoning outside of the mainstream political apparatus, which construct alternatives to bureaucratic structures of state administration and to profit-driven market forces, contributing to social innovation, openness, social justice, collective political empowerment.

In this vein, I have tried to situate my study in the framework of the Greek anthropological literature that examines the field between the state and the household as a locus where the political is being produced (Rozakou, Gkara & Yiannitsiotis 2013) away from and in relation to the state (Campbell 1964, Papataxiarchis 1990, Allen 1993, Astrinaki 2002, Tsantiropoulos 2004, Rozakou 2007, Herzfeld 2012). At the same time, I have tried to expand the notion of the political as a field of antagonism and a field of patronage (Campbell 1964, Sotiropoulos 2013, Papataxiarchis & Lyrintzis 2013; see also Dertilis 1977, Mouzelis 1978, Mavrogordatos 1978, Komninou 1981, Nikolakopoulos 1985) by including the agonistic features of the groups I have studied which are inherent in their structures and by excluding the patronage relations, which in my case-studies are replaced by public deliberation, 'humble leadership' and transparency.

Heteropolitical ethnography

When studying radical political alterity, in the contemporary West, there is but one way to treat it methodologically in order to gain an insight inτo the 'indigenous cosmologies' of such collective endeavours, and this is to treat it as early anthropologists treated non-Western, exotic societies. The collective action that we studied in the framework of *Heteropolitics* is not simply challenging mainstream economy and politics but it reframes these notions. It carries thus a degree of exoticism in the midst of the conventional, the mainstream, the orthodox. We went in the field to study alterity, but we ended up studying much more than that; we studied prefigurative action in the midst of a devastating financial breakdown, we explored actual 'real utopias.'

In such a radical alterity, an ethnographer is just one participant in a system of knowledge production, and s/he participates in a system of collective knowledge production that forms the basis of political action (Casas - Cortés et al. 2013). Hence, our work was not just to interpret the field but also to produce knowledge with the actors of our field and to conceptualize alternative schemes of community, the commons and social self-organization. In light of these, the methodological routes I have chosen to travel during my fieldwork in the two Greek case-studies were both mapped and unmapped. The familiar route was of course the conventional ethnographic fieldwork, which is paired with participant observation in which the ethnographer, in this case myself, was initially an external observer who attempts to immerse herself in the field in order to attend to the specific 'lived realities' of her interlocutors and establish meaningful relationships with them. Following this path, I was able to 'convince' them, so to speak, to proceed with in-depth interviewing. These methodological techniques have made it quite clear that I would have to challenge my own presuppositions and subjectivities and that I would have to situate myself in the broader global and regional networks both I and my informants were part of (Burawoy 2009).

That made me both an insider, as far as the broader context is concerned, and a new student as far as the specific context of each case study was concerned. Hence, I was by no means a neutral observer since day one, and I became an even more 'biased' insider as I was immersing myself in the particular case studies. I remember very vividly the PI criticizing my affective engagement with my informants when one of them was diminishing the importance of their endeavour, which vexed me enough to want to abruptly interrupt the interview. Therefore, in this report I do not pretend to be an objective outsider, but a subject that produces knowledge not in distance but in tune with the people I conducted a study on, and I was a student of.

In other words, I have conducted an extended case method where

> I extended my-self into the lives of the participants under study; I extended my observations over time and space; the microprecesses to macroforces; and finally the theory. Each extension involves a dialogue: between participant and observer,

between successive events in the field, between micro and macro, and between successive reconstructions of theory. These dialogues orbit around each other, each in the gravitational field of the others (Burawoy 2009: xv).

In this sense, my 'ethnography moved from its conventional single-site location contextualised by macro-constructions of a larger social order (such as the capitalist world system) to multiple sites of observation and participation' (Marcus 1995: 95). It attempted to study not only how historical and macro-processes effect micro-institutions and practices but also how micro-processes re-define macro-processes through prefiguration, by establishing 'real utopias.'

Furthermore, my ethnography was 'grounded' as everything observed and produced in the field qualified as data, and it revolved around various aspects of the same issue. I have benefited from social media encounters, interviews, the collection of press and archival material, and digital ethnography of instant messaging applications in order to identify the verbal practices and the rhetoric used to speak about the subject of the study. In Marcus' words, the ethnographer must 'trace the social correlates and groundings of associations that are most clearly alive in language use and print or visual media' (1995: 108). Keeping a diary during fieldwork was also important, not only for writing down things to remember for future reference, but also in order to integrate informants' narratives and biographical data in a more coherent way than through the interview text. This technique helps create an ethnographic space in which the subject of study is seen –to the extent possible- through the eyes of the informants (Voulvouli 2009).

Multi-sited ethnography consists of techniques entitled 'following.' 'Follow the metaphor' is a technique which consists in observing the circulation of signs, symbols, and metaphors bearing on the subject of study. In discourse theory, these are defined as 'nodal points' which 'partially fix meaning' (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 113). In trying to grasp the logic of social movements (Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000), I identified the 'signifiers' floating around the discursive practices of my interlocutors, invested with meanings such as collaboration, solidarity, social profit and social value in their attempts to create 'common hegemony.' That is,

> a hegemonic politics which rallies together broad-based political fronts, uniting social forces around a common political project and identity, with a view to altering the balance of power in society and to configuring new social relations (*Report 1. The Political*, 2020: 9)

For, the subjects of our study have been treated as knowledge producers in their own right, capable of creating systems of meanings. Knowledge production has been treated as a process that does not take place only in academy but also in the field. Theory was 'deployed in the service of description rather than the other way around' (Graeber 2009: 509), and I learned things by doing, not by framing things. I have not collected data as a knowledge producer in a 'crowded field;' I have produced data along with my interlocutors. Throughout this *praxis* I have gradually became an engaged/militant

ethnographer assuming the role of facilitator, networker, mediator, accompanier, activist knowledge producer or sympathetic interlocutor (Juris & Khasnabish 2013: 23-26, 368, 370, 372). Herein lie the unmapped routes I have travelled through this heteropolitical ethnographic journey.

I have endeavoured to produce knowledge by being in action (Shah 2017: 45), by embracing the knowledge laid out in front of my eyes and ears, by becoming part of prefigurative practices of the collectivities I studied, and by benefiting from their collective intelligence (see, for example, the chapter I co-authored with some of my interlocutors in 2018 -Chryssos et al. 2018). I have tried to uncover new possibilities within present circumstances, activities, explorations and dislocations, and capture new ideas that spring from the groups I studied. In short, I have attempted to distance myself from dominant and habitual ways of thinking, acting, feeling and evaluating. Through critical reflection I came to place myself at a remove from such routines or from hegemonic forms, and I sought to see our present and our future possibilities, in other, new ways (Hage 2012: 287); in ways that my field has prompted me to experience. The taste of an alternative present and potentially future. Finally, the methodology I employed was not only a way of studying alternative politics but, most importantly, it has developed in a heteropolitical methodology itself, that included both the classic ethnographic participant observation methodology and the engaged/militant aspect of critical ethnography, reflecting thus the heteropolitical field of the contemporary radical political imaginary. Below, I summarize the main points around which my report of the two case studies has been revolved around.

Social Innovation and Collective Knowledge production: 'Society in Control'

The definition of social innovation adopted in this study prioritizes social welfare and social value over profit and material value. In Thessalia, this is a tradition of thought that has not been developed recently. As will be discussed below, the area has been a pioneer in autonomous politics and this tradition is 'rhizomatically' transferred to the present day. Both case studies, even though they champion a new type of cooperativism, they also foster values of community that had roots in the past, communal traditions of a recent or an older past that relate to their collective history or even to the personal history of their participants. Solidarity, trust, reciprocity, cooperation are values that were enacted when the local societies were in dire conditions in the past, and somehow, in a rhizomatic way, they have found their place in today's new cooperatives of Karditsa and Sarantaporo.gr, incorporating the individual and collective past of people and places.

As already mentioned, my position as an ethnographer during my fieldwork has been that of one knowledge producer in an already established system of knowledge production. It became quite obvious from the very beginning of my research that the entities I worked with had developed 'indigenous cosmologies' by appropriating and domesticating concepts such as politics, economy, collaboration, solidarity, value, profit, cooperativism, womanhood, technology and social innovation. Both CEK and Sarantaporo.gr are reframing these terms, either consciously or unconsciously. When it

is done consciously, my role as an ethnographer is to convey their appropriated meanings. When the reframing is done unconsciously, I have attempted an interpretation after discussing it with them. For example, I have discussed the term 'moral rationalism' that I use to describe the balance between profit and non-material human needs that the Cooperative Bank of Karditsa pursues (the present report, section 5.2.8) both during the interview I had with its CEO and later in an informal discussion I had with him. Similarly, I have discussed the politics of the self underlying the decision to be involved in Sarnatporo.gr with my interlocutor who described her involvement in the network (the present report, section 5.1.5).

When my informants were very specific about the concepts they were using to describe their practices, my job was to familiarize myself with the literature on these concepts in order to be able to deliberate over these terms with them. As I discuss in section 3 of the Report on CEK, the concept of social innovation has been a very fruitful analytical term for two reasons. Firstly, because it has guided my analysis on the social origins of the concept in the framework of CEK and, secondly, because it has allowed for a discussion on the non-mainstream uses of the term in the literature. This discussion ended up adopting the type of social innovation that describes the community involvement in defining social innovation and, hence, in producing knowledge, namely the 'society in control.' This type of social innovation harnesses innovative knowledge for the community as a whole and not for an economic structure alone. Furthermore, in this study, social innovation has been analyzed as a concept that has its roots in the historical habitus of Thessalia, the administrative district where both case-studies are located. It is also a concept that addresses technology and economy as total social phenomena, which is the next main point I will be discussing further down.

Technology and Economy as total social phenomenon

In the pages that follow, technology is discussed as a socially constructed concept, and as such it is full of interpretations, appropriations and domestications. It is historically and culturally defined and constitutes a metaphor of social relations. The innovative aspect of technology in the case of Sarantaporo.gr, lies in its deployment as a collective good that serves the community and not the individual users as conventional telecommunications companies do. It is employed/constructed/ configured in ways that can bring about a better future for the villages that participate in the network, and it is designed by the network's activists, who are not just users but inventors of a technology that carries their social needs. In this sense, the technology that Sarantaporo.gr deploys assumes the character of a total social phenomenon endowed with technical, social and political skills. In sections 4 and 5 of the Report on Sarantaporo.gr, I engage in a discussion of technology situated within the anthropological literature of technology, cyber technology, interface anthropology as well as within science and technology (sts) studies (Godelier 1971, Haraway 1989, Hess 1998, Traweek 1993, Latour 2004, Tsing 2005, Barad 2007, Haraway 2008, Viveiros de Castro & Goldman 2011), aspiring thus to be part of what Fischer (2007: 574-575) calls

cosmopolitical technoscientific world where one needs an ethnographic eye to clearly see the political, cultural, technological, financial, institutional and human capital building blocks and barriers….[and] the creation of political consciousness out of the inventive use of changing assemblages of political resources, of technoscientific communities of understanding both among new generations of scientists, engineers and physics and among *publics at large* (emphasis added).

In this regard, the Report on Sarantaporo.gr may be seen also as an attempt to 'decolonize' and 'provincialize' (Wiener 2015) technology. That is, to claim that there is not one, but multiple technologies born out a pluriverse of assemblages, be it human or human and non-human ones, and by studying a local assemblage of high-tech community (see also Athanasiou 2004).

Similarly, economy in the framework of CEK embraces moral rationalities as opposed to capitalist rationalities by allowing community needs to reframe economic practices rather than the other way around. In opposition to *market totalitarianism*, the economic activities of CEK are circumscribing a new alternate modernity by laying the basis for exchange practices of reciprocity, gift, obligation and solidarity, which speak not just to the economy but also to non-economic practices. These ethics attest to a *moral rationalism* that gives prevalence to solidarity rather than profit by acknowledging the uneven power relations in the economic sphere (Lazzarato 2014). Moral rationalism attempts to alleviate some of these inequalities and create a moral economic sphere in the framework of which value is domesticated to fit the 'indigenous cosmology' of the community. To achieve that, both communities I studied deliberate on how to make their economies work in a morally sustainable way. They also deliberate on how to design, devise and deploy the wireless technology. This process is political, and it concerns the politics of a community, which is the next main topic of analysis in this report.

Communities of Values and Care

To achieve this kind of collective action, the practices discussed in this report, people need to be in a community where commonalities emerge and evolve, where individualities unite and 'tie the knot' or, in the case of Sarantaporo.gr, 'the node,' bringing together not just digital components but also diverse subjectivities who constitute a community that works, learns, practices and offers together. Similarly, CEK is a community of communities that reframes the economy based on principles of value that bear on both material and immaterial concerns, and based on an 'ethics of care' that sees people interdependent and revolving around 'us' rather than 'me;' in other words, it revolves around the community. Since the very existence of community requires political deliberation that results in alternative notions of value and alternative moralities, in this study I do not distinguish value and ethics from politics. Both notions are vested with political meanings and produce political action which is ultimately the gist of this study. That is, to revisit the 'political' as a notion that parts ways with state-Centerd politics and is situated in mundane day-to-day practices

inspired by direct democracy, horizontalism and inclusion. Hence, the aim of this study is to discuss the 'exotic,' the alternative politics, *politics as it should be* (as one of our interlocutors put it) or else the *heteropolitics* of the entities we studied.

Commoning as heteropolitics

Both Sarantaporo.gr and CEK concern collectively produced, owned and managed resources. The infrastructure and the wireless network of Sarantaporo.gr are collectively owned and managed by the members of the community. Likewise, the plant of the Stevia Agricultural Cooperative, which is one of the two entities of the Ecosystem at which we gave a closer ethnographic look, is collectively owned and managed by its members. The specific type of commons that each entity forms, constitutes one of the interests of *Heteropolitics* while the second interest concerns the governance of these commons.

Both case-studies can be classified under the category of 'new commons,' be it in the form of a digital commons or in the form of 'new cooperativism.' To a greater extent Sarantaporo.gr, and to a less extent CEK, are not market-oriented and they constitute social rather than market assemblages, establishing thus a third mode of production based on cooperation, participation, reciprocity, horizontalism and humble leadership, which in turn render their governance a 'third mode of governance.' This is a heteropolitical mode of governance manifested through the deployment of the technology that Sarantaporo.gr vests with political relations, and through the re-appropriation and domestication of the notions of value that CEK vests with non-economic relations.

Their prefigurative character stimulates political imagination on how we act in common (*στα κοινά*), which in colloquial Greek means doing politics; a happy linguistic coincidence which will be elaborated in the following and denotes that politics is every decision a community takes even in its most mundane form as long as it is in common.

5. Case Studies in Greece

5.1. Sarantaporo.gr

5.1.1. Introduction: Hacking the 'Gods'

Imagine walking through the narrow street named after the 12 Gods of Greek Mythology (*Οδός 12 Θεών*, 12 Gods Street) of a Greek mountain village of 60 permanent residents, elevated on 1 250m of Mount Olympus, the highest mountain of the country -home of the Greek Gods according to the myth- enjoying the clean cold air, the local architecture and the spectacular views of the underlaying plateau and just as you reach for your smartphone to capture the moment and post it on one of your social media accounts, you realize that an open-access Wi-Fi network called Sarantaporo.gr–Unifi appears in your Wi-Fi network list. Swayed by the totalitarian market *habitus* of the neoliberal era, you hesitate at first to try and connect to it as your experience is such to suggest that open-access Wi-fi can only be found in places such as airports, bus and train terminals, most of the times for a limited amount of time or sometimes in public buildings or places of public use. Nevertheless, you try to connect and *voilà!*, 'there was light,' as one of my interlocutors told me citing the Bible, when she was describing the 'coming of Internet' to the village. The name of it, Kokkinopilos (literally translated into English as Red Mud, probably drawing on a special kind of red soil found in the area). It is the highest inhabited village of Greece and one of the 11 participating villages in the Sarantaporo.gr Community Network.

Figure 1: The sign of the main street of Kokkinopilos laid on an electricity meter, named after the 12 Gods of Greek mythology–Οδός 12 Θεών (12 Gods Street) (photo by A. Voulvouli).

Then imagine that you visit the local taverna of Kokkinopilos, where you can find local delicacies, and the owner asks you with pride whether you need the Wi-Fi password because 'we have it free here,' and just as you try to tell him that you are already connected through Sarantaporo.gr-Unifi he jumps in and explains that this means that

you have access through the backbone network which is open-access, but if you want higher speed you have to connect through the access network, which is installed in the premises of each node-holder, that is, those who hold an access point in their house, business etc., which connects them to the backbone network. The password, however, is the same for every node, so once you learn one of them you know them all. As you make it down the mountain, you might want to have some coffee or local spirits in one of the tavernas of Pythio, the neighboring village, where you also have Sarantaporo.gr Wi-Fi through the node of the owner, who is very content with the benefits that internet connection offers to his business. And then, perhaps, you want to go horse-back riding to the local riding club which was recently connected to the CN [Community Network, henceforth CN] for a cost less than one fourth of what it would have cost the owner had he decided to use a private service provider.

The above-mentioned fragments of everyday life in rural Elassona, the region where Sarantaporo.gr CN is located, meant to serve as an introductory narrative of my engagement with the CN as an ethnographer. For six months, I conducted fieldwork in Elassona attempting to gain an ethnographic insight into Sarantaporo.gr. I initially settled in the area and consequently became node-holder, after having requested to have a node installed to my apartment. In doing so, my aim was to engage in participant observation in the community of Sarantaporo.gr and to address issues such as: How did it come about? Who participates? How does it work? What drove people to get involved? What kind of leadership exists in the network? What does it mean to actors to participate in the endeavor? Which form of common and commoning practices are created? What kind of community ties does involvement with the network produce? What is the role of the market, if any? What is the role of the state? What is the importance of local context/particularity: is this process of commoning reproducible in other areas in Greece and abroad?

Eventually, these issues were altered, expanded and enriched in a way that only ethnographic engagement can procure. What is a community network? How did digital technology find its way in one of the most remote areas of central Greece? How was it embraced, learned, taught and appropriated by the local communities? Does it have transformative power? How is the concept of commons and, particularly, that of digital commons perceived, reproduced and appropriated/domesticated? What do those involved aspire to achieve by being engaged in such an endeavour? Does the building of a CN produce changes in social relations, practices and subjectivities, and to what extent do these changes carry a transformative, democratic and emancipatory potential for local communities and beyond? In other words, 'by gaining entry into the inner workings of such an artefact one can interrogate seemingly closed systems for their socio-cultural, gendered, historical and material composition' (Jungnickel 2014: 15).

During my fieldwork, I became familiar with technological concepts that were either unknown to me, or I was only familiar with one of their double senses. The meanings of the word 'hacking,' for example, was a revelation to me. I was familiar with the term, but I had no idea that my understanding of hacking was what hackers themselves

describe as 'cracking;' that is, breach of internet security protocols in order to use info for illegal ends (Coleman 2013). On the contrary, hacking according to my interlocutors mainly has a positive connotation. It means understanding how something works in order to improve it or expand its use and, in this case, we are talking about 'white hacking.' But it also describes a process of thinking outside of the box in order to offer solutions to a problem. 'In this sense, you might say that we are hackers,' commented one of my informants.

Indeed, Sarantaporo.gr is constituted by a group of tech enthusiasts who attempt to improve wireless technology in a way that benefits the community that uses that technology. As opposed to market-driven wireless technology, the CN offers solutions to the digital divide between urban and rural areas by employing the 'human intellect' and by acting upon it, rather than expecting the 'invisible hand of the market' to intervene as *deus ex machina* and offer internet to the people. Hence, Sarantaporo.gr is hacking the market-God right under the eyes of the Gods of Greek mythology.

By hacking I mean not just the reframing of wireless technology but also, as one of the core-members of the group put it, an alternative equation of time and labour, in which time is attuned to the joy of creation and not to the capitalist time, where a product is expected to be manufactured at a certain deadline in order for it to be sold at the market and be appropriated as a commodity. Coleman (2013) would describe the pleasure of manufacturing the network as an 'aesthetics of hacking' affecting hackers, who are essentially tech aficionados crafting a kind of 'home-brew high technology' (Jungnickel 2014). For Montgomery & Bergman (2017), Sarantaporo.gr would be a kind of joyful militancy in the framework of which there is experimentation, potentiality, struggle, care and love. The Wi-Fi generated by Saranantaporo.gr CN is not a product but a craft, an outcome of technological craftsmanship, a process of effort, experimentation, transformation. And craftsmanship can be accomplished when people are 'in their element' as one of my interlocutors translated the word 'meraki' (*μεράκι*), a Greek word that describes the affective engagement with one's task.

Something else that has emerged when I was in the multi-sited field of Sarantaporo.gr. has been historicity and its implications in trying to discuss 'the sort of people whose names are usually unknown to anyone except their family and neighbors but who nonetheless are major historical actors when they act collectively' (Hobsbawm 1998: 1). According to Hobsbawm, such people, widely known as 'the common people,' are actually far from common ('uncommon'). When they have acted collectively, they have made a difference and they can again shape history. So, Hobsbawm advocates a 'history from below,' the history of committed men and women who are not passive subjects of macro-history but progressive agents of society. Furthermore, paying attention to history helps perceive local technology as appropriated by the local community, challenging the view that technology is above and beyond society. In this report, following the train of thought of anthropologists (Gell 1988, Pfaffenberger 1988; 1992, Pinch & Bijker 1984) who argue that technological innovations are embedded in the web of socio-political relationships and loaded with socio-political

meanings, I argue that a local version of wireless technology has roots in a Do-it-Yourself (DiY) culture of the past (Jungnickel 2014; on DIY activism see also Searle 1997, Mckay 1998, Wark 2004, Lessig 2004). Before the creation of Local Communities in 1834, society was the main agent of decision-making. But even after then, the centralization of the Greek State until the 1980s left space for non-formal politics but also for self-organization in order to grapple with the slow state reflexes.

Therefore, in this text I will seek to frame Sarantaporo.gr as a case of commons, community-building and, hence, as a case of practicing alternative politics which is more democratic, egalitarian, autonomous, caring, open and plural, promoting openness diversity, inclusiveness and horizontal non-hierarchical self-government. Breaking with the ethnocentric bias of state-centric politics, in the pages that follow, I will argue that political organization which lacks the state form and a visible organ of coercive power (Clastres 1987) is still politics and implicates many different dimensions. These include collective decision-making, legally binding authority, interests, conflict, negotiation, public administration, government and power, which are themselves internally complex and fuzzy (*Report 1. The Political,* section 1.1), common hegemony and humble leadership. In this framework, the work at hand constitutes also a type of 'interface anthropology' (Laurel 1990) that focuses on human-computer interaction and an ethnography of the non-experts, the 'backyard technologists' (Jungnickel 2014) of Elassona who are 'hacking' the certainties of totalitarian neoliberalism.

In addition, after delving into the lived experience of the network, I will address its hybrid and queer commoning qualities. What I refer to here as 'commoning' is the essence of politics (taking part in common or public affairs, «τα κοινά» in Greek) as this unfolded in the praxis of the network, fostering openness, self-government, trust and responsibility towards commoning. Through notions such as the 'spirit of the gift,' which emphasizes contributing to a common cause, I will lay out the particular character of a digital commons/P2P project, as a 'high tech gift' economy that emerges as a total social phenomenon of a community which is endowed with hybrid technical, social and political skills.

Finally, I will address the contradictions and weaknesses of the endeavour, namely its mitigated horizontalism and the gender deficit that it demonstrates. I will conclude by arguing that inclusiveness requires not only challenging mainstream notions of market and state politics, but also enabling disenfranchised historical subjects who have been, and may well become again, agents of social transformation. In order to broach all these questions, I will firstly sketch out the profile of Sarantapro.gr CN, providing also a brief historical account of its life.

5.1.2. 'The Network'

I initially came across the case of Sarantaporo.gr CN through my involvement with *Heteropolitics* as a researcher. I was given some texts to read, and through them I have found other online sources referring to the CN, which are many, I have to say

(Sarnatoporo.gr, Mitrousias 2015, Bezdomny 2016, Sotirchou 2017). Apparently, 'the network,' a term commonly used by the local residents to refer to the CN, has been considered a very successful case of community networks by international standards. In fact, in December 2019, Sarantaporo.gr has been awarded the first prize at the European Broadband Awards (EBA). According to the criteria of the evaluation, the network has been singled out especially for its focus on digital literacy and skills-building, a feature of the network which will be taken up in the following. Surprised as I was that I had never heard about it, I started reading everything I could find about it in order to be able to determine whether it could make up a good case study for the *Heteropolitics* project. In this section, I attempt to offer a sketch of the CN as it is described in press articles, research project reports and other information material I was able to extract by browsing on the internet, updating this information with data generated during my fieldwork. In the next section, I will undertake a more in-depth ethnographic narrative of the field.

Figure 2: The award plaque of EBA (photo by A. Voulvouli).

Sarantaporo.gr is a CN, that is,

> a local telecommunications infrastructure set up by a group of people (a community) to connect to the internet and provide digital communications services. It is built and managed as a commons, that is, a resource produced and maintained collectively, rather than held privately, as alternative to large commercial or state networks and internet providers (de Rosnay & Tréguer 2019: 25).

The network initially connected 14 villages through a common telecommunication infrastructure and provides access to its network services (Sarantaporo.gr). In the course of the years, some of the villages withdrew from the CN. But new subscribers (indigenously referred to as node-holders) have been added, such as farm owners, whose premises are located outside the villages, and the above-mentioned local riding club, which is also located in the outskirts of the villages. Furthermore, the number of access nodes increased considerably during my stay in the field, surpassing in the end the initial number of nodes installed at the beginning of the CN's life.

To describe it in the words of some of the members of the core-team, that is, the group of activists that brought the CN to life, and some more recent members and collaborators:

> The CN is located in the rural area of Elassona, in the north-western part of Greece. Poor access to basic telecommunication services due to non-existing network infrastructure provided the main motivation for the development of the CN. Due to the geographic location and the small population of the villages, telecommunications companies (TELCOs) had not any interest in investing in the area until quite recently. Hence, the locals did not have access to the Internet and subsequent services that are dependent on ICT technologies (Navarro et al. 2016: 60).

The core team of Sarantaporo.gr launched its activities in 2010. A group of people got together on a voluntary basis and started creating a wireless CN that provided access to broadband services for local residents, local institutions, groups and visitors of the area. Network equipment was first installed in the Sarantaporo village. Gradually, nearby villages followed with the help and cooperation of active local residents and communities. The initial deployment was funded by the Greek Free Open Source Software (GFOSS)[1] society, for the access network (160 access nodes), and later by the EU project CONFINE, for the backbone (21 backbone nodes). There were also cases where individuals set up their own nodes to become part of the network. Until August 2016, the funding of the network operation and maintenance was under the responsibility (and good will) of local cultural organizations. This scheme proved inefficient in terms of liability, punctuality and transparency. Today, according to the new sustainability strategy of the network, each node holder contributes financially with an annual fixed sum, which is gathered from all the end-users of the node (Navarro et al. 2016: 60).

The network Sarantaporo.gr is described as public, open and social, in the sense that:

• It is developed and sustained by the core team in collaboration with local groups, partners and active residents of the area;

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[1] GFOSS is a Greek non-profit organization founded on February 28, 2008 by 36 Greek Universities and Research Institutes, which are the current shareholders, in order to further the cause of Free, Open Sources Software (FOSS) and Openness.

- It is open and free to use for any resident, entity or visitor of these areas, as long as the use is in accord with the operation rules of the network;

- No profit is incurred from access to the network.

- The network users contribute to its sustainability in a collective manner.

Central to its function is the aspiration to bridge the digital divide in remote areas of the country which are most in need, while promoting cooperation and equal participation in the digital age and its wealth of knowledge and opportunities. From its very beginning, the goal of the network has been to boost the socio-economic development of this under-served agricultural area and to create the conditions needed for the cooperation of all relevant stakeholders (Navarro et al. 2016: 61).

The architecture of the network consists of:

1. Sarantaporo.gr Non-profit Organization (NPO), which was founded in 2013 and constitutes the legal entity behind the network. The partnership is composed of a group of people who were active since 2010, plus additional members who were interested in joining the effort later. The term used by the participants to designate this group is 'core-team.'

2. Local collaborators involved in the network, who can be local support groups, individuals or associations (e.g. cultural associations). These offer help and services in preserving and extending the network infrastructure, and may also contribute financially via donations. Part of their role involves the collection of donations to cover the annual operational and expansion network costs. Their contribution is also critical in identifying and reporting situations of network failure. The body of volunteers also includes few individuals who are eager to contribute time and effort to the network. Some also contribute to the financial targets of the organization by donating money. Nevertheless, most people using the network do so while contributing neither effort nor funds.

3. Public organizations and institutions have been implicated in the network in various ways:

- The Greek FOSS society has provided the network with the majority of the initial equipment for building the separate access networks within the villages, through the Open Wi-Fi action.

- The Technological Educational Institute (TEI) of Thessaly is a partner that gives access to its infrastructure and provides Sarantaporo.gr with Internet access, which is currently one of the network's most appealing services.

- The local municipality of Elassona has given permission to the CN to use a small warehouse in the antenna park in a mountain near Elassona in order to place there some of the network's telecommunications equipment.

- Finally, Sarantaporo.gr has received support from the EU through its participation in the EU project CONFINE, through which it funded the creation of the network's backbone (Sarantaporo.gr).

4. Professional companies or small businesses that supply services over the network. The integration of professionals in the network is a fairly recent idea. There are examples of companies that can provide VoIP (technology that facilitates telephone calls over IP networks) services and sensor monitoring and have Sarantaporo.gr users as customers. These market-oriented activities are yet at an early stage, but collaboration with more companies and their integration in the network is part of the partnership's future plans (Navarro et al. 2016: 60).

An example of such an integration is the collaboration of the network with Modulus, a private provider of internet telephony services. As Yiannis (2018) described the partnership:

> The founders of Modulus were old members of the Athens Wireless Metropolitan Network (AWMN), so they come from a community network and they know very well what it entails. I met them because I am a member of AWMN and I knew about their company, so we made a deal and they bought the Elassona string in order to provide local phone-numbers to interested parties, and we informed the members of the network. For every name we get a small commission.[2]

The information above supplies answers for some of the questions posed in the opening part of the text. That is, its early stage of development and its technical features. In addition, we have seen so far the relationship between the CN with market-oriented entrepreneurial activities and specifically with Modulus, which is a small private provider of internet telephony. Finally, I have tried to sketch out the role of the state in the CN's development and its subsequent expansion, which is limited to financing the purchase of the hardware to build the initial infrastructure. Similarly, the answer to the question whether Sarantaporo.gr as an infrastructure and governance is reproducible in other areas in Greece and abroad arose weeks after I left the field, in August 2018, when Sarantaporo.gr transferred its knowledge and supported the deployment of the first nodes of the Kalentzi Community Network. This CN is deployed by P2P Lab (a partner of *Heteropolitics*), which already operates in this area with its 'Tzoumakers' community, a collaborative workshop that fabricates farming machinery, under their EU funded 'Phygital' project (Sarantaporo.gr). It has to be noted, also, that during my fieldwork in Karditsa (the present report, sections 5.2.1-5.2.13), my interlocutors expressed their interest in getting in touch with Sarantaporo.gr in order to explore the possibility of setting up a similar network in the area.

As mentioned in the foregoing, in Greece there is one more community network in Athens which is set up as an urban digital commons, and participation in it requires

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[2] All the excerpts from interviews and discussions with my interlocutors in Greece are translated by me.

advanced technical skills. Even though different in their inception, Sarantapro.gr and Kalentzi CN share similar characteristics with AWMN and with Guifi.net, a community network operating in Barcelona since 2004. As Bollier and Helfrich (2019: 24) claim, such enterprises show that it is entirely possible for commoners to build and maintain high quality, affordable internet connections for everyone. As in the case of Sarantaporo.gr, Guifi.net grew its system through a kind of improvised crowdfunding system. The payments were not going to Guifi.net but to the suppliers of gear and ISP [Internet Service Provider] network services. What Guifi.net (and Sarantaporo.gr) does is simply to pool & share. It pools resources and shares internet access. As in the case of Sarantaporo.gr, after a few years of operation Guifi.net established an affiliated foundation to help oversee volunteers, the network operation and the governance of the entire system or else the *politics* of the network, on which I will elaborate in the following.

In order to do that, in the next section I will present a closer ethnographic account of the local collaborators, that is, the activist residents of the area. This description is an attempt to construe the politics of Sarantaporo.gr, which unfolds within a network of people spread geographically across the area in which the network is deployed.

5.1.3. Ethnographing the commons: The narratives on the ground

Sarantaporo.gr CN is a telecommunications infrastructure developed to serve the needs of the residents of participant villages and, thus, to bridge the digital divide between urban and rural areas. It is an infrastructure offered as commons to the people of the area, whether they are node-holders and they participate financially in the maintenance and expansion of the network or not. The group consists of three main sub-groups: (a) τhe core-team, the members of which form the NPO who do not reside in the area. Some of them live in Athens, one of them in Larissa, which is the biggest urban center of the area, and others abroad; (b) the local collaborators/node-holders, and (c) the node-holders that do not have any other involvement with the network. From now on, I will be referring to these two groups using this *native* terminology; that is, node-holders. The network is connected to the market through private businesses that provide services over the network and to the state through national and international funding schemes (see above) and through the facilities of the Technological Educational Institute (TEI) of Thessaly, which provides Sarantaporo.gr with bandwidth.

In this section, I will set out the lived experience of the network as recounted by local collaborators/node-holders and the core team. I will also portray the operation of the network on site and I will refer to narratives regarding the early stages of the network's life, which shed light on how people were involved, what triggered their engagement with Sarnataporo.gr and how they managed to bring it into life, both as a cognitive and as a practical project. Odysseas (2018), one of the members of the core team, describes the first years as follows:

I really enjoy offering to people and I have always been looking for ways to achieve that. When I came back to Larissa, after I completed my studies and having wandered for a few years, I sought a way of integrating myself into my local society, which has suffered a lot from abandonment, lack of human resources and financial hardship. I found myself through my involvement with the network. So, the initial idea was to have a website for communication, and this is how we registered the domain sarantaporo.gr. Anyone was welcome to contribute and to write something about the village. But then they discovered that there was no internet connection there, and that Sarantaporites (local people) could not have access to website. So, we decided to connect Sarantaporo ourselves. We found this funding opportunity provided by GFOSS and we applied through the cultural associations of the region. The first connections were relying on 3G technology, which had limited bandwidth, but then the University of Thessaly agreed to provide us unlimited bandwidth, and now we are on WiFi connection. It was very unofficial at the beginning, but in 2013 we decided to form a non-profit association (AMKE in Greek) the Sarantaporo.gr–AMKE.

Yiannis (2018) added a more personal tone in his narrative:

While I was a student, I have been really active in extracurricular activities, and when I returned home I felt like I was not doing anything but my work. That's how the idea came up. At first, it occurred to me that we could register the domain and get back together with friends from Sarantaporo, then we started the team informally, at first, and then we took it a step further in 2013. You know the rest.

- So you missed your involvement in the public domain?[3]

- Yes, but not politics in terms of party politics, elections, that sort of thing, but in being active outside my work and family.

Kostas (2018) from Kokkinopilos remembers:

I was interested, I wanted to have Wi-Fi connection at home. In 2014, I found out that there were these kids that they had set up a network in Sarantaporo, and I was really interested in that. I thought that if no one showed any interest, I would contribute the whole amount for the backbone infrastructure myself. Three more people were interested, and we created a group in charge of the network. Since I am retired, I had more free time than the rest of the group, and I also liked setting up the nodes. It was exciting! I never thought that we would have been able to accomplish it, but I took it upon myself to raise the money, to convince more people to join, and this is where we are now.

Finally, Takis (2018) from Pythio, remembers the early stages of the network:

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[3] The term I used here, was 'koina,' which means politics and literally translates into commons.

I have always been involved in politics, but the existence of the network was picked-up by two kids, two girls, one of whom is my niece. I saw them trying to connect a node and I asked them what they were doing. They had instructions from Odysseas about how to do, it but they asked for my help because they had to button something up on a roof. I helped, and then they taught me how to make wires, which I managed to do, and then we installed all eight nodes that they were in charge of installing. We did it all alone with no directions. Then, one year later, we thought that we could install a node in the middle of the village so that others would be able to share the Wi-Fi, and we did, and ever since we have installed many more nodes in the village.

Takis has had a long-standing involvement with collective affairs since he was 16, as a member of the cultural association of young people in the village. This activity was the main opportunity for socializing and for creative collective action in the villages at that time. For him, engaging with collective affairs is necessary for his self-realization as a rounded human being. What is 'political' to him? Every action and involvement with the main political field, from resistance to neutrality. Basically, action in accord with one's principles is what we can contribute to help humanity move to the next step of progress. His personal interest in establishing the wireless community network derived from his interest in the news, e-banking, and weather forecasts for farming. The political reasons for his involvement with the Sarantaporo.gr network stem from his belief that the 'common' people can fill the gap that the deficiencies and incompetence of state telecommunication services and private telecommunication companies have created for him and his fellow villagers.

'The state established electricity infrastructures and the telephone network across the country. Now, private companies will not do the same with Internet unless it is profitable. But we can do it ourselves, take care of it, run it and expand it,' he told us during his interview. This could not have been a better introduction to the next section, which looks into the political aspects of Sarantaporo.gr. Taking my lead from the feminist motto 'the personal is political,' in this section I attempted to introduce the personal narratives of my interlocutors as an overture to 'the political' in Judith Butler's terms (1988:522): the enactment and reproduction of pervasive cultural norms and of social and economic structures by individual action. Be it in the name of feminism, which seeks to undo power structures in the domain of family life, or in the name of collective action that focuses on the domain of public life, personal narratives have the capacity to bring out how the subjectivities of the people involved in such action construct their understanding of how people get together and act in concert.

As Malinowski himself put it,

technology is an indispensable means of approaching economic and sociological activities and what might be called native science […] [thus] we need to know more about the ways in which speaking, tool-using and sociality are interwoven into the texture of everyday life in contemporary human groups (quoted in Pfafferberger 1992:492-493).

5.1.4. 'Commoning the political:' Alter-politics or 'politics as it should be'

In an interview he gave to US conservative commentator William F. Buckley Jr, the host of the television show 'Firing Line' in 1972, Andreas Papandreou, a late former Prime-minister of Greece, made the following statement by replying to a question of the audience: 'I believe that the Greek villager is the most progressive force in Greece.' When someone from the audience asked him about his vision of decentralized government and whether he thought that the Greek villager wants a king and a church, Papandreou replied: 'I quite disagree with the reports about the conservative Greek of the village, he is a magnificently wise and committed man, and if he has not moved into action it's because organizationally the framework has not been provided for that.'

Indeed, one of the policies his Panhellenic Socialist Party (PASOK) implemented once it ascended to power was decentralization, which was enacted by the Law 1235/1982 that established the prefecture councils. Decentralization was expanded in 1986 with the creation of 13 administrative regions. Initially, the secretary generals of these regions were appointed by the government, but in 1994 PASOK legislated the direct election of prefects and prefecture councils. As far as decentralized corporatism (Kioukias 1994) is concerned, PASOK passed a series of laws to regulate the relationship between the State and the cooperative organizations. As Patronis and Mavreas claim (2004:58),

> the main objective of the new legal framework was to abolish the old rules of the electoral game played by the cooperatives which, for whole decades, ensured the election of more or less the same traditional cooperative leadership…the new field of 'opposition' was of course favorable to PASOK and the left-wing parties which had a tradition of active membership and, therefore, could easily prevail over the ideologically and organizationally unprepared conservative party.

Even though the efforts of the early PASOK governments to regulate and intervene in the cooperative movement have placed trust in people as historical subjects of change, they did so by inducing emancipation from above. Hence, they did not break with hegemonic rules of leadership and representation. They rather replaced leadership so as to serve PASOK's vision and to help it accrue increased gains in electoral politics and more power in representative structures of democracy.

Sarantaporo.gr is an example of a new wave of cooperativism that emerged in Greece during the ongoing financial crisis that Greeks have faced since the turn of the decade. The crisis has swept away lives, aspirations, and subjectivities. It has given rise to a wave of solidarity manifested through initiatives that focus on trade, exchange, social services etc., nurturing a culture of self-organization and a new kind of cooperativism that contests neoliberal politics (Kioupkiolis 2014: 192), both in urban and rural areas. Sarantaporo.gr reframes, albeit often unconsciously, this politics from below, which addresses not only the absence of public infrastructures under the neoliberal state but also the prejudices of public opinion against cooperative initiatives. This bias stems from the experience of the recent past, when state intervention in cooperativist politics

resulted into mismanagement and corruption, to the effect that cooperativism became a synonym of inefficiency, failure, corruption and political patronage. As described above, Sarantaporo.gr makes use of public money through state funding and European agencies. The network collaborates also with local authorities, but it avoids any organic connection with them. Any attempt of local politicians to hijack the project, a typical tactic of the past, has been so far unsuccessful. Even though there are activists with overtly party alliances, this has not been a hindrance neither for their participation in the network nor for the network's operation.

'We are proud of our network, it is made, sustained and expanded by us for us,' said Grigoris, a CN activist during one of our preliminary discussions, and he added: 'This is not a PASOK cooperative.'

> It is not metaphysical. This whole process was dialectic. The core team were zealously working to improve the technical part and gradually we were brought in the loop, and this brought results, and these results engaged more and more people. Then the network became ours, and then we started setting the next goal, and when we reached it, we set a new one which was ours to define, organize and reach again (Takis 2018).

These were Takis' words during his interview, which implies that it is the people, the common people who construct indigenous cosmologies, who craft counter-hegemonic categories of thought and praxis at the same time. Contrary to implicit hegemonic assumptions, which portray villagers as people who need direction from above in order to catch up with modernity, the rural area of Elassona, where Sarantaporo.gr is located, can be the blueprint of a *new modernity of alternative politics* produced in common.

In fact, according to Rigi (2014:394), such a condition can flourish in the countryside, rather than in urban Centers, where cooperatives must be organized around common land and they can open to admit as many new members as the land can sufficiently feed. Moreover, they must provide care and education for their members and, at the same time, they should try to force states to supple these services. They should also be involved in the global production of software and all symbolic items through peer production under the Global Production License, which is a free copy-left license for software and all related items. Furthermore, they should be also able to manufacture and use automated machines such as 3D printers so that they will be able to produce material products that are needed. Furthermore, they should, and this is of particular interest to this case-study, build their own transportation and communications network infrastructure.

As far as the rest of the material that cannot be produced by such a cooperative, there must be a stock of cash which could be obtained by selling products or services to the market. In this way, Rigi (2014) claims, peer producing cooperatives are partially implicated in the capitalist regime of value and its exploitative mechanism. But they can minimize the corrupting effects of this exchange in two ways: 1) by reducing this contact with the market to its absolute necessary minimum; 2) by keeping the earned

cash in a special fund which is used for purchase from the market. In other words, Rigi envisions what he calls a revolutionary cooperative model that generalizes peer production to all branches of production and this, according to him, effectively means the end of capitalism. The transformation of land and technological infrastructure into commons is crucial for such a model, and it can only derive from a revolutionary peer producing cooperative movement. Having said that, I am not arguing that Sarantaporo.gr is a revolutionary cooperative. I am arguing, however, that it has the potential to be transformed into such a model given its orientation towards inclusion, incorporation of first sector 'Internet of Things (IoT)' applications to its infrastructure, emphasis on education of its members, preference for open source material and collaboration with groups like the Tzoumakers mentioned above that manufactures farming material through open source technology. Furthermore, within the scope of our research, Sarantaporo.gr is an entity that exemplifies participation in politics in a broader, collaborative and open manner.

Participation in the commons is an expression used in Greek to describe participation in politics. *Συμμετοχή στα κοινά* (to participate in commons) means to participate in politics, in vernacular and official Greek. Hence, in a terminological coincidence, in Greek commoning means doing politics. In fact, commoning does not refer only to participation in electoral or other mainstream politics, but also to participation in civil society activities, like joining a cultural association, and even participation in social movements and other grassroots activities. This alternative notion of politics, which parts ways with state-centric practices and allows the *political* to include effectively the *common* insofar as politics becomes common by opening up decision-making, representation and leadership to ordinary people (*Report 1. The Political,* section 1.18) is the quest of *Heteropolitics*. In a 'public philosophy' key of thought, in this part of the text I argue that 'native' categories of thought or the 'indigenous cosmology' are already in place, informing the understandings of citizens and enabling them to envisage possibilities of governing themselves differently (Tully 2008: 16), in alternative political ways. Commoning is already a native category of thought in the community of commons of Sarantaporo.gr. How it was transformed into radical political imaginary, which then turned into *praxis*, will form the topic of the present and the next section.

Furthermore, in these two parts, I discuss how, in the course of its life, the network has developed what Alexandros Kioupkiolis (*Report 1. The Political*, section 1.18) defines as 'common hegemony:'

> a bottom-up initiative directed by the agency of 'common people' through more egalitarian and horizontal relations. 'Common hegemony' is integral to the wider wager to 'common' politics by making political decision-making and initiative accessible to ordinary people on a footing of equality, turning thus politics into a common enterprise of common people.

As I will try to show in the following pages, Sarantaporo.gr has fostered in effect, much more than a wireless network, a social network of 'common people' who operate

in a semi-horizontal governing structure. This renders their involvement with the network a political as well as a technical project. The 'villagers'[4] of the rural, isolated area of Elassona who had no expertise on the subject but a strong will to make it work, evolved into 'backyard technologists' (Jungnickel 2014). In a discussion we had with Takis (2018), one of the local collaborators, he told us the following:

> We had our ups and downs, but always, when the moment was critical, we always went ahead and not back. At some point, things were very critical in Sarantaporo, but we managed to keep it running, and then other villages and new people joined. We were eager to make it work or, perhaps, we had a bigger ego and we kept going forward but not pro-actively. It was rather dialectical. We benefited from it, but we also knew we could count on each other.

In her ethnography about a community Wi-Fi network in Adelaide, Australia Jungnickel (2014: 112) writes that the backyard technologists who deploy that network are partly inspired by a making-do culture, which emerged from hard bush conditions and economic struggles and limited materials of Australia's colonial past –a survival technique that fused resourceful local knowledge, ready-to-hand materials and hands-on skill. Similarly, the tradition of community-self-help that Sarantaporo.gr embodies is reinforced due to the lack of state care, and was inspired by a 'count on each other' culture in order to offer solutions to their mundane living. An incident I witnessed during my stay in the field attests to that.

It was a snowy afternoon in Kokkinopilos and I had to go to Pythio, the closest neighbouring village for a meeting. Before leaving, I passed by the taverna to let them know I was leaving, ask them whether they needed something from the grocery and whether it was wise of me to leave the house during the snow fall. A person in the taverna told me that I had nothing to worry about because the snow was still soft but he realized that I still was a bit nervous so he turned to one of the other patrons whom he obviously knew very well and asked him politely to get into his SUV and drive around the village in order to melt the snow and make me feel more comfortable with driving in the snow. I thanked both of them very warmly. 'Don't mention it! We do this when it snows until the (municipal) snowplows arrive. They don't always arrive on time and we have to keep the roads clean in case of emergency,' said the owner of the taverna. I thought about it for a few seconds and I replied: You do everything yourselves here.

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[4] The preconceived stereotypes about residents of rural areas and their ability to catch up with modern technology are exemplified by the featuring title of a news piece reporting the award European Broadband Award won by Sarantaporo.gr that appeared late last year: 'Greek Villagers Win Top European Union Broadband Award for Creating Network.' In the piece, it is mentioned that 'it all began in 2010, when a small team of young people coming from the village of Sarantaporo, opposite Mount Olympus in central Greece, set forth to show to their fellow *villagers* (my emphasis) the webpage they had built for their town' (Kokkinidis 2019).

You build your own Wi-Fi, you make your own tsipouro, your own cheese, your own sausages and you keep your roads clean when it snows! 'You bet,' he replied back.[5]

That was the first time during my fieldwork that I realized that Sarantaporo.gr is not a radical new ethos for those 'villagers.' It was rather an eventual development of their collective DiY culture of making their own life without expecting the market or the state to offer them solutions. Sarantaporo.gr is a high-tech collective DiY craft just as the local homemade *galotyri* cheese and sausages, their home-brew tsipouro and their creative everyday practices tailored to cope with the lack of state presence in one of the most isolated areas of rural Greece.

In this vein, Kostas (2018) from Kokkinopilos told me:

> I do everything here because the rest of the node-holders cannot climb on roofs and I don't mind. I like helping people and I keep busy. But as far as technical stuff and representing the network is concerned, these are mainly done by the guys in Athens. We are mostly workmen here. We take instructions from them and we apply them in the field and, of course, sometimes we have to make decisions, but these are not difficult to make. We discuss it, and then we let the guys know. Not very important decisions, but still we do take action.

In these narratives, Sarantaporo.gr appears as a community which is not a passive, rural, 'traditional' and a fixed object of a one-way beneficial offering. Based on my experience in the wider area around Sarantaporo, I emphasize 'the enabling dimension of the CN, the potentiality and openness that it activates, the serendipitous, dynamic and collaborative manner in which needs are traced, problems are addressed, solutions are devised, community is molded and politics are practiced' (Chryssos et al. 2018:139). Sarantaporo.gr demonstrates a kind of popular unity that stems from its *network form* (both actually in terms of its technological nature and politically). The network structure is diverse, open and decentralized, it strives for 'another leadership,' which is assumed by laypeople in concert, through the guidance of the general assembly. The mediation of 'technopolitics' allows ordinary, non-organized individuals and groups to kickstart, to communicate and coordinate mass action without the mediation of hierarchical organizations, creating thus a post-hegemonic locus of alternative politics of self-organization (*Report 1. The Political,* introduction).

Even though, for many of my interlocutors, participation in politics relates to hierarchized relations between those who command and those who abide by the rules of the commanders, the politics of Sarantaporo.gr flows from a community which is shaped in the context of the collective endeavor. A discussion I had with one of them helps illustrate this point. In the interview I held with him, I asked: 'is what you are doing politics?' He said without even thinking about it:

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[5] When informal dicsussions are mentioned, unless explicitly permitted by the interlocutor, names and other forms of identification have been altered throughout the text.

No, what we are doing here has nothing to do with politics. We do it because we want to do it, we serve our needs as opposed to waiting for our needs to be served by the state, the municipality or local politicians. We are not politicians. We are people.

When I asked him to elaborate a little bit on this point, as I had trouble understanding why he thought that to participate in the network is not a form of political participation, he said:

Well, first of all the network is for everyone. You don't have to be a member in order to have internet. If your house is close to a house that has a node, then you also have reception, as long as you have the password, and we give the password to everyone. Secondly, we built the network ourselves and we maintain it ourselves. You see how that works through telegram.[6] Thirdly, we don't have to depend on the state or a private education provider to learn how to maintain the network. We have seminars in which we learn to do all those things. Make the hardware, deal with problems that arise etc. Finally, the price we pay every year depends on our potential, so we have set a price that everyone can afford, and if there are fellows that cannot afford it, we help them with the surplus that we have or some of us share the cost of the node. We decide for almost everything ourselves. Which state, which municipality, which political party does that?

But then, I said:

what you are doing is substituting the state. Instead of demanding internet connection from politicians, which you have every right to do since you pay taxes, you assume their role and you provide this to yourselves. So, isn't what you are doing politics at the end of the day?

He thought about it for a while, and then he said: 'Yes, you are probably right, but this is a nice type of politics. It is politics as it should be.'

While state-directed cooperativism has not succeeded in providing the organizational framework for rural men/women to move to action, to become bearers of novice knowledge and to develop their ability to cooperate, a commons-led community endeavor is succeeding both in creating the organizational framework, in terms of education, functional cooperative environment, but also in promoting the hegemony of notions such as sharing, giving, working, building and expanding together. Sarantaporo.gr is a CN built and managed in rural Greece by people on the ground who, contrary to popular belief, are not only capable of adapting to modern technology. Also, and perhaps most importantly from the perspective of *Heteropolitics*,

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[6] This is messaging application, through which the node-holders share various online sources, discussion documents e.g. Google documents, videos featuring interviews, presentation at conferences, more general information etc with members of the core-team. Most of the discussions, though, concern technical issues that arise during the day, which are often solved with the help of members of the core-group and recently with the aid of some local node-holders, who have developed a better understanding of how the network works in technical terms.

they are capable of building a community of commons, namely of digital commons. This digital community falls under the category of what Bollier terms 'new commons,' which combines individual freedom and autonomous social collaboration, holding the promise of more democratic participation, openness, diversity and co-production without the hierarchies of the state and the market (Benkler 2006: 2, Bollier 2008: 1-20, 117, Bauwens 2005b). In other words, Sarantporo.gr practices *heteropolitics* by nurturing a culture of decentralized collaboration, co-operative nonmarket production, sharing and common autonomy. They advance thus an alternative to both the profit-driven, competitive and centralizing practices of the market and the top-down, hierarchical command of the state.

New cooperativism modalities, such as those embodied in Sarantapro.gr, seek to reverse the rules through 'common hegemony.' This is produced through the agency of common people who negotiate *dialectically* the features of a new leadership. The leadership is collective and is based on social bonding that goes beyond identity politics. It relies on trust which is gained through practice. 'People saw what we are doing, they saw we delivered, we showed them how it is done and what it results in and then they trusted us,' Takis (2018) told us, and I add to his assertion that people realized that Sarantaporo.gr is not politics in its vernacular use, but a *common enterprise of common people*; *politics as it should be*.

5.1.5. Commoning Sarantaporo.gr: A prefigurative counter-hegemonic commons in progress

The *main objective of Heteropolitics* is to illuminate and to envision *another* politics, more democratic, egalitarian, autonomous, caring, open and plural, by taking our bearings from theories and practices of the commons which further openness, diversity, inclusiveness and horizontal, non-hierarchical self-government (*Report 1. The Political*). Therefore, in this section, I will delve into the governance of Sarantaporo.gr as it has developed through the course of its life, and mainly as it has crystalized after the foundation of AMKE. In Yiannis' own words (2018):

> The decisions are mostly taken by AMKE right now. But even before 2013 we have been operating similarly. The core group would get together either in person or via online platforms and hangouts, and we even kept minutes. We were making decisions according to majority rules and this is what we are still doing. Actually, we were much less in contact with the local collaborators before the foundation of the AMKE because those of us who do not reside in the area could not cover the expenses of getting there. After 2013, we managed to receive some funding and it is easier to go there now to install new equipment, and also to hold seminars. What we are discussing right now is how to involve local collaborators in decision making. Perhaps, one of the next general assemblies can be an open one and we can have more participants than the core AMKE group.

We have anticipated such an assembly, we have provisions in our statute where there is an article about collaborating members who have the right to participate, if they wish,

in general meetings, to express their opinion, and to intervene, but they have no voting rights. So basically, we could make it more accessible informally, but now we are trying to protect what we have achieved so far.

> In our assemblies we don't have quorum, but the presence of six or seven members out of ten is enough, and we have achieved a rather easy communication between us. Back in the early stages of the network, there were members who kept creating tensions, but most of them are gone so now we can decide in peace, which, I think, is very important. This is why we prefer to have a small decision-making group. We sit, talk and come to an understanding, and even when there are different opinions, they are expressed politely. We already do it voluntarily, so we don't want to lose interest in it because of tensions generated by someone who is, like, weird…In most cases, if not all, we try to achieve unanimity. Even if one of us has objections to something we intend to do, we don't take it to the ballot. We discuss, we are prepared to listen to each other, and we argue, but at the end of the day we all agree on what this group's vision is.

Likewise, Odysseas (2018) told me:

> AMKE is not open, as if it were a club or an association, but partners can be recommended by members. In due time, we could ask some people who have shown interest and dedication to join. And they have really contributed to what the network has become…In any case, any new member must be approved by the board. But this can create problems. If the structure grows, it will be more difficult to reach decisions, and perhaps this is why we keep it tight…this is something we are still thinking about: How to incorporate more people, but we don't want to complicate things. People must get used to participating in public affairs. They usually don't. There is no participation. Even in PTA (Parents and Teachers Association) meetings, parents don't come. The president has to do everything. People are not trained in participating in collective life.

Sarantaporo.gr is a case of commons, because it pools and shares resources as well as because its relation to the market is limited to services that cannot be developed yet by the network itself. Also, it is Centerd around a community, and it has achieved a type of horizontalism which is impure. At the same time, it is work-in-progress, pursuing more inclusivity on the condition that there is a consensus around the aspirations and objectives of the core team. Having said that, I am not arguing that the direction of the network is pre-written and sealed. There is a dialectic relationship between theory and praxis, which is informed also by the needs and beliefs of the collaborating members and even the node-holders.

As Kioupkiolis (*Report 1. The Political*, section 1.22) claims, contemporary hybrid forms of collective mobilization gesture effectively beyond hegemony insofar as they endeavour to anchor collective power, social direction and transformative processes in the grassroots, in common people, prefiguration and autonomous mobilization. They

do so by deploying an entire repertoire of institutional practices and organizational patterns, which are animated by other practical orientations towards transparency, openness, publicity, ongoing self-reflection, pragmatism, respect for differences, humble leadership, commitment to principles and ethics, among others. Sarantaporo.gr, which holds a mix governance model, melding horizontalism and verticalism, is indeed transparent, open to anyone who wants to join as long as s/he respects the rules set by the network. It operates in a constantly self-reflexive mode, and it does respect differences. Both core members and local collaborators are committed to the project and the principles it fosters. As result, its mission is accepted, embodied and reproduced not just within but also outside its nucleus.

Furthermore, the network is pragmatist to the extent that facilitates forms of convergence and common identity which breed diversity and openness. It is a heterogeneous assemblage of agents and practices that coheres around strategic wagers and practical objectives rather than around group identities and definite political programs or ideologies. It has developed a type of sustained interaction which advances shared objectives and generates thus a community of practice and a practical identification which does not rest on common dogma or a collective tradition. Such communities of action can help to minimize exclusions and offset pressures towards homogeneity (Hardt & Negri 2004: 86-87, 337-340, Nunes 2014: 42-44, Haiven & Khasnabish 2014: 239-240).

The network came to life during the beginning of the Greek debt-crisis, when the Greek Free Open Source Software (FOSS) Society offered funding to collectivities that wanted to create their own community network. In this sense, it is also a case of queer commons, not only in the sense that it includes and goes beyond identity politics, and it is thus a queer assemblage. It is, rather, a product of a queer historical conjuncture, which, on the one end, accelerates and intensifies neoliberal market totalitarianism and, on the other, leaves open cracks for self-organization, emancipation and commoning. It is liminal in the sense that people are entering the threshold of something new, even though it might not be clear what this new might be (Susser 2017b:16), and exactly because it has queer and hybrid qualities along with a mixed structure of governance. Finally, it is a case of commons because it requires sharing, negotiation, distribution of benefit, care and responsibility (Gibson-Graham et al. 2013)

Nevertheless, Sarantaporo.gr in not just a case of commons but also a case of peer to peer (P2P) production in that the participating agents collaborate in order to generate the shared resource, they exchange and sometimes even create knowledge. According to Bauwens et al. (2019: 2):

> P2P is a social/relational dynamic through which peers can freely collaborate with each other and create value in the form of shared resources. It is this mutual dependence of the relational dynamic and the underlying technological infrastructure that facilitates it, which creates the linguistic confusion between P2P as a technological infrastructure and P2P as a human relational dynamic.

According to their account, the P2P mode of 'relationship,' as they dub it, bears multiple characteristics which expand from full P2P to 'hybrid' infrastructures. This means that we can use capitalistic infrastructures to generate P2P relationships. They use Facebook and Bitcoin as examples that attest to this possibility, as these projects display also P2P dynamics even if they do so with different political orientations. Hence, P2P is 'primarily a mode of relationship that allows human beings to be connected and organized in networks, to collaborate, produce and share' (Bauwens et al. 2019:2).

For them, P2P is synonymous to 'commoning' in the sense that it is not only shared but also co-governed in the framework of a community that has set rules and norms (Benkler 2006; 2011, Bollier 2008; 2014, Bauwens 2005b; 2009; 2011 Bauwens et al. 2019: 3; see also Papailia & Petridis 2015). They distinguish between rules that are set by extractive capitalist corporations which aim at improving productivity and P2P enterprises, which adhere to cooperation, reciprocity and exchange. They actually hold that P2P moves to the core of the socio-economic system transforming thus market, state and reciprocity dynamics.

In addition to the above, Sarantaporo.gr is a group that practices prefigurative politics, insofar as it operates beyond the state and the market by offering solutions, by producing concrete results and by setting a footprint of alternative ways of social organization and social innovation. Takis (2018) told us that [Sarantaporo.gr]

> shows a different way of doing things and, thus, it has an educational aspect. You show that you can do things differently and people, especially young people, can actually see how it can be done. It shows that certain infrastructures such as public roads and, why not, internet is a common good which we all share, and we are all responsible to keep it that way.

Even though he went on to claim that he does not really think that Sarantaporo.gr is a radical social innovation, in the course of his narrative he said the following:

> It doesn't really show how you can change society. Of course, if you create a cooperative the provides telecommunications you do solve a problem, and it creates a precedent and countless ways of communicating but, in essence, you are substituting the state and you don't solve the actual issue which is economic recession. In this sense, it is not revolutionary, it is not anti-capitalist but anti-trust. Nevertheless, there is a double gain here: Firstly, you save money that you can then spend on the community in which you live and, secondly, as I already said before, you educate people.

I claim that Takis' narrative described the formation of a 'hegemonic collective subject' that goes beyond the technological and legal infrastructures of a new commons, contributing to thinking social change in terms of pursuing 'political organization, the elaboration of political projects, institutional reforms, the building of massive social alliances, the transformation of popular ideas, sentiments and consciousness' (*Report 2. The Common,* section 2.3.1: 61). In this sense, it is part of 'a

counter-hegemonic struggle' (*Report 2. The Common,* section 2.3.2:) by constituting a 'third mode of governance' (Bauwens 2005b) both inwards and outwards insofar as it is integrated into a *conscious struggle for a new hegemony* of the commons (*Report 2. The Common,* section 2.3.8).

Similarly, Yannis' narrative indicated the network's prefigurative and hegemonic form:

> I believe that after eight years, the local people have realized that what we are doing and the way we are doing it has yielded positive results. They see that we mean well and over time they also adopt this philosophy of offering. There have been cases of people who initially resisted the idea of participating and then changed their minds because they felt that it is good for their village. Their relatives come and stay longer, Internet access has facilitated their neighbors' and friends' lives and, in general, they have realized that having a common infrastructure benefits the whole community and not just some people.

The prefigurative and counter-hegemonic character of the network illustrates that another internet is possible, one where people and their rights are put first, where they are able to reappropriate the digital infrastructure and challenge the power structures that are turning us into digitals serfs, where modern-day communication tools that are all around us come to serve trans-local communities and become tools of emancipation (de Rosnay & Tréguer 2019: 28).

It also stimulates political imagination to envision other ways of doing politics beyond the standard, the dominant and the formulaic. It illustrates that a better world is indeed possible by refashioning the dominant figures of subjectivity which are attached to the neoliberal hegemony (*Report 1. The Political,* introduction). It is an outcome and it is also constitutive of radical political imagination in the sense that it provides a concrete example of how we can think about public ownership, even of the pipes (hardware infrastructure) of the Internet and of other means of production.

This would be a world of agency, solidarity, cooperation, reciprocity and trust. Much like the activists of Sarantaporo.gr, who have gained not only respect from their fellow locals, because of the positive technological results that the network has yielded, but also their trust because of the principles they follow. Takis, already involved in contentious protest politics, has been involved in local politics for years and has also participated in a local action group. Around the time of our interview, this group had prevented the local authorities from cutting the water supply of a family that was going through considerable economic hardship. 'We have this kind of solidarity in the village and people know that, and then when I showed to some that the network does indeed work, they knew that they could trust me,' he told us during his interview. Similarly, Kostas (2018) recounted an incident that occurred between him and two other node-holders:

> I offered advice and information to a restaurant owner around here, and then he had the network installed, and after that I overheard his wife telling someone that

they really trust me and that's why they went ahead and joined the network. I was impressed and flattered to be honest!

Trust and responsibility are two more constituents of commoning Sarantaporo.gr. As it appears in the narratives of my interlocutors, political participation, be it in more formal and action politics or in more informal cultural activities, like Kostas' public involvement in a religious community, generates trust, and trust in turn assigns responsibility to the bearer of trust. This sense of responsibility calls for action, involvement in public life, in politics, in commoning.

The notion of commoning, as it unfolds through the narratives of Sarantaporo.gr activists, parts ways with the notion of politics which has been re-introduced in the course of the country's national integration. The Law 1833/34 instituted the creation of Local Communities as the smallest administrative unit of Greece. Local Communities transferred decision-making from society to the regional state, resulting in a system of patronage (Campbell 1964, Dertilis, 1977, Mouzelis 1978, Mavrogordatos 1978, Komninou 1981, Nikolakopoulos 1985, Sotiropoulos 2013). Yiannis' (2018) account of an incident sheds lights on the practices involved in such a system:

> There was a case of a node-holder whose router was off, and he took it and drove all the way to Elassona (the nearest town) to the Municipality and asked the employees to fix it. Initially people could not grasp the meaning of common infrastructure and what it entails. They have grown accustomed to it gradually. They thought that the term 'community network' referred to a network managed and owned by local authorities.

The large internal migration of the 1950s and 1960s and the creation of imagined communities in the form of cultural associations with a local geographical focus have reproduced national uniformity and the attendant values. Market values have filled the space emptied by solidarity and exchange economies of the past. Local events reproduced these values even if they had a 'traditional' character like a *paniyiri*, which is a modern appropriation of religious celebrations of the past (Panopoulos 2006). Hence, cultural associations that were the organizers of such events were identified with the narrative of multiculturalism in the 1990s, which denoted a market-penetrated notion of difference. So, during the initial phase of the network, its liaisons with local cultural associations obscured the commoning character of Sarantaporo.gr, they identified it with a profit-driven initiative, and they associated it with the state. Nevertheless, the efforts and affirmative actions of the activists of Sarantaporo.gr have given rise to a new way of seeing, thinking and acting as far as *συμμετοχή στα κοινά* (commoning) is concerned.

Another feature of the network is the creation of an 'indigenous cosmology,' which does not only involve participation in politics but implicates also more philosophical aspects of one's being. In a personal discussion I had with one of my interlocutors, she told me that her involvement with Sarantaporo.gr was induced by her father's persuasion that an individual's mission in life was to raise children:

> To me, this insinuated that you need to have a larger mission in life than idiocy, and my involvement with the network has evolved as such a mission…I believe that one of the worst aspects of contemporary society is quitting hope that something better can come and I can be part of that.

Commoning, thus, frames or re-frames not just the common political, but also individual politics towards the self and thus the community. I have already quoted the accounts of Yiannis and Odysseas, who placed emphasis on contributing to society as a key constituent of their involvement with Sarantaporo.gr. This points to a similar conclusion and takes us to the next section on the 'gift' of commoning.

5.1.6. Tying the node: The marriage of community and politics and their wedding gifts

In this section, I will take up the emergence of the community of Sarantaporo.gr as a result of its network form, which fosters diversity, openness and decentralization. Just like the actual nodes of Sarantaporo.gr connect by 'seeing' and 'talking' to each other - to use the indigenous language of the activists-, the 'distributed' nature of the network is made up of different people who connect with one another. Hence, Sarantaporo.gr knits together a network of people that have the ability to coordinate action in concert and to sustain a political community without strong hierarchies and uniformity or homogeneity (*Report 1. The Political,* section 1.20). On the contrary, the network develops in a community centered around a shared enterprise which has certain rules and protocols, respects and caters for diversity and has the capacity to change and evolve. It is a community that happens through praxis, which also establishes a continuum between technology and society.

As I already mentioned above, as soon as I settled in one of the villages of the network, I asked to participate as a node-holder. I contacted Odysseas, one of the NPA members, and he explained to me how it worked. He told me that in a few days someone from the local participants will be paying me a visit in order to install my node. He was not sure at the time who would that be, but he reassured me that the first available node-holder who knew how to install it, would soon install mine. After the person who could come had been determined, Odysseas gave me his phone number in order to contact him and to arrange the date. A few days later, Takis, a local node-holder from a neighboring village, came with the necessary equipment, climbed on my roof and installed the node.

Odysseas then called me in order to help me set up my connection, which is a process that I have to say entertained me enormously. I had never thought before I would have been able to do so. He also informed me about the cost of the equipment needed and the annual financial contribution that each node-holder provides. The cost of node is equivalent to the cost of a node used by commercial providers, and perhaps less. However, the annual contribution is five times lower than the fees charged by a conventional TELCO. The speed of the internet is also impressive. The speed provided by Sarantaporo.gr was 2 times the average speed I had back home, where I used a private provider. Odysseas also informed me that node-holders had set up a discussion

group using a messaging application, and he asked me to join. It would be helpful both for me in case I wanted to report a system problem, and also for them as they had remote access to the system, and they could immediately try and solve any problem that arose. Occasionally, the help of the local collaborators was needed, as when there was a power cut, and someone had to visit certain backbone nodes to reset them. Currently, local collaborators are much more involved in the technical assistance, and some of them even have access to the control panel of the network.

I joined the discussion group that currently has 60 members, although the number keeps changing. The members of the group share various online sources, discussion documents, e.g. Google documents, videos featuring interviews, presentations at conferences, and more general info with members of the core-team. Most of the discussions, though, concern technical issues that arise during the day, which are often resolved with the help of members of the core-group and the local collaborators.

This process of initiation has taken place through seminars and workshops organized by the core team. The necessity of the seminars, according to one of the core-team members, was emphasized in a presentation he gave to the 2018 CommonsFest[7] conference which I attended:

> Two things are important if you want to bridge the digital divide between urban and rural areas. The first is infrastructure, which we build along with local residents. The second is education. It's not enough to build the infrastructure. You have to train people and show them how to maintain it, to expand it but also to design it according to their needs. This is what we are trying to do through workshops, in which local residents participate. Our goal is to have at least 3 or 4 people who know how to manage and expand their network so that we can work with them and get the job done…Education is not only about building and maintaining the infrastructure but also about more basic things. For example, what is the internet for? How can we make use of it? What services does it provide? These things might appear simple to us, but you have to take into consideration that when we started there were people that could not tell the difference between internet and Facebook. For them internet was Facebook. We had to help them understand that it was not just about Facebook but that there are many more options. We also had to inform them about the risks that internet use entails, and how they could protect themselves from them. Then, after the presentations, we go to the field to check the already installed nodes and see whether we can re-adjust them or use them as an example for future installations (CommonsFest 2018).

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[7] CommonsFest is an annually organized event to promote freedom of knowledge (or free knowledge) and peer-to-peer collaboration for the creation and management of the commons. Through an exhibition, talks, screenings and workshops, the aim of the festival is to advertize the achievements of this philosophy to the public and to motivate its diffusion (CommonsFest 2018).

Barbrook and Cameron (2015: 31), referring to what they call cyber-communism, note that 'only once everyone has been educated can all citizens participate in political decision making.' This assertion reflects pretty much the strategy of the core group and practices followed by Sarantaporo.gr activists. As a P2P project, the network mobilizes human creativity more efficiently than market or state mechanisms, by involving and educating people. This is because it brings together a wider diversity of autonomous individuals who self-identify with the tasks they want to assume in a collective enterprise, according to their individual capacities and desires (Benkler 2006: 111).

During the months I stayed in the field, I had the opportunity to witness one of these seminars, which was indeed as described by my informant. There was a sort of lecture by one of the core-team, intercepted by food breaks, and then there was walk in the field in order to check the installed devices and to realize what they had been talking about all these hours. The next seminar was taught by Takis, one of the local collaborators who has self-identified with the tasks, has studied and practiced new skills, and has partial access to the control panel of the network. He participates, thus, in decision making, even if informally. As Miller et al (2016: 213) claim, in their discussion of social media in terms of an emergent technology, the development of social media as new technology is dependent upon people who spend a great deal of time thinking and wondering about the future, and how they can devise technology to help bring it about. Similarly, by getting involved in the deployment of wireless technology, the activists of Sarantaporo.gr endeavor to devise a form of technology that can bring about a better future for the community it serves. Technology has the 'capacity to aspire' (Miller et al. 2016: 197), that is, it involves thinking about what is needed towards navigating a desirable future (Appadurai 2004). This is a political practice par excellence, which in this case develops within the context of the network community of Sarantaporo.gr -the focus of the next pages.

Figure 3: Installing a central node on a roof (photo by A. Voulvouli).

Gibson-Graham et al. (2013: xix) argue that in the process of recognizing and negotiating we become a community. This, in turn, results in rules and protocols developed to manage the commons. This is why commons and community go hand in hand. According to Nancy (1991; 2000), community happens, it is an act of association which sets up a space of co-appearance and relations. It is a *mélange*, a dialogue of plural voices, encounters, reciprocal action open to diversity and change, a praxis of sharing which is never complete, a network of singularities which expose themselves to each other and touch each other without melting together.

One of the activities that exemplifies this praxis of sharing and plurality is the organization of social events, such as music nights, festivals, smaller get-togethers and gatherings which purport to build closer affinities between node-holders of different villages, to welcome new members and to reaffirm the bonds between older members of the group. I also, like all the other node-holders, was invited to participate and to co-organize a music night with plenty of food, drinks, music and reflections on the course of the network over the years by core-members, local node-holders. Users of Sarantaporo.gr Wi-Fi contributed their comments, too.[8] The music night, which usually takes place at the beginning of the calendar year, is seen also as an opportunity to celebrate the beginning of the new year by cutting the traditional new year's cake (vasilopita). Having in mind that one of the local collaborators belongs to a Christian dogma that does not celebrate the coming of the new year as the Orthodox majority of the rest of the group, vasilopita is cut not at the end of the dinner as it would have been otherwise. It is cut at the beginning so that he can also join the event after the vasilopita cutting. The respect that the community of Sarantaporo.gr shows to diversity is not something given but something that has been subtly negotiated within the community and has evolved into a rule.

Now going back to the rest of the night, there was also a lottery, and three winning numbers got a new node each. As explained to me later, this idea aimed at expanding the network of local nodes in the same way that their 1+1 policy which had been established recently. Basically, according to this policy, if you decide to become a node-holder, then a second device will be provided to you. In this way, you are encouraged to share it with a neighbor or someone that does not have the financial

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[8] A similar observation is made by (Jungnickel 2014: 99) about the barbeques organized by the Wi-Fi community that she studied in Australia. She claims that such events mirror the connectivity of the nodes in the sense that they bring the community together. In her own words,

> the Wi-Fi barbeque is less about the actual food on offer and more about the socio-technical interactions it makes possible. Barbeques fit with Wi-Fi because both are socially constructed…In view of this, the barbeque reflects and produces a crucial social connectivity in the group.…Making plans, gathering equipment, preparing sites and securing helpers for an antenna-raising can take months. Barbeques consolidate these heterogeneous entities, bringing them and Wi-Fi down to earth. They also fortify the importance of social connections. Barbeques transform Wi-Fi makers into family and family members into helpers.

means to pay for the node. Indeed, a few months after the 1+1 policy started, the community of the local node holders of one village decided to install an access node to a household that was financially unable to meet the cost.

Figures 4 and 5: Photos from the music nights of 2018 and 2020 (photo by A. Voulvouli).

In this framework, Sarantaporo.gr evolves as a community which is defined by certain rules, such as the financial contribution of its members. But those rules are in a dialectic relationship with the needs of those members, removing thereby enclosures on the basis of principles of social justice and respect to diversity. A community of obligation and gift, reciprocity and duty (Esposito 2013), a community of people who work together, learn together, practice together and offer together. In this way, the CN 'ties the knot,' which colloquially means getting married. I believe that the community of Sarantaporo.gr ties (brings together) not only components of the nodes, but also 'ties the knot' as a community, as a group, and constructs not just a telecommunications network but also a social network. As Miller and Slater (2001:8) have very eloquently put it, the internet cannot be understood except as an example of what Latour terms a hybrid, which is irreducible to either its human or its material agents. Similarly, on my view of the sarantapro.gr CN, the infrastructure built by the community is a hybrid of technical, social and political skills.

Yiannis' (2018) account of how his involvement with the network has impacted his life helps shed light on these assumptions:

> I always give my self to everything I do, and at the same time I am trying to get along with people, to offer and help, if and when needed. Getting involved with the network has enhanced these abilities. I have come close to people; I have met new people and I believe I have earned respect. They also get to know me and see me under different eyes, as someone who knows and can help.

As far as the network's transformative potential is concerned, Yiannis (2018) said the following:

It opens new ways in everyday life…and even in technical terms our network is so competent. At my house in Larissa, where I use a commercial provider, I get half the speed I have here.

In Yiannis' narrative, I recognize the 'spirit of the gift' (Mauss 1990) in the sense that Sarantaporo.gr participants offer time, effort and knowledge, not as a commodity exchange but as a way of offering oneself to a common cause.

It is a kind of high-tech gift economy as an efficient way of solving common problems…transforming the passive consumption of fixed information products into a fluid process of interactive creativity…the results of this creativity can often be trivial or mundane…by circulating gifts between each other individuals are able to work together on common projects. For, as well as having fun, the members of network communities are engaged in a continuous process of collective labour… the circulation of gifts encourages friendship between participants and thus people can compensate for the damage caused by loss of a sense of social commons (Barbrook & Cameron 2015:37 - 40).

It is a process that follows the principle of do-ocracy: 'from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs' (Bauwens 2005). In Kostas' (2018) words: 'There is nothing to decide as far as who will help. I am more available than the rest and I offer to help most of the times. It is not a big deal.'

To sum up, engagement with Sarantaporo.gr creates egalitarian ties between its members who re-imagine the political through their practice. In this framework, the marriage of community and politics is venerated through gifts offered both by those involved and those attending this wedding. And, like any ritual, a wedding reflects, confirms and reaffirms social ties, community politics and cultural practices of a nascent community.

5.1.7. 'Did technology come to the village?': Sarantaporo.gr as a total social phenomenon

In the crowdfunded documentary entitled 'Building Communities of Commons in Greece: A documentary on networks in Sarantaporo area' (Marmaras 2016), which features the case of Sarantaporo.gr, a local interlocutor sighed with disbelief 'did technology come to village? I still can't believe it!.' His disbelief and surprise, as he explained to me later, stemmed from his experience with telecommunications networks in the area, which were scarce. That was back in 2010. Since then, the Sarantaporo.gr CN has expanded considerably. When I began my fieldwork, the number of connected nodes was around 70, and when I completed my research the total number of the access nodes was 120, while currently it has increased to 150.

Last summer, after exploratory meetings with professionals in the field of livestock breeding, the network has undertaken to connect a dozen farms at the outskirts of the villages where the network operates, with the backbone infrastructure. This project will expand the network's reachability considerably, and will enhance its connection

literally and metaphorically with more productive activities than it already has. This means that Sarantaporo.gr is gradually becoming integral to the community's economic activities. This is crucial as it can 'export' its business model to the real economy and can amplify its transformative potential. Considering that an access node is available to neighboring buildings, the number of people using Sarantaporo.gr CN is far greater than the number of the actual node-holders, so wireless technology is not an urban myth anymore around the area.

In addition, some of the people involved in the network are not only users, but also tech enthusiasts, learners and trainees, builders of an infrastructure which is offered as commons and alters not just power relations between them and conventional technology (i.e. technology offered as a commodity), but also the relationship between them and technology. A small example is a weather forecast application developed in the framework of the Sarantaporo.gr endeavor and an agricultural telephone application called Commontasker. This is developed through a participatory research design, which is based on a series of interviews and seminars and aims at serving the needs of the local farmers. In this framework, technology is not something abstract and far away anymore, but it is something which bears their intellectual imprint. In this sense, perhaps the internet has not yet been invented, but rather it is always being invented and reinvented in each new context and situation (Meikle 2004: 75), and the activists of Sarantaporo.gr, both the core-team and volunteers, are agents of social change.

> By tapping into the impulse to harness shared skills, resources and ideas for seemingly infinite application a culture of making is established, which [may] grow in new directions with individuals imagining other things they might tinker and mod. Such stories offer a way to think not only about how Wi-Fi might have been otherwise but how we might apply these imaginings more extensively to the world around us. The technological imaginary that such endeavours stimulate goes beyond its technical features and enables makers to re-imagine how things might be (Jungnickel 2014: 127 – 130).

Anthropological approaches to technology and STS scholars (Burrell 2009, Ferguson 1977, Gell 1988, Goggin 2004; 2007, Ito et al. 2005, Pfaffenberger 1988; 1992, Pinch & Bijker 1984) view technology as socially constructed. The culture/science dichotomy is not helpful at all if one tries to interpret scientific knowledge. Instead, it would be useful to adopt the notion of hybridization of artefacts (Latour 1993). Scientific outcomes constitute a combination between 'traditional' and 'modern' social conventions. In that sense, 'modern science' has never been able to establish that a dichotomy between science and culture is a pertinent framework on which to base an analysis. Hence, the products of science are not neutral (see also Escobar 1995). The minute a set of meanings associated with the technical content of the artefacts gains ascendancy over other ones (Pfaffenberger 1988: 240), the technological product is loaded with non-technological meanings and identities. Pinch and Bijker (1984: 30) describe this process as following:

In its inception, a new technology appears in a variety of forms. The process is analogous to the species-multiplying effects of an adaptive radiation of biological forms into an unoccupied series of niches. Some forms 'survive;' others die. In this process, the determinants of survival are not merely economic, technical or rational. On the contrary, the surviving form is the one selected by a social group that succeeds in imposing its choice over competing forms (and against objections of the weaker groups).

The fundamental characteristic of such groups is that all members share the same set of meanings attached to a specific artefact. Therefore, when one examines the impact of a technology on society, he/she is obliged to examine the impact of the technology's embedded social behaviours and meanings (Pfaffenberger 1988: 241).

Technology is not an independent, non-social variable that has an impact on society or culture. On the contrary, any technology is a set of social behaviours and a system of meanings…Thus, when we examine the effect of technology on society, we are talking about the effects of one kind of social behavior on another (MacKenzie & Wajcman 1985:3).

Mainstream Western notions of technology posit the purity of technological artefacts or, in Marx's words, a fetishized form of technology. What is produced in reality by relations among people appears before us in a fantastic form as relations among things, and the task of the anthropology of technology is to bring these hidden social relations to light (Pfaffenberger 1988:242).

Social anthropologist Bryan Pfaffenberger (1988), in his brilliant paper entitled 'Fetishized Objects and Humanized Nature: Towards an Anthropology of Technology,' defines technology as a total social phenomenon in the sense used by Mauss. Technology is simultaneously material, social and symbolic. It has a legal dimension, a history, it entails a set of social relations and it has a meaning (Pfaffenberger 1988: 236). Citing Winner (1986), Pfaffenberger claims that individuals, as they employ tools and techniques, they become agents of world-making through the choices they make in the deployment of those tools.

During my fieldwork, I witnessed an incident which illustrates just that. A resident of Kokkinopilos, Asimakis, requested to become a member of the CN, and Yiannis, one of the local activists initiated the process to include him. He informed him about the cost of the hardware and then he explained how they would install the node on his roof. But Asimakis did not want to have the node installed there as it would spoil the silhouette of the building. Yiannis explained to him that not only he would have better reception but, most importantly, the network would benefit because, through his node, other potential node-holders would be able to carry the signal to their buildings. Asimakis rejected this argument by saying that all he wanted was to have internet at his house and that he did not feel responsible to help future node-holders. After a brief discussion, the local CN team decided to tell Asimakis that the rules of the network are very strict as far as access to each other's nodes is concerned, because the internet

provided by Sarantaporo.gr was for everyone and not just the node holders. So, they had decided to turn down his offer to become a member.

This account sheds light on technology not driven by scientific findings alone. A technology's form derives from the interaction of heterogeneous elements such as political choices and, however inhuman technology may seem, it is the outcome of human choices and social processes (Hughes 1983, Law 1987, Pfaffenberger 1988). In more existential terms, machines (technological artefacts) represent not just human relations but also relations between humans and the machines themselves. Gilbert Simondon describes this as transindividuation, that is, a process which captures the becoming of a collective subject, be it a collectivity of humans or humans and non-human beings or even machines (Combes 2013). The human qualities that node-holders attribute to the nodes, as if they have eyes and they 'see' each other, or as if they have mouths and 'talk' to each other (see above) illustrates a level of integration between humans and artefacts that goes beyond fetishism or passive 'consumption' of technology. It rather suggests that technological objects embody human capacities through a process of assimilation that humanizes technology in a way that even small particles of a machine are conceived as particles of a larger sociotechnical collectivity; a 'collective subject,' in Simondon's own words, which precedes over 'technique' despite it being essential in its formation (see also Athanasiou 2004, Coole & Frost 2010, Kirksey & Helmreich 2010, Latour 2004, Thomas 1991).

Sure, Asimakis could have reception if he had his node installed on his balcony, but the community would not have benefited because his node would not have been able to 'see' and 'talk' to other nodes properly. Therefore, the community decided not to deploy technology according to Asimakis' wishes. This choice is not a merely scientific choice, but a political/social choice which is taken by the community and is based less on scientific and more on social principles. The outcome of any given innovation is still subject to substantial modification by social, political and cultural forces (Pfaffenberger 1988:240). Just as the private TELCOs had decided not to invest in infrastructure in the Sarantaporo area due to lack of economic profit, so did the Sarantaporo.gr CN team decide not to invest in Asimakis due to the absence of any social benefit.

Furthermore, both choices have had a social impact on the Sarantaporo area. The lack of private infrastructure has kept the residents of the area isolated, but at the same time it has created room for a collective self-organized CN to be born. This, in turn, has brought people together, forced them away from the alienating forces of the market, and instilled a sense of social responsibility. It was not technology alone that did this. It was rather the choices regarding its deployment. As Pfaffenberger (1988: 240) very eloquently puts it:

> A new or introduced technology brings a new set of possibilities to a situation. Whether people capitalize on those possibilities depends on their ability to conceptualize the restructured political field, to set new goals for themselves and

to mobilize personnel and resources in pursuit of these new goals. We here confront a series of indeterminacies in which the outcome is far from predictable.

It is not so easy to predict the future and the extent of social change that Sarantaporo.gr can bring about. But, as one of the core-team members put it, 'I would say that community networks will take the world by storm. I won't say that it will start in Sarantaporo but we are here and we are strong' (Heteropolitics 2018).

Summing up, to address the question of the first part of the title of this section, I reckon that what the hesitant and slightly ironic tone of the interviewee who asked whether technology had made it to his village revealed was a disbelief not in technological means but in the social skills required by a community in order not only to adapt to new technology but also to actually make it work in ways that accommodate its social needs. So far, it seems that the technopolitical paradigm that Sarantaporo.gr brings forward is one that vests technology with social, rather than technical, features that stem from community values and needs. A technopolitical paradigm, the product of a joint venture between humans and anthropomorphic machines, but more importantly between humans themselves, who build and manage this technological infrastructure in common.

5.1.8. Sarantaporo.gr as a new commons sociotechnical experiment

As mentioned above, one of the conditions in order to join the network is, firstly, to place your node at the highest possible point of your building so that it has visual access to the buildings of potential new node-holders and, secondly, to never change the access key password, which is widely circulated in the areas of the network so that everyone can connect to it. Access to the CN must not be a privilege of Sarantaporo.gr node-holders but also of their neighbors and visitors. The infrastructure is offered as a commons to all who wish to connect and to get involved in the process of building and/or expanding the CN. What distinguishes a community network and information technology, such as the internet, from other types of commons pool resources is that its products are not exclusive to certain groups of people (Benkler 2006).

In addition, the technological shift of information technology forges not only new modes of production but also new forms of self-governance and collaboration (Bollier 2008, Bauwens 2005), which render communities like Sarantaporo.gr innovative in their inception and function even in the realm of commons. This is why Benkler (2006) calls such entities 'new commons.' In this section, I discuss the CN as a sociotechnical experiment whose features stretch beyond technological innovation. Sarantaporo.gr is primarily an agent of social rather than technological innovation. Echoing the classic Marxist thesis about how the modes of production provide meaning to social and not just to material conditions of living (Marx & Engels 1976), I argue that a new commons such as Sarantaporo.gr is not merely a high tech community but a community that introduces a shift in the social conditions of life.

As Kioupkiolis (*Report 2. The Common,* section 2.3.2) mentions, the new digital commons make up a tripartite system which consists of a self-governing community of

users and producers; a common good (from free software and music to encyclopaedias and social communication platforms); and equitable, self-legislated norms of access, use and collective self-management. These processes are not market-oriented, they revolve around use and not exchange value (Bauwens 2005), and the participants of such initiatives are not market actors but social actors (Benkler 2006). According to Bollier (2008), digital commons with these features carry a liberating potential that alters the way people think and talk about politics but also implies a new way of doing politics. Even though Sarantaporo.gr activists vehemently distance themselves from mainstream politics, as discussed in the previous section, they do feel that what they are doing is politics in the wider sense of the term.

Peer-to-peer projects such as Sarantaporo.gr generate use value, rather than exchange value and profit for the market. They constitute, thus, a 'third mode of production,' which differs both from market/profit-driven and from public/state-managed production. They do so through free cooperation, rather than by coercing the producers. They are self-managed by the community of peers itself rather than by state or market hierarchies. Hence, they represent a 'third mode of governance.' Furthermore, users have free access to the use value that is being produced, through new regimes of common property. This is a 'third form of property' distinct from both private and state property (Bauwens 2005b; 2014: 20).

Barbrook and Cameron (2015) claim that this kind of peer-to-peer production can supersede capitalism through the adoption of enjoyable and efficient ways of working together. For, to create a new technology is not only to create a new artefact, but also to create a new world of social relations and myths, in which definitions of what 'works' and is 'successful' are constructed by the same political relations that technology engenders (Pfaffenberger 1988: 250).

This emergent 'sociotechnological paradigm' of commons-based peer production has spawned, at the same time, a broader radical transformation of contemporary culture, diffusing the values and the practices of the commons -sharing, free collaboration for mutual benefit, egalitarian self-organization, openness (Bauwens 2005b). According to Bollier, this amounts to a 'Great Value Shift' which has brought about a crucial shift in subjectivity (Bollier 2008: 190) by propagating, among other ideas and values, a deeply different conception of wealth as commons.

'The crucial difference between a commercial and a community network is that it makes people familiar with each other and with the whole process of setting it up and maintaining it collectively,' said Yiannis (2018) during his interview, resonating with the benefits discussed above, while Rita (2018) commented:

> Its' much more than a wireless network. Its ultimate value is that it can transform mentalities. It urges you to think as a user and not as a customer, and this can make a big impact in the future if young generations learn to think that way.

Of course, as Pfaffenberger himself suggests (1988), the point here is not to romanticize such efforts but rather to explore whether infrastructures, such as the

Sarantaporo.gr Community Network, have the potential to become what Bollier calls an 'infrastructure of freedom,' in the sense that it is not merely a matter of material things but also a system of human social behaviors (Bollier 2008) that could or could not prevail over others. So, to answer the question about the effects of particular technologies on society, one should have a good theory of how that society works. Answering it will often require an understanding of the overall dynamics of a certain society (MacKenzie & Wacjman 1985:6). In other words, technology should be understood as a total social phenomenon that involves material, social and symbolic aspects.

Technologies are not the single determining factor since they are channelled and moulded by political objectives, social values, the historical context etc. It is the interaction between technological-economic 'feasibility spaces' with social responses to them, in the form of institutional regulations and social practices, which define the prevailing structures and modes of life in a certain period. Hence, the digital technologies of networked computers can be put to different uses. There is no assurance that they will contribute to innovation, freedom and justice. This is a matter of the social choices we will make in the coming years (Benkler 2006). As Odysseas (2018) told me:

> The most important feature of the network is the infrastructure because on it you can build services that are important for the community. If you own the infrastructure, then you have the freedom to choose how to use it and bring about results that relate to almost every aspect of social life. To us the infrastructure is a tool to generate social and economic development.

Sarantaporo.gr is a nascent community of people whose participants are rational social actors, rather than docile consumers, who were in a position to identify cracks in the organizational framework that gave life to the network. The network is a community of technology deployed, maintained, expanded and appropriated through common hegemony, that is, the agency of ordinary people, collaboration, P2P values and practice, which involve not only material but also, and perhaps most importantly, social and symbolic aspects of life. Hence, the innovative aspect of the CN lies more in its politics as a community than in its technology. It is a sociotechnical experiment of new commons marked by the potentiality of change towards more effective, egalitarian, democratic and horizontal social relations.

5.1.9. Contradictions and weaknesses: Enclosures and gendered technology

Kioupkiolis (*Report 1. The Political*, section 1.20), Nunes (2014) and Tormey (2015) maintain that most actual network formations are not fully horizontal. Yet they are not ruled by solid hierarchies and a single leadership. Saranatporo.gr is a case of mixed hierarchy, which allows decision-making to take place both within the AMKE but also on the ground. There is a kind of 'humble leadership' that allows deliberation to occur, but, at the same time, important decisions regarding the operation of the network are taken by the AMKE. When asked, local collaborators and node-holders stated that the

'soul' of the network, the ultimate decision-makers, are the partners of AMKE, most of whom have also confirmed this. In Odysseas' (2018) own words:

> I believe that the core group, myself included, have made it possible for the network to develop in what it has become. We have worked very hard to build it, to persuade people to participate and, thus, if one of us decides to part ways with the CN that would be a huge loss.

Even though Sarantaporo.gr is an infrastructure that operates as a commons in terms of sharing a resource, much of decision-making is enclosed and confined to a handful of people, who are recognized by the rest of the community and themselves as the 'leaders' of the project. The practical aspects that such a leadership facilitates are by no means unimportant in the operation of the network. When decisions are made by a small circle of people, it is easier to reach consensus and arrive at decisions in a timely manner. Nevertheless, this practice creates discontinuities and difficulties in attaining the ultimate goal of the network, which, as Yiannis described it, is to reach a point when 'we' (the core group) will not be needed on the ground.

In addition, this kind of enclosure is not limited to non-AMKE partners. In two co-authored texts by the CN core members, it is mentioned among other things, that 'During the discussions for the organization of the Sarantaporo symposium we faced the need to achieve gender balance in the representation of the locals but also in the whole group' (Antoniadis et al. 2017: 53), and they went on to claim that 'gender inequality in participation is consistent (Antoniadis et al 2018: 17).

Indeed, it has been my observation that, in the framework of the project, gender relations are asymmetrical. The number of women node-holders that participate in discussions and problem solving is considerably smaller than that of men, and there is only one woman partner of AMKE. Indeed, in a presentation given by the network at a the CommonsFest 2018 there was a tacit recognition by the presenter that women are not as much included as men in the endeavor. After he had shown some slides with pictures from a workshop that the network had organized, he turned to the audience and asked them whether they thought that something was missing from the pictures and some mumbled the word 'women.' He replied that it was a correct observation but not actually true because the next slide was one with women trying to assemble the bits and pieces of the cable they use to connect the nodes.

He actually said that women were much more competent during the workshop and that they compared the putting together of the hardware to knitting. The audience laughed at that point as did he, in a performance of implicit disbelief that women could actually do it better than men unless it reminded them of a female task like knitting. Indeed, patriarchal categories of thought do penetrate the group's mentality. When I discussed with some of the members of the AMKE about this, there was a moderate acknowledgment from their part that gender disproportion was indeed a weakness of the CN. However, they did not feel that this was something they are responsible to

address since they have never placed a gender barrier in attending or participating in the network.

On the contrary, as Yiannis (2018) told me, women have helped enormously in at least some instances that the network needed their assistance, as for example in 2013, when the BattleMeshV59 Warm-up event hosted by Sarantaporo.gr took place. When I asked him what kind of support women provided during that event, he replied that they have prepared the food and the tables for the participants.[10] This was undoubtedly hard work, but it was also indicative of the role that women are expected to fulfill in society in general, and in the community of Sarantaporo.gr in particular. The traditional domestic versus public space dichotomies (Campbell 1964, Herzfeld 1985, Dubisch 1986, Handman 1987, Papataxiarchis 1991; 1992), which still characterize the indisputably patriarchal Greek society, are being replicated even in the context of a community that is indeed semi-hierarchical, believes in sharing resources, has a democratic drive for politics and is open to participation.

Closely linked to this aspect is Silvia Federici's work on the importance of women in sustaining the commons. According to her, literature has widely ignored the centrality of the reproductive work both for the accumulation of capital and for a future communist society (Federici 2012: 91). In a system of production that mystifies the reproduction of the worker as a natural or a personal service and profits from the unwaged condition of reproductive labourers (Federici 2004: 8, 12), women as the main reproductive labourers are at the bottom of the food chain. Women's struggles against land enclosures in England during the 16th and the 17th century, the Westerner colonizers, of the 'New World,' the commercialization of lands Africa, Asia and the Americas in the 1990s demonstrated that commoning the material means of reproduction of life is a stepping stone for forging collective interests, mutual bonds, spaces autonomous from capital and the state, and conditions of sustenance which loosen the grip of global markets on our lives (Federici 2004). Besides, as Bijker and Law (1992: 3) claim, it is sometimes said that we get the politicians we deserve. But if this is true, then we also get the technologies we deserve. Our technologies mirror our societies. They reproduce and embody the complex interplay of professional, technical, economic, and political factors. Sarantaporo.gr cannot escape completely from patriarchy, which is endemic to capitalism.

Actually, this is not a feature that we find only in Sarantaporo.gr, but also in the wider community of technology and commons in Greece and elsewhere (see Wajcman 1991,

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[9] The Battlemesh is an annual event that aims at bringing together people from across the world to test the performance of different routing protocols for ad-hoc networks (like, for example, community networks).

[10] A similar observation is made by Jungnickel (2014), who writes that women were involved in the group of the community Wi-Fi she studied, but mostly as wives, mothers, sisters, aunts, female friends and girlfriends who mainly hosted and catered barbeques, providing care of children and transport to events as well as other womanly activities.

Haring 2007, Jungnickel 2014). CommonsFest 2018 (see above) was attended by a small number of women commoners. This fact suggests that it will take much effort to scrutinize and transform the gender deficit in Greek commoning. Enclosures tend to exclude not just 'rotten apples' but also subjects who historically have held an important role in the struggles of the commons (Federici 2004). Ethnographic engagement with Sarantaporo.gr has revealed that the network has reached Pythio through the effort of two women or two kids, as Takis informed us. But calling these two women 'kids' suggests that their involvement with Sarantaporo.gr was perhaps not a mature decision like those taken by serious adult men in the core group or the rest of the collaborating partners. However, as Guattari (1991) wrote, new technologies hold the possibility of spawning new types of subjectivities, radical democratization and gender relationships, which he called 'ecosophical practices' that could radically transform techno-capitalism. Commoning in the framework of a new digital commons should target patriarchal structures of power and should be inclusive of all. It should enable hidden figures of history to become visible without the assistance of ethnography, as important as this might be.

5.1.10. Conclusions: The Commons of the (Un)common people

Sarantoporo.gr is a local digital infrastructure that provides digital communications services to the local community, set up by the community itself. It is built and managed as a commons, which means that it is produced and maintained collectively as an alternative to state and market providers. It is also a P2P production as it engages and encourages its members to collaborate and generate a shared resource and knowledge. In this regard, it is a mode of relationship which inevitably entails politics that transform market, state and reciprocity dynamics. It shows how another internet, which is collectively created, shared and managed, is possible. It is thus a 'craft' of the radical political imagination of our times that goes beyond the dominant figures of subjectivity attached to the neoliberal hegemony.

Its activities were launched at the beginning of the devastating financial crisis that Greece has been suffering since the turn of the second decade of this century, by a group of visionaries who attempt to bridge the digital divide between urban and rural areas and provide access to broadband services to the local community. Interestingly enough, the CN is product of a historical conjuncture, during which mainstream politics are surcumscribed by the forces of the market that have gained prevalence in relation to community values. In opposition to this trend, Sarantaporo.gr, which was initially established in one village and has spread to include ten more villages and various stock farms around the area, has proven that in such circumstances non-mainstream, alter- or hetero-politics can flourish in the cracks of capitalism.

The network is maintained with the help of local residents, backyard technologists, (un)common commonores who became part of the network for practical, personal and political reasons and create 'history from below.' Their aspirations extend from understanding, expanding and improving the use of broadband technology in ways that benefit the local community to becoming a high-tech gift economy that parts ways with

totalitarian neoliberalism by creating a 'craft' rather than a product. In this sense, the network is both a product of a queer historical conjuncture and it is itself a queer assemblage of people and governance. It is a 'new commons' that combines individual freedom and autonomy, and holds the promise of democratic participation and co-production. A queer community of subjectivities closer to or further from each other who organize and act around a common cause related to a common infrastructure. It is a community that facilitates forms of convergence and common identity which breed diversity and openness. It is a heterogeneous assemblage that happens through negotiation, deliberation of plural voices and encounters, reciprocity open to diversity, singularities that touch each other without melting together. The music nights described above, which are organized in a way that respects differences without lacking the togetherness that they aspire to achieve, is an example of how plurality, singularity and diversity create the community of Sarantaporo.gr.

Herein lies part of its heteropolitical and transformative nature. The first is manifested through the deployment of the technology it uses and promotes, a technology vested with political relations. The way the technology of Sarantaporo.gr is used and shared is a product of decisions taken by the group in the process of becoming a community. It is thus a political process involving the setting up, the maintenance, the expansion of the network as well as the deliberation spaces in which the agency of its members is manifested through a 'common hegemony' that forges egalitarian and horizontal relationships. It opens up decision-making to 'common' people, who practice 'politics as it should be.'

The second is suggested by the transformative potential that the network has both with regard to individual subjectivity and to the collective imaginary through the formation of an indigenous cosmology, which is manifested through its prefigurative praxis. It stimulates political imagination around how we can collectively think and act about things alternatively not just in the framework of the network but in every possible space of deliberation, *στα κοινά*. And also around how these alternatives of being in the world can be carried out by 'uncommon' commoners -committed men and women who are not passive subjects of macro-history but progressive agents of society. In this framework, politics/commoning reframes individual politics towards the self and also the community that works, learns, offers and differs in common. A community that goes beyond tying the node to 'tying the knot,' and creates not just a telecommunications but also a social network. Hence, commoning in the context of Sarantaporo.gr constitutes a hybrid assemblage of technical social and political skills.

Its hybridity is also evident in its association to state and market. The CN pools and shares resources to a certain extent through market and state. However, it is by no means market-oriented, and its actors are social rather than market actors. It generates thus use value rather than exchange value and profit. It constitutes then partly a 'third mode of production' based on cooperation, participation and reciprocity, which render it a 'third mode of governance' or else *heteropolitical*. Yet again, its governance also demonstrates hybrid qualities. Horizontal governance is neither pursued at this point

nor achieved. Still, the rules are not fixed and there is a dialectic relationship between rules and praxis. The leadership of the core-group is humble and reflexive. As a new cooperativist modality, the network relies on the agency of common people who negotiate dialectically the features and the future of a new leadership that is collective, it is based on social bonding and it goes beyond identity politics. It relies on trust which is gained through practice. It coheres around strategic wagers and practical objectives rather than around group identities and definite political programs or ideologies. It advances shared objectives and it gives rise thus to a community of practice and a practical identification, which does not rest on common dogma.

The network evolves as a liminal technopolitical experiment, aspiring to promote cooperation which, in the course of its life, has gotten more that it bargained for (herein lies its liminality). It is not just an alternative to profit-driven practices and to the top-down command of the state, but it is also a potential blueprint of a *new modernity of alternative politics* of decentralized collaboration, cooperative nonmarket production, sharing and common autonomy both inwards and outwards, insofar as it is integrated into a *conscious struggle for a new hegemony* of the commons desired and reproduced in other areas. In addition, the Sarantaporo.gr is transparent and open to those who want to join. It operates in a constantly self-reflexive mode, and it is transformed into a counter-hegemonic collective subject that is part of 'a counter-hegemonic struggle' in its technological, economic and political form. The network sets a blueprint for alternative technologies which are permeated by social rather than technological prerogatives, embodying an 'alternative mode of production' that 'hacks' the convictions of totalitarian market capitalism and realizing, finally, 'a third mode of governance' of semi-horizontal, democratic and inclusive commoning.

In sum, Sarantaporo.gr is a community of decentralization, gift, reciprocity, care, democracy, do-ocracy, responsibility, openness, trust and solidarity with a transformative power. However, embracing its transformative potential means that Sarantaporo.gr should challenge not just mainstream market certainties and state politics but also habitual assumptions of gender inequalities in decision-making processes. The case of WCK (see the present report, section 5.2.11), which holds a pivotal role in the Ecosystem of Karditsa, summoning a new paradigm of political organization through collective commoning and through alter politics of affect, illustrates how gender divisions are first and foremost a hindrance to what Sarantaporo.gr aspires to become. Similarly, the semi-horizontal operation of the network entails certain enclosures that diminish the shared vision of a hegemonic subject that aspires not just to resolve technical problems but also to create a new consciousness in participant users. As an infrastructure of commons and a potential 'infrastructure of freedom' the network should address inclusiveness not just in terms of rural versus urban, state versus self-management, market versus society but also in terms of addressing the reproduction of cultural norms of gender inequality that are not just personal but also political, as well as promoting a leadership which has the capacity to include the 'pluriverse.' Sarantaporo.gr is no more a peripheral community network but an example of how another world is possible, and this world cannot

exclude, even unintentionally, half of its population from public deliberation, *από τα κοινά.*

5.2. The Cooperative Ecosystem of Karditsa

5.2.1. Introduction: First encounters

It was relatively early in the morning when I first entered the building where the Development Agency of Karditsa (in Greek Anaptyxiaki Etairia Karditsas -ANKA) is located, during my first days of residence in Karditsa. In the framework of *Heteropolitics,* we had decided to study the local Ecosystem of Cooperativism, the most successful case of new cooperativism in Greece and, thus, I have taken up an apartment in the Center of the city, and I arranged an appointment with the director of ANKA, which is considered to be the 'heart' of the Ecosystem. The building, which was built in the 1970s, was unattended, the elevator was out of order (see figure 1) and I remember thinking: 'how can something flourish in such a building?' But then I thought that crisis-ridden Greece saw the rise of grassroots action such as the one I was there to study, and our aim was to research alternative forms of community-building and political action in times of ecological, economic, political and socio-cultural crisis: to critically re-elaborate contemporary thought on community, the 'commons' and the political in search of better ways of being in common, of governing ourselves and of acting together so as to address the manifold pressing challenges and actual plights of our world. We set out to pursue a more empirically grounded research into new social movements and developments which introduce alternative ways of doing politics and of constructing self-governed communities in crisis-ridden Southern Europe. Actually, that abandoned building provided an excellent setting for what we wanted to argue for. That is, to describe (a) self-organization that resists and copes with the abandonment by the state and (b) transformative collective action, which is part of ordinary, face-to-face interactions, resistances and attempts at 'coping' with everyday problems.

Figure 1: The elevator of the building where ANKA is located, featuring a sign that informs visitors that it is out of order until further notice (photo by A. Voulvouli).

In the framework of our *Heteropolitics* objectives, our aim is to trace the social origins which produce the specificities of contemporary patterns of community organization and civic action, which in turn produce *another politics* or *heteropolitics* in Greek, in a more democratic direction with respect to alterity, horizontalism and self-government. Such 'patterns of commoning' (Bollier & Helfrich 2015) are enhanced and facilitated by what 'indigenously' is called and has come to be known as the Collaborative Ecosystem of Karditsa (CEK). CEK is a social and solidarity economy (SSE) initiative in the sense that it concerns the so called third sector of economy (Kavoulakos & Gritzas 2015), it includes cooperatives, associations, unions and a financial institution (Klimi-Kaminari & Papageorgiou 2010). It also partially aims at substituting for the lack of state social welfare and at democratizing the economy on the basis of citizen participation in it (Adam & Papatheodorou 2010, Kavoulakos & Gritzas 2015). What's more, CEK is an ecosystem, that is, a community of communities (entities of SSE) that cultivate the ecosystemic approach of SSE. A hybrid/impure commons which bears both non-capitalist and capitalist aspects (Bauwens et al. 2019, Dini & Kioupkiolis 2019).

> It is within the old form…even though it naturally reproduces in all cases, all the defects of the existing system…It shows how, at a certain stage of development of the material forces of production, and of the social forms of production corresponding to them, a new form of production develops and is formed naturally out of the old (Marcel Mauss' Inaugural Address, MECW 6: 78, quoted in Rakopoulos 2017: 46).

Early 'primitivist' anthropology of 'pre-state' or 'preliterate' people strove to capture what laid outside Western modernity, which was in the process of colonial integration. Contemporary anthropology has the potential to study radical cultural alterity (Hage 2012). In *Heteropolitics*, our intention is to study this cultural alterity by bringing to the fore and by giving intense presence to these 'other, minor or alien, realities that show to us that being other than what we are is not only conceptually but also materially possible, in specific ways which can come to haunt our everyday life through anthropological knowledge' (Hage 2012: 301).

In this work, the Collaborative Ecosystem of Karditsa is studied as such a reality, which might not be radical in the sense that it fully breaks with the state and market (not even the 'primitive' societies were as isolated as early anthropologists have construed them), but it is 'different.' It might call for the state to be a facilitator in its endeavour, but at the same time it takes advantage of the 'cracks' in the system. The Ecosystem is constituted by horizontal, self-governed communities, which pursue the participatory self-management and sharing of public goods and prefigure a transition from the contemporary state-and-market domination to a pluriverse Centerd around the common (Hardt & Negri 2004; 2009; 2012).

As Gibson-Graham (1996: 544) write, 'economic discourse may be hegemonized by representations of capitalist dominance but the economic world is queer.' Last year in an interview she gave to Hara Kouki for the Greek newspaper *Efimerida ton Syntakton*

(2018), Katherine Gibson said that we must recognize that the state itself has queer qualities in the sense that it is not a closed but a fluid system full of heterogeneities, contradicting policies, departments, administrations, civil servants and politicians that act inexplicably or un-orthodoxically in some cases.

Indeed, during the beginning of the Greek debt-crisis, the Greek Free Open Source Software (FOSS) Society was granting money to collectivities that wanted to create their own community network. This is how Sarantaporo.gr (the present report, sections 5.1.1-5.1.9) was initially financed. In addition, the Law 4019/2011 regulating Social and Solidarity Economy was passed during the peak of the Greek crisis in 2011, which was then revised in 2016. This created a favorable -even though controversial- legal framework for the creation of solidarity economic initiatives. In a similar vein of thought, David Graeber in his book, *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value* (2001), talks about the possibilities that Marcel Mauss' analysis on the gift opens in terms of locating potential transformative politics. He writes:

> [Mauss' analysis] would present us with the possibility that the specter of communism might lurk not only within families and friendships but within the very organization of corporate capitalism itself, or pretty much any situation in which people are united in a common task, and inputs and outputs are therefore organized only by the actors' capacities and requirements rather than by any balancing of accounts (Graeber 2001:227).

Through these lenses, we can see the new wave of social and solidarity economy initiatives which have been launched in Greece during the crisis as potential transformative action that engages in agonistic politics outwards, as our immersion in the field has shown us. It might not be antagonistic vis-à-vis the state and market as the Marxist strand of thought on the commons envisions it. But it is a different way of doing politics, a part of ordinary, face-to-face interactions, resistances and attempts at 'coping' with everyday problems in a way that opens up transformative dynamics based on self-government, equal partnership, democracy, deliberation. This in turn transforms reproductive relations, social needs, social organization and, thus, social relations and politics (Lapierre 1990).

In the pages that follow, I will attempt to sketch out the profile of the Collaborative Ecosystem of Karditsa (CEK) after placing it in a historical context. The reason of this historical linking is twofold. Firstly, because it sheds light on the contemporary attempts at cooperativism and commoning in the area (Sarantaporo.gr included). Secondly, because in my interlocutors' narratives about the tradition of cooperativism in Karditsa, there was a sense of value vested in that. When I say 'value,' I employ the meaning given to it by Graeber (2001) as a concept invested with history. He suggests that certain goods are deemed 'unique' not because they actually are, but because they have specific histories that make them more valuable than others. It is true that, in his analysis, Graber speaks about material objects. However, in the same book, he attempts to offer an approach to value which is far from economistic. In this regard, I suggest that the tradition of cooperativism in Karditsa is deemed valuable because of

its unique history, on which I will elaborate further down. There have been many instances during my fieldwork when my informants pointed out the singularity of cooperativist history in Karditsa and the value that this holds in relation to contemporary cooperativism. Critical anthropological approaches advance, as I will discuss below, a concept of value that sheds light on the political dimension of endeavours such as the one undertaken by the Collaborative Ecosystem of Karditsa. Hence, my aim is to place CEK within the framework of the contemporary literature on the Commons, Community and the Political.

By commons, I mean a community of collectively produced, owned and managed resources. For the purpose of this work, commons is also intended as a liminal condition (Stavrides 2015), in which people cross the threshold of something new, although it is not clear what this might be (Susser 2017b: 16). CEK is a deliberate structure born out of the necessity to cope with neoliberal economic policies, and it has expanded during the crisis of the last decade. However, as a community, it is in a constant process of (re-)formulation by getting feedback from the entities that constitute it. In this sense, the participating parts are creating novel walking paths in regard to leadership, decision-making processes and collective representation. These might stem from the past to a certain extent, whilst at the same time they are a product of a radical political imaginary of the future and they create a space that allows for a multiplicity of realities to coexist together; a multi-natural space, in Bruno Latour's words, that allows for a multiplicity of ontologies to come together, a multitude -in Hardt and Negri's words- of distinct and yet coexisting interests, movements and struggles (Hage 2015:2477).

By community, I mean 'other cultures' of diverse communities, spaces and commons, which organize their modes of governance, their material production and reproduction, their interaction with the natural environment, in ways which diverge from the normal, from the routine and the dominant in our social milieus. In the framework of *Heteropolitics*, we do not explore alien cultures situated in far-off places and 'indigenous' communities as early anthropologists have done, but we seek to perform the critical and constructive functions of critical anthropology by immersing ourselves into minor 'other cultures' in our midst, in the societies of the Mediterranean South under crisis.

In this framework, the concept of *communitas* defined by Victor Turner (1979: 471) as 'the mutual confrontation of human beings being stripped of status role characteristics,' as a relation among a plurality of singularities (Nancy 2000) turns out to be very fruitful. In the case of Karditsa, we witnessed communities of people -the entities that constitute CEK and CEK itself- that are after horizontalism, they facilitate leadership and they are democratically-driven. It is an open community of people who collectively decide on how to govern and be governed in open, plural, diverse, creative equal and just ways (Nancy 1997), and these entail political decisions which take as to my next attempt: the political dimension of CEK.

By the term 'political' I refer to how these communities 'become other together' (Nunes 2006: 305) through political decisions. That is, we point to the diverse modes in which plural communities manage themselves by enabling mutual challenges, deliberation, decision-making, the questioning of existing arrangements and creative agency. From the perspective of the project, the *political* upholds effectively the *common* insofar as it opens up political decision-making, representation and leadership to ordinary people. And this calls for other, non-mainstream ways of doing politics, for an idea and a practice of *heteropolitics* or alter-politics. Having said this, I am not arguing that the actors involved in such a process claim necessarily specific political goals, but they rather see themselves as transforming social relations from the bottom up (Susser 2017a: 2). As one of our interlocutors (Koulosousas 2019) told us during his interview:

> Our first success is that 47 people sat together around a table and have been able to reach an understanding. There is a spirit of cooperation and if things don't go as planned, then, I repeat, at least 47 people have been able to get together and cooperate. Similarly, all of us we will decide what we will do next.

To sum up this introductory section, in this text I claim that the Collaborative Ecosystem of Karditsa is a project that builds on a past of self-organization, semi-autonomy, solidarity, cooperation and reciprocity, and brings this past to the present time by way of appropriating this past in the form of a heteropolitical new cooperativism. It emerges at the level of the everyday, of horizontalist community-building, and it evolves into transformative social innovation. A type of innovation that puts society 'in control' of deliberation, collective praxis, equality and democratic governance. A society that cultivates the ecosystemic approach of SSE and sets off prefigurative politics. This alter-political ethos opens up transformative spaces of action, which are informed by rational morality and affective reflexivity, by a subtle moral economy behind the economy of visible transactions, rather than by material gain. As paradoxical as it may seem in a study of economic practices, in this text, the economic is replaced with the social, and value is seen as a holistic political concept of both material and immaterial prerogatives (Appadurai 2003, Papailia & Petridis 2015). But first things first. Let us now introduce the reader to the place where all these take place.

5.2.2. The place

The Regional Unit of Karditsa administratively belongs to the Region of Thessalia in Central Greece. It covers an area of 2.636 km^2 which comprises the 18,8% of the total area of Thessalia Region and 2% of Greece. Half of its area is plane (47,7%) and it is characterized by medium size agricultural ownership, while the rest is mountainous and semi-mountainous (8,3%). According to the last census of 2011, its population is estimated around 140 000 people. Karditsa is one of the biggest agricultural areas of Greece, as is the rest of Thessalia. Its main agricultural production is cotton, which covers almost half of the cultivated land of the Regional Unit, making up 1/3 of the country's production. Karditsa holds 12% of the Regional GDP. Stock farming is low,

and it is characterized by small farms and low exploitation of the products on the local level.

The capital of the Regional Unit is the city of Karditsa, which has approximately 38,000 inhabitants and has a well-arranged street plan with many sidewalks rendering it a pedestrian-friendly city. The central park of the city, called *Pafsilipo* -a compound word consisting of the words *pafsi* meaning end and *lypi* meaning sadness, literally translating into the end of sadness- is a very well-maintained area, which features high trees, a small zoo and a children's recreation area. In the park and the surrounding area, you can find free peacocks strolling around, which is considered a very unique attraction of the city. Karditsa is one of most bicycle-friendly cities of Greece, which is something one notices immediately upon visiting the city. Almost all households keep at least one bicycle, used by all members of the family.

Figures 2 & 3: The municipal children's library located at the entrance of Pafsilipo, featuring a wall with a hanger where you can hang your old clothes for those who need them. The wall is called 'the wall of kindness' (photo by A. Voulvouli).

When I first settled in the city, I used to say it is a place that mirrors its name. I thought that Karditsa was a regional spelling of 'little heart' (from 'kardia,' meaning heart in Greek). Indeed, there is a theory that the name of the city comes from the Greek word for heart since it is in the middle (in the heart) of Greece (Lekka 2009). I remember joking about my striving to understand what makes this area so serene, prone to caring for others, collaboration and cooperation and saying that I would just write that it must have to do with its name. Another theory regarding the origin of the name of the city is that Karditsa, although a regional vernacular term, probably comes from the word *Karydia* which is the Greek word for walnut tree. Thessalia is known for its special dialect, that sounds very provincial in the ears of the non-natives. However, a closer ethnographic look and a careful review of the literature of the history of Thessalia suggested that there were other unique attributes of the region which might actually explain all these we were looking for. These will be the focus of the next section.

5.2.3. Cooperativism as Social Innovation: The social origins of the Collaborative Ecosystem of Karditsa

In this section I will attempt to sketch the *historical habitus* of Thessalia as far as cooperativism, self-organizing governance and economic autonomy are concerned. To bring the argument up to contemporary time, I will argue that Karditsiotes (the Greek word used for the residents of Karditsa) claim experience as far as alter-political processes are concerned. They take this a step further by claiming credit for the development of socially innovative practices that this experience has generated. Starting with ANKA, in the pages that follow I will give a brief historical account of its activities and then I will attempt to historically situate them in relation to Thessalia's micropolitics. Finally, I will conclude this section by defining cooperativism as a heteropolitical social innovation that has its roots in the past but is suffused with the complexity of today.

ANKA today

The promotion and the incubation of innovative initiatives as well as the organization of the debate on local development issues were the basic characteristics of Development Agency from its establishment. The objective was to eliminate the start-up costs of collective schemes and to help them cope with the bad reputation of the traditional cooperatives. The statute of ANKA (1989: 1, my translation) states the following:

> The mission of ANKA is to: a) contribute to the development, management, maintenance, and protection of natural resources; b) introduce innovation strategies and entrepreneurship in the local productive system; c) introduce and expand the use of renewable energy; d) support and develop new cooperative schemes; e) support social development and in general the development of the Regional Unit of Karditsa and if requested in other regions of Greece. Our task is the technical support: a) of Local Governments and the Decentralized Administration of Thessalia, the Associations of Municipalities and Communities, the development of associations and other legal entities constituted or involved by the above bodies; b) of the cooperative organizations of the Regional Unit of Karditsa as well as the businesses and other legal entities that they constitute or are involved with; c) of small and medium-sized enterprises, through information transfer, organization, encouragement of operation and expansion of viable units as well as their adaptation to new technological requirements and in general to the new state of affairs of the European Economic Area; d) and the promotion of entrepreneurial, economic and more generally sustainable development of Local Governments. Also a) to offer technical support to Local Development Programs that are of interest to Local Government and to encourage local productive initiatives and generally to support by any appropriate means local development; b) the undertaking of research, training and other programs related to Local Governments, cooperativism and local development; c) the design and implementation of programs that prevent and

combat social exclusion, racism, xenophobia and all forms of discrimination; d) the design and implementation of programs for rural development and for the protection of the anthropogenic and natural environment; e) the implementation of co-financed projects, social actions, services and supplies.

Indeed, ANKA, which was established in 1989, has been aiding local cooperative schemes, either those which are already formed or those which are taking their first steps. Its initial shareholders were the local Association of Municipalities and Communes holding 53% of the shares, the local Association of Agricultural Cooperatives with 35% of the shares, and four major Municipalities of the Regional Unit of Karditsa, each with 3% of the shares: The Municipality of Karditsa, the Municipality of Mouzaki, the Municipality of Palamas and the Municipality of Sofades. Over the years, the number of shareholders has expanded to include the Collaborative Bank of Karditsa, four more municipalities (Plastiras, Argithea, Domokos and Farsala), as well as the Commercial Chamber of Karditsa. Among its first projects was to support women's cooperatives involved in the attempt to develop rural tourism in Plastira's Lake, the establishment of Women's Center and a Center of disabled people, which are non-for profit associations (Bellis 2019, WCK 2018).

Over the years, ANKA has hosted collective initiatives of social entrepreneurial nature, such as the Energy Cooperative of Karditsa, and specialized Centers, such as refugees' associations, one Roma non-for-profit agency, plus farmers cooperatives and producers' associations (ANKA 2020). At the moment, ANKA runs an incubator of social enterpreneurship for small start-up companies (up to 15 000 euros initial capital), whose ideological base is self-government, equal partnership, democracy and voluntary work (Bellis 2019).

These companies are focusing on social innovation in the sense that they are willing to contribute to the local community. They are characterized by transparency and the publicity of their activities, flexible organizational schemes and transnational cooperation. ANKA hosts these companies for a period of 1 up to 4 years, until the beginning of the investment plan. It offers technical support in the initial phase of the hosted scheme, organization and assistance in the awareness campaign (meetings in the villages, press releases, etc.), services such as bookkeeping and secretarial assistance, aid with the business plan and search for financial instruments (Bellis 2019, ANKA 2020).

During the first meeting I had in 2018 with the director of ANKA, Vasilis Bellis, he told me:

> What is going on here is tradition. Karditsa has a long tradition in cooperativism and it is not only about a couple of people. One person cannot do magic and make the difference. There are many people here who are into cooperativism and they have dedicated their lives to have this. There is a culture (of cooperativism) here. Plus the foundation of ANKA has helped a lot in the introduction of social innovation (informal conversation with Vassilis Bellis 2018).

While I was well aware about his reclaiming of Thessalia's cooperativist tradition, his second claim regarding the introduction of social innovation raised some questions on what he might have meant by that, and how that related with the history of the area. A meeting between ANKA and representatives of the Ecosystem with a representative of an incubator of digital innovation from a big Greek city answered parts of my questions.[11]

Their guest's approach to innovation was one that highlighted the creativity of people in as far as digital technology is concerned, which could help local economy thrive. It was my impression, however, that what he described as innovation was somehow vague and abstract, and this was the impression of one of the other attendees. Grigoris at some point interrupted the speaker to ask: 'We hear a lot about innovation. What is innovation?.' The speaker went on to say with a rather pompous attitude that 'innovation is actually a mathematical type. The invention plus entrepreneurship, which means that if I invent a mobile phone that rotates and ventilates (I am just using a silly example) if you cannot sell it, then it is nothing.' The director of ANKA, taking the lead from both the previous speakers, intervened and said:

> This is why we believe that there has to be a bottom-up approach to innovation. We want to be able, as an Ecosystem, to issue calls that have been decided collectively on a grassroots level, and ask from young people to come up with solutions. We don't ask for money but for legitimation from the regional or central administrative authorities.

Similarly, Grigoris went on to say:

> How can we make business plans without collective deliberation? In a cooperative, it is the statute that defines the resources, but currently all the resources have been taken away from cooperatives and this makes the establishment of a business plan impossible. You know what is the only innovative strategy that occurred in Greece during the last few years? To strip cooperatives off resources.

The discussion took an awkward turn after that, in the sense that their guest was not expecting this kind of reaction, and he tried to turn the discussion to the benefits that digital innovation has on local economy, while the hosts were trying to explain to him that any kind of innovation, if not related to the needs of the society, is not what they were looking for. Towards the end of the meeting, the director said:

> You came to a rural area that has indeed produced innovative practices in cooperation. If we try to divert the Ecosystem towards digital innovation, it will be both wrong and ineffective. Every innovative strategy that has been developed here is lofty and of high risk. The farmers here have invested money from their

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[11] The meeting took place in Karditsa, in November 2019.

own pockets, and we might not need a hackathon,[12] but we definitely need support. This is what we are and if you try to make us into something else because there is available funding about something else, that would be both wrong and ineffective. We need to find something that suits our needs and our character as an Ecosystem …Even if we borrow the technology from others, we still want to make it work ecosystemically. We want another type of innovation here; innovation that relates to food technology, social financing etc.[13]

In a discussion I had privately with some of the participants in that meeting, they mentioned that while innovation was actually what the ecosystem seeks, their understanding of it was quite different from how their guest broached it. They were not at all interested in a top-down approach to innovation that would attract available funds just for the sake of competing and getting some of this funding. To them, such an approach was a dead-end opportunistic one, and as valuable as a hackathon. It was treated as such during the discussion and afterwards.

When months after that meeting, I asked Vassilis Bellis whether there was any follow-up contact or meeting, he replied that there was none whatsoever. This shows the assessment of the people in the ecosystem. Without active societal engagement, innovation lacks meaning, as promising as it may sound. Indeed, during the meeting described above, Vassilis Bellis insisted on using the term social innovation as opposed to innovation without qualification. When I mentioned to him that I noticed this distinction, he told me that it is different to speak about innovation in general and innovation that aims at addressing and accommodating certain social needs. The fact that certain visions of innovation do not appeal to the Ecosystem, means that they are not considered of significant value to replace the long-established innovative tradition of the area in general, and ANKA in particular, about which I will elaborate further down.

The Collaborative Ecosystem of Karditsa is such a project, which is committed to transformative social innovation, fostering a different way of doing things holistically. This a difference in kind that does not only meet certain social needs in a certain historical conjuncture, such as the debt crisis of the last decade. It also meets needs that this type of different social organization identifies, needs based on values such as trust, reciprocity, equality, collaboration, exchange, solidarity (Avelino & Wittmayer 2015, Kavoulakos & Gritzas 2015). This in turn leads to different priorities (needs), such as profit sharing as opposed to profit accumulation, democratic participation as opposed to hierarchical structures, grounded solutions as opposed to opportunistic gains. In

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[12]A hackathon is a time-constrained event, in which computer programmers collaborate on software projects.

[13] Indeed, a pivotal role in supporting such an innovative ecosystemic approach is played by the Cooperative Bank of Karditsa, which was itself hosted in the incubator of ANKA between 1994-1996. At the moment the Bank has more than 9.500 members and has become a shareholder of ANKA. It supports local initiatives and cooperative schemes mainly of the primary sector but also small entrepreneurial schemes of local interest.

short, a prefiguration of different politics. As Haxeltine (2015) claims, transformative social innovation adheres to counter-hegemonic principles of social organization, such as the ones mentioned above, which can replace existing institutions.

Amanatidou, Gagliardi and Cox (2017: 3) attempted a typology of social innovation dividing it into three main types. The first type, which they name 'Society Consulted,' describes the process by which society is consulted occasionally over the introduction of an innovative project, but it is mainly acting as the end-user. The second type, 'Society in Partnership,' refers to innovative practices that attempt to accommodate social problems by involving civil society in the process. Finally, the third type of social innovation, 'Society in Control,' refers to community involvement not just as partners in resolving social issues but as equal knowledge producers that address social problems and then proceed to resolve them. This type of social innovation differs from the other two types not only methodologically but also in kind, in the sense that it places community at the Center of innovation and renders it thus an agent of social change in favour of collective interests rather than private profit. This is exactly the type of social innovation that the Ecosystem representatives claimed to have been able to achieve and aspire to expand, during that meeting. To them, social innovation is not a way of organizing sufficiently, but a way of harnessing innovative knowledge in service of the community. Hence, the assertion of Bellis 'even if we borrow the technology, we want to make it work ecosystemically,' that is, collectively.

One of the most crucial aspects of kind of support that ANKA provides is the introduction and cultivation of the ecosystemic approach of SSE. According to Igual and Vidal (2002), an ecosystem of social and solidarity economy is a group of organizations that share certain principles or operational characteristics such as solidarity, reciprocity, open access and democratic participation in decision-making and profit-sharing. Similarly, Matray and Poisat (2014) define SSE ecosystems as a system of collaboration and synergy aiming at social profit. The definition of social profit depends on the 'politics of possibility in the here and now' and the 'emerging political imaginary' (Gibson-Graham 2006: xxiv) of communities that are complex, multifaceted and often contradictory, making room for new autocatalytic dynamics which draw certain elements and dynamics in other directions, skewing systems towards alternative equilibriums and new patterns (Coles 2016: 25, 123, 146-148).

In this sense, social innovation may very well be construed not just as technology that serves a social purpose (Drucker 1957), but also as social practices designed to include and empower vulnerable social groups (Taylor 1970). Moulaert et al. (2006) focus on social innovation as social practices that address social exclusion in remote rural areas and intend to overcome such barriers. In one of our interviews with Vassilis Bellis (2018), told us that Karditsa is one of the remotest regions of continental Greece due to the lack of adequate access to the A1 Motorway, which is the main traffic artery that connects Athens to Thessaloniki. According to him, the fact that *Karditsiotes* have a very widespread ethos of collaboration relates to its remoteness. 'They had to do everything by themselves and they have learned to lean on each other to be able to

cope' he said (2018).[14] Indeed, as Hassiotis (2007, cited in Varvarousis & Tsitsirigkos 2019: 16) writes,

> the lack of state attention and support regarding societal issues continued in the years that followed the Greek revolution to a certain extent due to frequent political changes and administration gaps. Hence, Greek people were forced to learn how to self-organize and solve problems on a communal basis, a skill that was crucial to the first forms of formal cooperation based on community principles.

To this day, Karditsiotes still face the absence of the state in all sorts of social services, prompting many of them to act collectively, (semi-)autonomously, creatively and deliberately in order to overcome it. But, as Bellis (2018) told us, the historical habitus of Thessalia in general, and Karditsa in particular, is no stranger to such initiatives, something that many of my interlocutors mentioned during our discussions. As already suggested in the introduction, the value that Karditsiotes vest in Thessalia's cooperative tradition appears to hold a special place in their narratives, creating 'imagined communities' between them and their cooperativist predecessors. Streets are named after historical figures of the cooperativist movement, flags and banners featuring cooperativists that have marked the history of that movement are waving during farmers' demonstrations (see figure 4), and a sense of pride emerges in conversations about the topic in any given circumstance. Getting familiar with that history was thus in order whilst in the field. In the next section of this part I will attempt a historical grounding of our research, starting with the Byzantine era to the most recent forms of Greek cooperativism.

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[14]In support of his view, Margaritis (2017:28), mentions that even though internal travelling between the different regions of Thessalia was relatively frequent, travelling to and from Thessalia has always been a challenge. Nevertheless, due to its large productive force, Thessalia had developed a railroad that connected Volos with western Thessalia to be able to move its products (see also Gourgioti 2009).

Figure 4. A flag waving at the farmers' anti-austerity roadblocks in Thessalia on February 2019. The Flag features Marinos Antypas a Greek lawyer and journalist and one of the country's first socialists who moved to Larissa, the largest city of Thessalia, at the beginning of 20th century, where he acted as an agitator over the rights of the farmers, advocating for land redistribution and transfer of rural lands to small farmers. Antypas was very influential in the farmers' movement, resulting in his assassination by landlords of large estates. He is considered one of the most influential historical figures of the Greek rural movement (photo by A. Voulvouli).

5.2.4. The social origins of Cooperativism as Social Innovation

For thousands of years, people have self-organized to manage common-pool resources (Ostrom et al. 1999). As Peter Linebaugh discusses, in his rewriting of the history of the Magna Carta from the standpoint of the commons, history demonstrates 'several millennia of experience in the mutuality and negotiation of commoning' (Linebaugh 2008: 9-10). For him, commoning is a historical tradition that calls for the right to resist. This is acted upon in the struggles against the commodification of bread in rural markets (Susser 2016; 2017, Thompson 1964), the housing commons of Amsterdam in the 1960s (Nonini 2017) and the first cooperatives in Greece at the end of 19th and the beginning of the previous century.

But even before this, the idea of self-organization can be found in ancient Greek times in the form of trade unions. Cooperatives were also present, in a more advanced form, in the Byzantine Empire. These consisted of unions of land or livestock owners who produced and managed their production in their common interest. In this period, they were recognized by the legislation of Leo VI the Wise, and they achieved increased autonomy, becoming a vital part of the economy. Cooperatives were also present during the Ottoman rule (1453-1821) and played an important role during the national liberation war of 1821. During this period, new cooperatives popped up in small villages, where small groups of producers known as 'syntrofies' (companies or friendships) decided to cooperate to avoid competition. In some cases, they were even able to export their products to other European countries. After Greece became an

independent state, the cooperatives remained active, working for the establishment of a democratic regime (Tsagari 2017).

Historically, the rural cooperative movement in modern Greece has proven to be avant-garde in the sense that it has developed very early; in fact, it is one of the oldest in Europe. It emerged at the dawn of the 20th century, bolstering a cooperative culture, generating new bodies of law (Law 602/1915, Law 921/1979) and encouraging a rethinking of economic and social priorities. Since 1850, Greece has witnessed the development of modern cooperatives based on a Western model. There are relevant examples as early as 1870, such as 'Self-help: Society of the Labour People' (Athens), which provided members with basic goods and food, and the 'Union of honest craftsmanship, the Second Society of the People of Athens,' which brought together marble sculptors and wood workers (Petropoulou & Nord 1993:1)

In the past history, there were six main experiences: bricklayers' cooperatives of villages in the Epirus region, which were organized in groups in charge of building houses in the city; stock farmers' cooperatives called 'Mitata,' an association of milk producers with shepherds with fixed quotas for sharing profits from the sells of milk and cheese; sharecroppers' cooperatives; cooperatives of carpet makers in Lower Asia. In the latter, all members contributed to the fund for buying carpet frames. The work was shared by women from all social classes and profits were distributed according to the needs of the members or used for public aims. Finally, 'sintechnies,' that is, craftsmanship unions functioning as credit cooperatives. An example is Philippoupolis Tailors' 'Sintechnia,' which since 1762 has lent money to its members, and theatre groups associated in cooperatives since 1860. Theatre actors overcame the need for management or sponsorship by creating their enterprises and sharing the profits between themselves according to fixed rules (Petropoulou & Nord 1993:1).

Thessalia is very characteristic example of such an organization. The historical habitus of the area is shaped by a strong tradition of cooperativism. In 1900, in Almiros, a region in Volos, the second largest city of Thessalia, 24 peasants gave birth to the first Agricultural Cooperative (Petropoulou & Nord 1993: 1). Over the course of the following years, the number of Agricultural Cooperatives all over the country reached 7000 in which around 750 000 farmers participated (Kioupkiolis 2014: 182). In 1935, they all came under the common umbrella of PASEGES, the Greek Confederation of Agricultural Cooperative Unions (Petropoulou & Nord 1993:1). As Kioupkiolis (2014:182) mentions, these unions promoted democratic participation, production adjusted to the social needs of the time, self-help and solidarity principles. In addition, they contributed to the development of rural areas through the construction of vital infrastructures. Nevertheless, state intervention and political patronage prevented them from forming a conscious and autonomous cooperative movement.

Nevertheless, Karditsa and the area around it had developed a more autonomous kind of communitarianism that included consumer cooperatives and soup-kitchens. For instance, the Progressive Association of Karoplesi («Φιλοπρόοδος Ένωση Καροπλεσίου», ΦΕΚ, henceforth FEK), a village in the south part of the Prefecture, is

a good example of an association which embodied the values of communitarianism. Following the principles of solidarity economy, the members of the association based their productive reconstruction and radical social transformation on people's needs (Katevas 2017; see also Beikos 1979). FEK was conceived by Yiannis Kospentaris, who was the General Secretary of EAM for the Prefecture of Karditsa and established FEK in 1933, Nikos Krikelis, an active member of EAM, and the progressive communist chanter Kostas Yiannelos. The aim of the Association was to gather around its structure young and educated people of the village in order to contribute to collective regeneration and welfare, which would in turn enhance personal well-being (Katevas 2017:40)

One of the first aims of FEK, according to its program, was to help establish similar initiatives in the neighboring villages in order to bring together their material, moral and intellectual forces in a joint civilizing venture (Katevas 2017: 69, citing from the manuscript of the founding Program of FEK). Thus, in 1935 FEK authored a text entitled 'Appeal' and addressed to all the Local Communities, the already existing labour unions, the local teachers association, the bar association, the chamber of commerce, the multi-child association, the association for the disabled, the student association and all the teachers and students of the Prefecture. In the text, the authors call for an economic rejuvenation and cultural development of the area (Katevas 2017:76). FEK had also established a very close relationship with local employees of the Agricultural Bank of Greece aiming at the financial support of the Bank towards the economic restructuring of the village (Katevas 2017: 78).

The similarities of FEK with CEK cannot escape our attention. Even if they are operating at different scales and in different historical times, both structures aim at reinvigorating the local economy and intellectual life with the aid of an 'ecosystem' of cooperation between productive and cultural forces, to which the finance sector contributes (the role of the Cooperative Bank of Karditsa in the development of the Ecosystem will be discussed in the following). In fact, at a very dark moment of Greek history, during the Nazi occupation, entities like FEK contributed to the support of the local populations that suffered from the brutal policies of the occupation.

During that period in 1943, Thessalia and Karditsa, more specifically, joined 'Free Greece,' a geographical area that stretched from the Aegean to the Ionian Sea and from Macedonia to Boeotia. This area held its own Government, namely the Political Committee of National Liberation, also known as Mountain Government, with a Communist Party-dominated cabinet. In the summer of 1943, Karditsa hosted the Panthessalic Conference of EAM, which inaugurated the establishment of Free Greece (Skalidakis 2017: 149). Throughout the years of this bold experiment, established and supervised by the National Liberation Front, EAM, the organization of the free state, was based on self-organized autonomous spaces that held on to their previous governing bodies, the local communities (Skalidakis 2017: 147), which were instituted

by the Law 1833/34, almost immediately after the establishment of the Greek State in 1833.[15]

Members of the local community councils who had collaborated with the Nazis were replaced by progressive members, most of whom were also members of the Communist Party. These local authorities collaborated with organizations such as the National Solidarity, the Partisan Commissariat, the United Panhellenic Organization of Youth (EPON), the militia of the Greek People's Liberation Army (ELAS) and with local organizations such as FEK that played a major role in the establishment of the local governments of 'Free Greece.'

Their policies prioritized those who had suffered more by the Nazi occupation and the areas who were less fertile, like the Epirus region. Healthcare and education were also a priority. The appointment of local medical practitioners who provided free services, and the establishment of 'popular drugstores' (*laika farmakeia*) were some of the policy measures adopted by the Mountain Government and the local authorities, whereas the school buildings were maintained and teachers were paid through the central government. Other infrastructural improvement, such as roads and bridges, was supported through voluntary work of local citizens. The economic policies of Free Greece were mainly based on a mixture of exchange and currency economy, since the fertile soil of Thessalia has rendered possible a form of export to parts of occupied Greece. One of the main agents of this policy was the Union of Agricultural Cooperatives of Larissa that played an important role in stocking and protecting local production. In short, EAM has homogenized the rural areas of Free Greece economically, social and politically (Skalidakis 2017).

The end of the WWII and the accession of Greece into the Western block saw the local institutions established by the Mountain Government either dismantled or returned to the hands of the organizations that ruled the area during the Nazi occupation. In 1946, the country entered a phase of civil war between the Greek government army and the Democratic Army of Greece (DSE) that lasted until 1952 with the victory of the government forces which led to Greece's membership in NATO, a fact that signalled the alliance of the country with the West. The civil war left the country in ruins, bringing about a big divide between the left and the right with the latter prevailing in national and local politics. After the end of the war many leftists were thrown to jail and forced to exile, finding refuge to communist countries or migrating to countries of the western block. The Greek cooperative movement during that period was weak. It was organized around agricultural collectives and cultural associations, mainly in Thessalia, which had more of an educational rather than an applied political character.

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[15] These communities replaced the decentralized administration of the Ottoman rule that had at its core the idea of local self-organization within a communal social structure that incorporated elements of inclusive governance (Klimis 1985: 126).

Due to the civil war and the subsequent dominance of the Right until the fall of the military junta (1967-1974), any grassroots action was treated with suspicion by the official Greek state (Marantzidis 1995).

Later on, in the 1980s, the government of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement [PASOK] passed a series of laws to regulate the relationship between the State and the cooperative organizations. As Patronis and Mavreas claim (2004: 58),

> the main objective of the new legal framework was to abolish the old rules of the electoral game played by the cooperatives which, for whole decades, ensured the election of more or less the same traditional cooperative leadership…the new field of 'opposition' was of course favorable to PASOK and the left-wing parties which had a tradition of active membership and, therefore, they could easily prevail over the ideologically and organizationally unprepared conservative party.

Nevertheless, Patronis and Mavreas go on to argue that the result of the intervention in the Greek cooperative movement was far from the expectations of its inspirators. It was, in fact, quite poor. The structural and operational weaknesses of the cooperatives (dependence on the State, ambiguity of their economic and social role and limited production) remained unchanged. On the contrary, emphasis was given to the trade union type of control of the organization, a fact that intensified party infiltration and antagonism amongst them. In this way, the agricultural cooperatives were gradually transformed into 'messengers' of the political parties and their leaders, who, in turn, proposed candidates 'whose main required qualifications were party devotion and performance and not *knowledge, ability or experience in cooperative affairs*' (Patronis & Mavreas 2004: 58; emphasis added).

Similarly, Kioupkiolis (2014: 183) claims that PASOK policies embraced cooperatives to an extent that the latter were claimed as a vehicle for the 'socialist transformation of society' and were used as tools for implementing state policies. As a result, the cooperatives were overstaffed. They increased their debts to the Agricultural Bank of Greece which was their main financier, they offered higher prices for agricultural products than the market and they made risky investments. This generated a distorted agricultural policy, accommodating short-term interests as a result of mismanagement and corruption. Karditsa was no exception. Hence, in public opinion, cooperativism became a synonym of inefficiency, failure, corruption and political patronage (Kioupkiolis 2014; see also Broumas 2017).

The new millennium saw the rise of an unprecedented neoliberal restructuring of the Greek economy. In 2010, the austerity packages known as MOUs (Memoranda of Understanding), which have been agreed between four consecutive Greek governments and their creditors, namely the European Central Bank, the IMF and the European Commission, also known as 'Troika,' were enforced. Greek society was brought down to its knees. GDP decreased by 21%, consumption by 23,2% and unemployment climbed to 27,3%. More than 150 000 private businesses closed down leaving 500 000

people unemployed (Kioupkiolis 2014: 192). In 2013, three years after the first memorandum, 1.4 million Greeks were unemployed, whereas in 2014 around 450 000 families had no working members. For those that had a job, things were not much better. The median monthly gross wage fell from 1997 euros in 2009 to 1048 euros in 2015 (ELSTAT 2015). Minimum salaries declined from 751.5 euros in 2009 to 586.1 euros in 2013. Between 2010 and 2014, VAT increased from 9% and 13% to 24%, while taxes on property, including small property, increased by 514%. On account of the above, one third of the total population now faces some sort of mental disorder (Varvarousis & Tsitsirigkos 2019: 23)

The country faced an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, which swept away lives and aspirations, and gave rise to a wave of solidarity that was manifested through initiatives focusing on trade, exchange, social services etc. These nurtured a culture of self-organization and a new kind of cooperativism fighting neoliberal politics (Kioupkiolis 2014; see also Kavoulakos & Gritzas 2015), in both urban and rural areas. Today, in Greece there are 1148 social enterprises, the majority of which have been established after 2011. Their activities extend from food trade and processing to education, general trade and leisure activities. Their difference from old-type cooperatives lies in the level of education of their members. It is also estimated than more than 60% of their total workforce are women. Based on recent data, 8% of the total number of social enterprises are based in Thessalia (Varvarousis & Tsitsirigkos 2019).

During that time, Karditsa experienced the emergence of a new generation of cooperatives. Their characteristics can be summarized as follows. They focus on one, homogeneous range of products, on the supply chain and on the market. Farmers are entrepreneurs and not officers. There is a strong contribution and ownership attitude. The activity is organized around an unanimously accepted investment plan. Their legal status is not necessarily that of the 'agriculture cooperative,' but also that of 'civic cooperative' or 'social cooperative' (Bellis 2019). These cooperatives have a bottom-up approach, addressing not just the absence of infrastructures of the neoliberal state but also the prejudice of public opinion against cooperative initiatives, which stems from the experience of the recent past, as explained above (see also Jungnickel 2014). By bottom-up approach, I mean that the entities adhere to principles of democratic governance, equality, solidarity, cooperation and transparency (Avelino & Wittmayer 2015).

Skipping ahead to section 5.2.9 where I will expand on the meaning of value in the ecosystem, and concluding this section, Thessalia has demonstrated in the past a propensity to autonomy, be it material or political, perhaps due to its material capacity as a fertile area. The alter-political ethos of the area cannot be overlooked in a study that is researching exactly that. Like in the past, in the present, the alter-political drive of Karditsa, operating within all the institutional constraints of the hegemonic state apparatus, enacted values of solidarity, trust, reciprocity, equality, cooperation and exchange that do not always seek pure financial profit. This is, according to Kesserling

and Leitner (2008), what social innovation is about: a condition of social being in the world that replaces profit with social welfare, where value is not determined only in material terms. This is a condition, hence, where the democratic 'Society in Control' type of social innovation prevails.

5.2.5. The Collaborative Ecosystem of Karditsa (CEK)

In this section, I will portray CEK as a community of communities full of internal contradictions, which render it a hybrid commons. I will set out, first, its main components by appropriating the typology of hybrid commons of Bauwens et al. (2019), namely, the productive community, the coalition of the ecosystem, the for-benefit association and other groups that constitute it. Then, I will further elaborate on its hybrid character and its capacity to transform extractivist capitalist into cooperativist capital through a process of transvestment, mainly through the Cooperative Bank of Karditsa, which is an integral part of the Ecosystem. Next, I will discuss CEK's community features and its politics of value that reframes the economy by refiguring mainstream market values into morally rational principles which shed light on the politics of the ecosystem.

The Collaborative Ecosystem of Karditsa (CEK) was established gradually since the 1990s, after the collapse of the powerful Union of Farmers' cooperatives, to fill the gap that was created by the dislocation of traditional cooperativism. The idea of its creation was born within ANKA. So far it has reached 42 members, which include 12 Agricultural Cooperatives, 3 Civic cooperatives, 1 Energy Community (Energy cooperative), 2 Forest cooperatives, 3 Social cooperatives, 5 non for-profit agencies, 6 associations, 1 union of associations, and unofficial groups. The activities covered by members in the primary sector include milk (from sheep and cows), cereals, tomato, snails, honey and bee-cell products, tobacco, legumes, stevia, superfoods, grapes, wine and spirits and forest products. The activities undertaken by members in the secondary sector include wine and spirits, pellets, fruit jams, sweeteners extracted from stevia. Finally, there are members who belong to the tertiary sector, such as farming services, medical commerce, famer suppliers, financial services, tourism, sports, social care, groups against exclusion and discrimination and cultural activities (ANKA 2020, Bellis 2019).

Currently, there is an ongoing effort to transform the Ecosystem into a functional network endowed with a legal form that will enable it to employ people and to be eligible for funding opportunities. This way it will be easier to offer common services to its members, who at the moment involve more than 11 000 people related to social economy enterprises, 5000 people who participate in 230 local associations in rural areas and are organized in unions on a Regional Unit level, 105 permanent and 68 seasonal employees. Its total turnover is 65 million euros, which amounts to 6% of the local GDP and it is four times over the national mean value (Bellis 2019). Based on these data, it seems that over the years CEK has managed to evolve into a project of considerable value for the local economy, even though it is still in progress and the

people involved aspire to develop it into a much larger project. As the mayor of Karditsa stated in an interview he gave me:

> We're trying to do something very different here. We don't have a magic wand to take it from A to Z, but what is being done, it is done in the best of terms. The training of entrepreneurs is a way to convey this message. Of course, if you asked me if this is what I would like it to be, I would say that I want it to be even better. People should understand that to be involved in something like this, they first have to contribute to the collective good rather than think about their personal interest. You give something to the community, and through this offer you also gain. If you don't see it that way, then the endeavour cannot succeed. It will fall apart sooner or later. This is the message we are trying to get through, and I have a feeling that we do it better than others. Having said that, I am not one of those who glorifies (the Ecosystem) and believes that everything is perfect. My concern is that this venture, which is innovative and its size is relatively large compared to similar ventures in other parts of the country, should develop even more to embrace a larger part of the economy. To achieve this, we have to focus on creating a local consumer consciousness that goes beyond cooperative structures to disseminate the idea that if our place wants to go ahead, we have to support ourselves (Alexakos 2019).

Finally, ANKA is actively involved in the development of a participatory digital platform entitled kalomathe.gr, which aims at facilitating knowledge diffusion concerning the social and solidarity economy, and has set up a public space for knowledge transfer and communication between agents of SSE (kalomathe.gr).

The role of ANKA is then, that of a hegemonic structure that coordinates a bloc of social forces that can supplant the status quo and set in motion a process of radical recreation only by becoming first the moral and intellectual leader of kindred and allied groups (Thomas 2013:194). Its hegemonic politics is also visible in its 'social leadership,' which is given priority over state power and puts in place a new social formation by combining force with generalized consent. In the words of Vassilis Bellis (2019):

> I believe that in order to build an ecosystem that gives prominence to dignity and equal participation, we cannot use power. I don't believe in leadership that comes from power but in leadership that stems from esteem. That's' how ANKA functions. It leads through values such as trust and knowledge.

In other words, Bellis referred to 'civil' hegemony that consolidates social forces into a political power on a mass basis, giving them direction and coordination in civil society, and turning thus into a nascent political hegemony before seizing state power (Thomas 2013: 194). Or to a social force that constitutes a counter-hegemonic contestant, constructing a new collective will through 'intellectual and moral reform,' by connecting with, and twisting, common sense (Gramsci 1971)

The aim of CEK is to create a space of deliberation between different agents of SSE as well as with academic institutions, political authorities and financial institutions in order to promote the interests of the groups that participate in it, be it entrepreneurial schemes or social service enterprises, cultural associations, refugee associations and primary and secondary sector cooperatives.

Its relation to the market is not exclusive and unproblematic but rather open, antagonistic and agonistic at the same time. There is an interaction between friend and enemy (Schmitt 2007), but there is an effort to domesticate and civilize conflict warding off the extremity of lethal confrontation (Mouffe 2005: 19-21). Furthermore, there is also a process of transvestment which benefits social entrepreneurship. This process will be elaborated further in the subsequent sections.

5.2.6. The Collaborative Ecosystem of Karditsa as a case of Commons

Simply put, in the vast literature on the commons, the term is used to describe resources that belong to a community (natural resources) or are produced by a community (productive, social, digital resources etc.). Access to these resources is equal for all members of the community. The commons are characterized by a tripartite system: the resources/goods themselves, the community and the practices that regulate access and use of the resources (Dellenbaugh et al. 2015, Bollier & Helfrich 2015). In the case of the Collaborative Ecosystem of Karditsa, we are not referring to commonly managed natural resources, but we mainly deal with productive goods of the primary and secondary sector, services of the third sector and social services as mentioned above. In the framework of the Ecosystem, the goods and services are managed collectively both by the Ecosystem and by each of the entities that constitute it. In this sense, we have a broader community (the Ecosystem) and a smaller community (each entity that participates in the Ecosystem). The smaller communities enact the principles of plurality, openness, collective discussion, democratic co-operativism, and these principles are, likewise, observed in the framework of the Ecosystem among the entities.

Hence, in the framework of the Ecosystem, 'commoning evolves as a grassroots project to build a new form of consensus that highlights the importance of sharing, economic security, and horizontalism across thresholds of difference' (Susser 2017a: 2), as well as a collectivity that works together and 'produces collective use values as products of their sociality' (Nonini 2017: 25). Furthermore, the Ecosystem and the entities constituting it constitute a liminal alternative political venue (Stavrides 2015), in the sense that the space is impure, hybrid and a work in progress. However, it is definitely informed by a 'concern for fairness and social justice willing to make sacrifices for the larger good and future generations' (Bollier & Helfrich 2019: xv).

If a commons requires sharing, negotiation, distribution of benefit, care and responsibility as Gibson-Graham et al. (2013) inform us, then CEK definitely falls under this notion. CEK is a community of communities that collectively negotiate,

share, care and take responsibility of their actions. As the director of ANKA told me in a personal conversation:

> In Karditsa, there is an informal network and it works well. It's a matter of culture. All the Mayors, the Chamber of Commerce, the Co-operative Bank, MPs of all the parties sit down together and discuss. At some critical points, like in 2010 when the crisis started, we were exploring alternative scenarios, the possibility of developing some economic activities. Because we are convinced that in times of crisis it is difficult to raise capital and get a job done. We believe it is easier to leverage capital through collective action and bring thus the actors together and decide what to do.

Nevertheless, defining CEK uncritically as a case of commons without laying out its internal contradictions, discontinuities, specificities and singularities would be over-simplistic. In the course of my fieldwork in Karditsa, I had the chance to witness not only the operation of different entities that participate in the ecosystem, their internal function and their principles but also the paradoxes, the contradictory aspects and their 'hybrid' (Bauwens et al. 2019) or 'impure' (Dini & Kioupkiolis 2019) character. So, yes, CEK is a case of commons in the sense that it makes up a community of communities that collectively decides how to function. But in the pages that follow I will attempt to analyze the peculiar character of that community of communities in order to trace how a multiplicity of realities coexist together and how in cases of commons like CEK a space of a multiplicity of ontologies is created. In other words, I will probe its politics, or even better its alter-politics.

5.2.7. The Social Ecosystem of Karditsa as a hybrid Commons-Based Peer Production

ANKA, as mentioned above, supports small entrepreneurial efforts, prioritizing social entrepreneurship but without excluding profit-motivated groups. It would be of use, thus, for the purposes of our work, to take up the concept of entrepreneurship as it is fleshed out in the work of Michel Bauwens, Vasilis Kostakis and Alex Pazaitis, entitled *Peer to Peer: The Commons Manifesto* (2019). In the book, they examine the difference between extractive and non-capitalist/generative entrepreneurship (Kelly 2012) as such. The first type is concerned with 'how can I put myself in between and extract a surplus,' while the second type is concerned with 'how can I build a livelihood around my contributions and share it fairly while recognizing natural limits in the process' (2019:8). According to them, commons-oriented or commons-based entrepreneurial coalitions fall under the second type, and they generate added value around these communities. Seed-forms of commons-oriented entrepreneurship produce added value on top of the commons that they co-produce and upon which they are co-dependent (Bauwens et al. 209:18). They use various examples to show how this is feasible. They describe it as a tripartite scheme, which is called commons-based-peer-production ecosystem and consists of productive communities, entrepreneurial coalitions and for-benefit associations.

The productive community is constituted by all the contributors to a project, and is configured by the ways these entities coordinate their work. The members of this institution may be paid or they may volunteer their contributions because they have some interest in the use-value of this production. However, all of them produce the shareable resource. The entrepreneurial coalitions attempt to create either profits or livelihoods by producing added value for the market based on shared resources, and the participating enterprises can pay contributors. The for-benefit associations, which can be also called infrastructural organizations, enable cooperation to take place autonomously and do not command or control the CBPP process itself. These associations differ significantly from both for-profit corporations and from traditional non-profits. For-benefit associations are situated at a distance from the commons themselves and the productive community, and they are not directly involved in the production. Rather, they facilitate and safeguard the conditions for the production to take place. Furthermore, for-benefit associations are not profit-oriented, but promote sustainability and welfare in the system as a whole, and they are usually democratically governed (Bauwens et al. 2019:19).

In the case of the Collaborative Ecosystem of Karditsa, their scheme can be applied in a looser way, since the activities of the Ecosystem are not all of an entrepreneurial nature and their production varies from primary sector to social services and culture, calling thus for terminological adjustment.

Productive Community	Coalition of the Ecosystem	Other	For-benefit Association
Farmers who sell their products through the farmers cooperatives	Agricultural cooperatives (AC) AC of Anavra, Achladia, Cattle and Sheep, Dimitra, Dionysus, Efkarpon, Fanari, Kedros, Menelaida, New Union, Tobacco Producers, Psychanthos, Snail Farmers, Stevia	Non-for-profit agencies (NPO) Business Network of Building Materials, Business Network of Food-Drinks, Ecosphere, Women's Center of Karditsa, Horizons	Development Agency of Karditsa

Associations which participate in the Union of Associations Association of stockbreeders of Palamas, Association of Beekepers of Karditsa, Breeders Association Cattle Race Greek Vrachykeratikis, Parent Association of People with Disabilities	Union of Agricultural Cooperatives Agrotourism Federation of Thessalia Hellenic Association of Agricultural Photovoltaic Union of Cultural Associations of Karditsa	Informal groups Contact Group	
Producers who sell their products to the Energy cooperative	Energy cooperative of Karditsa		
Citizens associated with the civic cooperatives	Civic cooperatives Roma Without Borders Urban Cooperative of Recycling		
Producers associated with the forest cooperatives	Forest cooperatives Forest Cooperative of Karoplesio, Forest Cooperative of Neraida		

Citizens and producers/members/ clients of the Cooperative Bank of Karditsa	The Cooperative Bank of Karditsa		

Michel Bauwens, Vasilis Kostakis and Alex Pazaitis lay out the characteristics of P2P networks and introduce the concepts that capture them. According to them (2019: 2):

> P2P is a social/relational dynamic through which peers can freely collaborate with each other and create value in the form of shared resources. It is this mutual dependence of the relational dynamic and the underlying technological infrastructure that facilitates it, which creates the linguistic confusion between P2P as a technological infrastructure and P2P as a human relational dynamic.

They describe the P2P mode of 'relationship,' in their own terms, as a relationship bearing multiple characteristics which expand from full P2P to 'hybrid' infrastructures. 'Hybrid' means that we can use capitalistic infrastructures to generate P2P relationships. They use Facebook and Bitcoin as examples that attest to that, as these projects use also P2P dynamics even if they do so with different political orientations. Hence, P2P is 'primarily a mode of relationship that allows human beings to be connected and organized in networks, to collaborate, produce and share' (2019: 2).

Even though their approach is mainly based on P2P production that belongs to the digital sphere, the authors claim that this mode of production can also be traced to any shared resource. Hence, it is synonymous to 'commoning' in the sense that the system or the set of resources is not only shared but also co-governed in the framework of a community that has set rules and norms (Bauwens et al. 2019: 3). Bauwens et al. distinguish between rules that are laid down by extractive capitalist corporations that aim at profit maximization, and P2P enterprises that adhere to cooperation, reciprocity and exchange. They actually hold that P2P moves to the core of the socio-economic system, transforming thereby market, state and reciprocity dynamics. In this sense, the hybrid forms of organization within P2P projects bear an 'immanent,' but also a 'transcendent' aspect in relation to the dominant economic system. They increasingly become an essential ingredient of capitalism, and they can act as the vehicle of new configurations of production and allocation, no longer dominated by capital and state (Bauwens et al. 2019: 4).

In this sense, peer production is a prototype of a new mode of production. At the moment, it is still dependent on capital that uses P2P goods for its own profit through 'transvestment.' This term describes the transfer of value from one modality to another (Kleiner 2010 quoted in Bauwens et al.: 7). This process however might be used in a

reverse way, which means that P2P networks may also transfer the value of capital to the commons as illustrated in the examples of their book.[16]

In the case of CEK, such a process is rendered possible through the Cooperative Bank of Karditsa. This is a credit institution whose function is permeated by a *moral rationalism*. The bank does not provide credit cards to its clientele or shareholders. It does not fund activities that are deemed unethical albeit legal, such as arm-industry businesses, lucky-games industry etc. It prioritizes first sector and cooperative endeavours, even if in pure economistic terms this policy might not prove to be profitable. Once the Bank redeems all shares of its shareholders, it is then free to invest all future profits into its social mission. Through this mechanism, external and potentially extractive capital is 'subsumed' and disciplined to become 'cooperative capital,' which is an example of transvestement from a capitalist to a CBPP modality.

As the CEO of the Cooperative Bank of Karditsa told us during our interview (Tournavitis 2019) with him:

> In terms of extroversion and financing, what do you finance? Ethics has to do with our concerns. Are you concerned with the numbers regardless of the social impact of your financing? Does it mean something to you if two unemployed people get a job or not? If a business is not very profitable but is concerned with its energy footprint is that something you factor in or not? Yes, you do.

In support of this claim, the chairman of the Board of the Agricultural Cooperative of Stevia (Koulosousas 2019) told us during his interview:

> The Cooperative Bank stands beside us when we need it. We can borrow from it on favourable terms. Once, we needed a loan and they have been able to authorize it in eight days. Of course, when we got the subsidies, we paid them back immediately. Any other bank would not have done this for us.

CEK is definitely not an example of anti-capitalist commons championed by anticapitalist commoners such as Massimo de Angelis (2010; 2012; 2017a; 2017b; 2019), Silvia Federici (2012; 2019) and George Caffentzis (2010), but it is a case of hybrid commons. Its hybrid character is an effect of structural constraints in combination with creative grassroots practice. It operates in a two-level framework: (a) The institutional framework of ANKA, which is a Limited Liability Company and is set by default to reproduce the development goals of the capitalist state, and (b) the agency and the creativity of the people that constitute it.

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[16] In the early anthropological literature on cooperatives, Marcel Mauss had made a similar point, speaking before the First National and International Congress of Socialist Cooperatives in 1900: we can create a veritable arsenal of socialist capital in the midst of the bourgeois capital (cited in Graeber 2001: 151).

The institutional constraints are indeed powerful, but at the same time they bear a queer quality. The financial tools that ANKA uses to promote its development goals are appropriated to fit the narrative of cooperativism that Thessalia subscribes to. During my presence in the field, I have attended meetings of the Ecosystem that attest to that. ANKA sets the framework of the macropolitical agenda, and then the participants collectively debate how they can bend this framework in favour of their agenda. Furthermore, ANKA is one of the few development agencies that has participated actively in public deliberation events between the government and social partners intended to co-draft the recent Law 4430/2016 that regulates SSE. CEK is first and foremost a process. It is not antagonistic to the state but it is a relational process which arises from the personal engagement of commoners –from their inventive *praxis* rather than from any pre-established rules (Bollier & Helfrich 2015: 1-5, 9).

At the same time, it is agonistic *both* inwards, when members struggle to sustain common rules and practices and to reconcile tensions between individual interests and personal autonomy with collective concerns, and outwards, when members struggle to safeguard the commons from enclosures and destructive interference from the state and the market (Bollier & Helfrich 2015: 2, 7). Regarding this last point, I have already mentioned the meeting between CEK and the representative of the incubator. Similarly, the agonistic character of the Ecosystem is exemplified by a meeting held in the offices of the ANKA by members of one participating entity. The meeting was held in order to resolve an issue that that had arisen between some stakeholders of the entity. During the brainstorming on how the issue can be resolved, some of the stakeholders wanted to follow the statute of the cooperative to the letter and remove the stakeholders that were idle and, according to their opinion, were actually a hindrance to the operation of the cooperative. The rest of the attendees maintained that the issue could be resolved in a less conflictual way through deliberation and, at the end, through voting. At the end of the discussion, the assembly decided unanimously to adopt the second solution and to bypass the statute, which 'at the end of the day,' as they mentioned, was there to resolve rather than to create issues. In this instance, it became clear to me that CEK is more favourable to direct democratic processes rather than formalistic solutions stemming from a statute that 'at the end of the day' was itself a product of public deliberation and not a 'bible' to be followed to the letter.

Finally, CEK negotiates social reproduction practices of capital, alloying and infiltrating them with cooperativist values. It is difficult to predict whether CEK will be able to 'erode' capitalist markets, but its micropolitics of self-government, equity, deliberation and democratic governance have the capacity to refigure existing reproductive relations to some extent.

5.2.8. The Cooperative Bank of Karditsa: The 'moral rationalism' of a 'moral economy'

In this section, I will discuss the role of the Cooperative Bank of Karditsa (CBK) which constitutes one of the central stakeholders of the ecosystem both in pragmatic terms, as it finances entities of SSE, and in hegemonic terms, as it promotes values of

ethical banking and moral economy through what I call a *moral rationalism* principle. This is a principle of ethical banking that factors not only pure economistic but also social criteria in financing. The alter-political choice of 'moral rationalism' that CBK adheres to, attempts to balance unequal economic power relations and to create a space of fairness between social, rather than economic, actors.

The Bank was founded in 1994. In the words of the Bank's CEO:

> We are counting 25 years of operation. It was an initiative of the Chamber of Commerce and the president and future president of the Bank at the time, who served for almost 20 years. The narrative of the time was that we needed a financial institution that can understand the particularities and the needs of the local community, but is also able to multiply local growth. Because, you know, whether we like it or not, we all need banking in our daily lives, and through our daily interactions with a bank a surplus value is produced; a profit. So, the question is what does the bank use that profit for? Does the profit return to the local community or is it being invested elsewhere? The mission of this Bank is to support local development as much as possible and to contribute to all related projects. That was our aim since the beginning and that was the mission entrusted to us by the local community, with the support of the local community. We are a cooperative bank. Currently we have 9 500 members, and our market share in our Regional Unit exceeds 25%. In this sense, we are a quasi-systemic cooperative bank. So, we want our mission to be worthy of our standing regardless of the economic environment in which we operate, and this latter in recent years has been anything but enterprise- friendly (Tournavitis 2019).

Gibson-Graham et al. (2013: 176) claim that, 'in a community economy, diversified investment would focus on ways of investing for the benefit of the entire society and in ways that allow people to meet their present and future needs without further straining planetary resources.' They characterize this process as investment in different futures. In order to be able to realize such a plan, a cooperative bank needs to cultivate 'an ethic of solidarity that regulates any temptation to heed the lure of quick returns and risky speculation,' as Gibson-Graham et al. (2013: 163) maintain in their account of Caja Laboral, the Workers People's Bank, a cooperative financial institution that was founded in the Basque region of northern Spain in 1959.

The story of Caja Laboral is very similar to that of the Cooperative Bank of Karditsa. It was established by cooperators as a second-degree cooperative owned by the productive cooperatives of the region in order to facilitate its first-degree enterprises. Even if the bank could have invested its surplus in high and quick return ventures, they have decided to put people over capital and to pursue a more prudent management, as Pangiotis Tournavitis, the CEO of the Cooperative Bank of Karditsa essentially told us during his interview. As in the case of Karditsa, Caja Laboral's business development agency supported start-up cooperatives and has helped them grow. With them, the bank has grown as well, making La Caja one of the major banks in Spain with 1.2 million clients. During the latest financial crisis the bank remained sovereign over its

assets due its cautious management, which revolves around people's well-being and toward regional sustainability (Gibson-Graham et al. 2013: 165).

Similarly, the Cooperative Bank of Karditsa has stood firmly beside local small businesses and cooperatives by having followed a careful management, which has paid back not only the bank but also its clients. According to Tournavitis (2019):

> I am not ashamed and I dare say that if this bank did not exist, the city and the Regional Unit of Karditsa would be completely different. It would be a deserted city. The Bank stood by the local businesses when all the other banks shut their doors. And they still keep them shut, so this bank here supports local entrepreneurship. And how do we do it? We have made a very good and prudent management in the previews years. That allowed us to be the only bank that never needed capital injection and will never need it in the future…We never expanded into forms of financing that were not related with the productive sector. We never financed consumer loans even though they have a very good profit margin. Until recently, we didn't issue credit cards and we are not financing housing loans. Our target is to support small businesses and that's why our risk is minimum. During the crisis the size of the Bank has expanded. Our total assets were almost 50 million at the beginning of the crisis and we have now exceeded 100 million, although we have gone through two bank-runs. Our clients feel secure also because we have a personal relationship with them.

The bank is member of the Federation of Ethical and Alternative Banks of Europe (FEBEA). It is the first bank in Greece that has signed a cooperation agreement with the European Investment Fund (EIF) to develop a microfinance program in the wider region, in collaboration with ANKA, which provides non-financial services (Petrakos et al. 2019: 15). When asked during his interview about his interpretation of ethical banking, Tournavitis (2019) told us:

> So what does an ethical bank mean to us? First of all, you respect the money you manage. So, what you finance, which actions you finance is important irrespective of the profit you make. For example, would we ever finance a company whose main business is gambling? No, we would not. Would we finance arms trade businesses? Well, we have a problem with that. So, the moral dimension has to do with a number of questions that are not quantifiable…This also has to do with the internal structure and organization of the Bank. Is it ok if the ordinary employee gets 500 Euros and the general manager gets 50 000? It's not ok. It is not ok because the role of the general manager is not to outshine everyone. There has to be a fair proportion in salaries. Also in terms of transparency, the payroll of the Board members is publicized annually in the General Assembly. And if we were allowed by the institutional framework, we would publicize everything…We have nothing to hide.

As in the case of La Caja, the Cooperative Bank of Karditsa plays a vital role not only in the local and sustainable development of the region but also in educating its

members (clients) in ethical financing. The bank is a major stakeholder of the Ecosystem but also a product of it. Hence, the ethics of solidarity that Gibson-Graham adumbrate in their account of La Caja is not applied by the bank as a top-down directive but as a principle, which was present from its inception as a financial cooperative. In my words, I would describe these ethics as a moral rationalism which seeks to sustain a healthy financial institution but, at the same time, it prioritizes people over capital, and contrary to all mainstream, neoclassical economical notions, people and capital are not mutually exclusive. In the end, it is an alter-political choice that challenges the economist assumptions of economy and exchange by shedding light on the uneven power relations between creditors and debtors (Lazzarato 2014), and by attempting to balance this asymmetry.

In their recently published paper on the Sardex complementary currency circuit in Sardinia, Dini and Kioupkiolis (2019:3) suggest that the circuit

> remained consistently on the boundary between the rentier-capitalist economy and local community economies [and] that his approach appears to be working, in the sense that the space created by it seems to leave enough room for the emergence of a collective political consciousness.

I believe that their view of Sardex is relevant not only to the way that the Cooperative Bank of Karditsa functions but also to the way that the whole CEK functions. CEK is neither anti-capitalist nor non-capitalist or a case of socialist capitals, as Mauss (1900) argued about early cooperatives. It is, rather, a hybrid Commons-Based-Peer Production as Bauwens et al conceptualize it.

To understand how such a system works, the ways in which it actually wrestles with the political challenges at stake, how it strategizes and the internal contradictions and clashes of values (Rakopoulos 2017), we need a *holistic* view of the commons as living complexes. Contemporary commons in practice are polycentric (Ostrom 1990), horizontalist or semi-horizontalist. They are characterized by humble leadership (*Report 1. The Political*, section 1.19.2) and indigenous cosmologies (the present report, section 5.1.5), and they keep a distance from the purist state/non-state politics stance. Therefore, we need a theory that captures their hybridity and the subjectivities that evolve within such systems. A theory that answers the question: Why on earth 'hybrid' commoners, that is, commoners that bear both capitalist and non-capitalist aspects would feel motivated to change their situation, when they sustain materially themselves and the capitalist market while they are also free and happy to engage in their favourite hobby? Why would they care about a 'common-ist' society and what would spur them to strive for it? To answer these questions we should turn to notions of community and politics and to anthropological approaches to economy and particularly in the concept of value.

5.2.9. CEK as a community: 'The politics of value'

During my interview with the project manager of the Women's Center of Karditsa, an entity of the Ecosystem, she told me that

WCK has a pivotal role in the life of the city. Over the years we have accumulated know-how which is absolutely useful for the local community and at the same time fosters a value of reciprocity. If only other similar Centers could operate in the same way. We run things participatorily here. We have an excellent working environment. There is no competition between us and the other institutions of the area. We are open to sharing our knowledge. We don't feel threatened by giving (Velessiotou 2019).

Her account of value as reciprocity, rather than profit-driven, was an excellent example of what Graeber (2001) calls neo-Maussian approaches to value or rather the 'politics of value' (see also Appadurai 2003), in the sense that value takes its meaning through a political decision of what value is. It could be a pure economistic concept, as in the mainstream, neoclassical economics, but it could also be a value totally embedded in social relations of reciprocity and gift, or both. If the latter occurs, as I will try to argue in the following pages, the character of the economy and the community can be studied in a way that would explain why people would care about a common-ist society, to return to the closing question of the previous section.

Value, according to Graeber (2001: xii), is the way in which actions become meaningful to the actor by being integrated in some larger, social whole, even if in many cases the totality in question exists primarily in the actor's imagination. In other words, value is a holistic concept, which involves a lot more than the reductive-economist market definition of the term. He claims, citing Marilyn Strathern, that the value of an object is the outcome of relationships, as ethnographic experience in gift-economies has shown us. Drawing on the Maussian notion of exchange and gift offering, Graeber suggests that non-commodity economies personify objects and value them according to the social relationships that they embody, as opposed to commodity economies where human beings are treated like objects.

Nevertheless, no pure gift, or pure commodity economy actually exists (Graeber 2001: 36). In commodity economies, as Eriк Olin Wright (2018:4) reminds us, people are also motivated, at least in part, by moral concerns, not just by practical economic interests. Even for people whose class interests are clear, motivations anchored in moral concerns can matter a lot. People act often against their class interests, not because they do not understand those interests, but because other values matter more to them. Two general kinds of motivations are at play in these diverse forms of struggle within and over capitalism: *class interests* and *moral values*. You can oppose capitalism because it harms your own material interests, but also because it offends certain moral values which are important to you.

In the field of economic anthropology this has been theorized by Marilyn Strathern through the concept of a partible or multiple person, which captures the various potential identities that a person bears. When we choose to make one aspect of our identity visible in a certain conjuncture, we value that aspect more in relation to a broader set of conceptual categories (Strathern cited in Graeber 2001: 35). On my interpretation of this, when we decide to act as *homo economicus*, we deem that aspect

of our identity more pertinent at that moment in time. If we decide to act in a less rational manner, in economic terms, we deem that aspect of our identity more salient.

Indeed, anthropologists (Whyte 1999, Yanagisako 2002, Appadurai 2003, Ferry 2005, Zamagani & Zamagani 2010, Rakopoulos 2015b, Papailia & Petridis 2015) have shown that economic interests alone cannot account for economic behavior. Particularly in the case of social and solidarity economy, one needs to bear in mind issues such as patrimonial concern, community egalitarianism, family ties, neighborhood relations, flows of reputation and politics (Rakopoulos 2017). These are core values which are factored in when economic decisions are being made in such contexts. A social and solidarity economy ecosystem operating within a capitalist market is a configuration that encompasses these aspects.

In the framework of CEK, there is partly a 'value sovereignty,' which enables the community to determine value for itself and to develop accounting practices in order to allow such a recognition to take place (Graeber 2001). This value is neither the value of the market nor the value of exchange. CEK does produce for the market and follows, thus, the values of the mainstream market apparatus. But it also gravitates around values very different from those of capitalist firms such as solidarity, equality, democratic governance, dignity of work, community development. As explained above, the Cooperative Bank of Karditsa is a financial institution. However, its decisions are informed by a moral rationalism. Even if an investment does not seem profitable enough to justify a purely profit-driven decision, but accords with the bank's founding philosophy to invest in the productive sector, or in a local small private or cooperative enterprise, then the Board would decide in favour of such an investment. Similarly, even if an investment seems to be returning a quick and sure profit, but runs counter to the bank's founding principles of ethical banking as set out above, then the board will decide against such investment.

If we see value under this spotlight, then economic activities emerge as a total social phenomenon. By that I mean a phenomenon that transcends modern rationalities of market capitalism and opens up conceptual and analytical space for non-economic relations, moral rationalities and seemingly irrational decision-making within a community. CEK is nurtured by partible people trying to build economic relations on a more communitarian, needs-oriented basis (Olin Wright 2018:37; see also Polanyi 2001 and Dini & Kioupkiolis 2019). This, in turn, creates a space in which potentialities of optimism (Graeber 2001) can occur in the present and the future. After all, an economy is the outcome of the decisions we make and the actions we take (Gibson-Graham et al. 2013: xiii). When people try to make their economies work for societies and environments, they are thinking deeply about shared concerns and they are experimenting with ways of responding.

What is going on in Karditsa, is, in the terms of Gibson-Graham the 'reframing' of the economy, the actualization of radical imagination (Hage 2015). This is a process in which 'multiple persons' imagine themselves as economic actors on many different stages so that environmental and social well-being, not just material output, are

addressed (Gibson-Graham et al. 2013: 4). The meeting I described above between representatives of the ecosystem and the representative of the incubator, Bellis' comment (see footnote 10) about jumping into a collaboration just because there was available funding, implied that an opportunistic profit-making was not within the scope of the Ecosystem. As he very eloquently pointed out 'we are not looking for money… [innovation] even if borrowed has to work ecosystemically,' that is, collectively.

And this is the gist of the Ecosystem: working together, being a community. This community reframes the economy by appropriating the capitalist mainstream market concept of innovation, it 'makes sales' by taking ethically driven economic decisions, it claims space in the capitalist economy by negotiating both outside and inside its boundaries. The internal negotiation is what makes a community. As Tournavitis said (2019) 'we have a personal relationship with our clients.' This relationship is not a clientelistic one, but refers to a consensus built among the bank, the cooperatives, the small businesses, the Ecosystem. In sum, among the actors of a community. And since the process of crafting communities and living together is political par excellence, to achieve such a condition requires politics, which I will take up in the next section.

5.2.10. The alter-politics of CEK

Heteropolitics seeks to draw out the concrete ways in which various practices of the 'commons' reconstruct communal ties, meet social needs, advance democratic participation and self-governance in the economy and other fields, and offer new ideas of social, collaborative production and self-management. To achieve that, we have decided to take a closer ethnographic look at two entities of the Ecosystem. The Women's Center of Karditsa (WCK) and the Stevia Agricultural Cooperative of Karditsa (SACK). Having in mind Federici's (2012) testimony that women hold a central role in the struggle of the commons through shared care work, WCK seemed an interesting case in order to test feminist theories of the commons and to contribute towards this end. Given that the agricultural sector of Karditsa is one of the biggest in the country and that the Ecosystem is constituted mainly by agricultural cooperatives, we thought that we should focus on one of them. Furthermore, both WCK and SACK make up successful examples in terms of organization and operation; they are both organizations that exemplify the strategy that the Cooperative Bank of Karditsa has, as laid out above. Moreover, choosing a case-study that combines the first and the second sectors of economy seems like a good example to engage with the area's tradition of cooperativism and its current manifestations.

In the following sections, I will look into the politics of care of WCK that cannot be but alter-politics to the extent that it stems from the affective engagement of the women of the Center with their beneficiaries. Affectivity promotes an alternative way of reasoning, in the framework of which pluralism, openness and solidarity are promoted as alternatives to liberal moralities of exclusivity and competitiveness. Moral principles are just as important in exchange practices as it is in non-economic activities. In the pages that follow, I will discuss what is common in the open door of

the WCK director's office and the glass table where the management board of SACK assembles and how they stage alternative paradigms of doing politics.

5.2.11. The Women's Center of Karditsa (WCK): The affective micropolitics of the ethics of care

WCK is a non-for-profit association, established in 1992 and put into operation in 1993. The Center is run by an executive board of nine members, the majority of whom come from the Municipality of Karditsa. Its operation covers the whole Regional Unit of Karditsa. It involves the following range of services: support of female employment, provision of care for women victims of gender violence, operation of a creative occupation area for pre-school children and a kindergarten, development of actions to promote gender equality, information on women's issues and implementation of national and transnational projects on relevant subjects.

I arrived at the building of WCK early in the morning, in order to meet with the director, Ms Kaiti Velesiotou, and to request permission to conduct participant observation on their premises and take interviews from the staff. It is a two-storey building, and the renovation has preserved the initial architecture that features wooden floors, doors and external frames. On the basement you find the reception area and the consultation room, in which the assisted women meet with either the social worker or the employment advisors or the psychologist of the Center. On the first-floor level, you find the desk spaces of the regular staff, all of which are women, and the small office of the director. The door of the office is almost always open and there is constant communication between the director and the rest of the staff.

The director welcomed me and introduced me to everyone else. Then, we entered her office to talk about the Center and our research, and after about twenty minutes we established a very good interaction. She explained to me the role of the Center, and we agreed that I could do participant observation both in the main building and also in the kindergarten. I could also interview staff members and parents of the children, but not women residing in the Shelter of Victims of Domestic Violence, due to their personal data protection policy.

Figure 3: The exterior of WCK, as it appears on the webpage of the Center (designed by Christina Papanouska, courtesy of WCK).

The first interview was scheduled with the director herself a few weeks after our first meeting and after I had visited the place several times. WCK, in her own words (Velesiotou 2019),

> is ran by a General Assembly with nine members. The stakeholders are the Municipality of Karditsa, ANKA, the local department of the Association of Greek Women. Until recently there was also the local department of the Federation of Greek Women, but they have decided to secede. Its place was taken by the municipality, which, ever since last year, has six members instead of five. The advisory section supports women within the framework of the General Cooperation Protocol signed between the General Secretariat of Gender Equality and UNHCR.

Within this framework, the Center assists refugee women and their children. A refugee woman who is victim of domestic violence is already given assistance. Recently, the Executive Board of the Center has also granted admission to two refugee toddlers and two infants into the daycare and the kindergarten. The creative activities area for pre-school children runs in the morning and has the capacity to care for up to 22 toddlers, and the kindergarten runs in the afternoon. These structures are hosted in a municipal building and so are the headquarters. One of the main missions of the Center is to promote gender equality, and its beneficiaries are all women without any discrimination. The first eight months of 2018 the Center has assisted more than forty women.

During my joint interview with the employees, they have described the procedures followed by the Center as follows:

> As a social worker, I am the first person that women see when they arrive here. This year, we got under the umbrella of the General Secretariat of Gender Equality, we also have a hosting advisor who has replaced my role as far as the first contact is concerned. At the first instance, we are asking for the biographical data of the women, and then we refer them either to the psychologist or to the employment advisor or to the legal advisor. Until recently we did not have a legal advisor on the payroll but we had a volunteer to do this job. Now we have the means to pay for the legal advisor (Beneki 2019).

> I am next, after the social worker. Usually the incidents vary: women who are looking for work, abused women or women who are going through a divorce, women who have problems with their teenage kids. Also women who suffer from depression or other psychological disorders but the highest percentage are women who are victims of domestic violence (Ioannidou 2019).

> As a legal advisor, I offer advice on legal matters, mainly on divorce cases but also on other cases such as residence permits for immigrants, bank debts etc. I categorize each case individually and then I give the appropriate advice. In order not to put the women at risk, I collaborate with the social worker and the

psychologist. Once I find out about their background it is easier for me to work with them (Bibila 2019).

As far as the decision making-process is concerned, the director (Velesiotou 2019) told me:

> There is one common spirit… all of us deal with everything and everything we do, we do it together. From mundane tasks to more elaborated actions, we do everything together. Over the years, we have implemented many projects for all groups of women; marginalized women like Roma women, single mothers, projects about employment etc.

Similarly, the project manager of WCK told me that even though the administrative decisions are taken by the Board of Directors, there are regular weekly staff meetings and also ad hoc get-togethers in order to discuss the tasks they have to complete and the topics that they submit to the Board.

In the following sections, I will consider how WCK generates an alter-political ethos by practicing a micropolitics informed by affective moralities of care. Even if they don't have a clear political vision of their work in the sense that they do not envision a radical change, the women employees of WCK bring to the fore 'a radical political imaginary that portrays and arranges such features according to the strategic and emotional investment in them' (Hage 2015: 994).

In this case, 'the emotional' does not refer to the attachment that people develop in the course of interpersonal relationships with other people, but rather to the ability to attach oneself to strangers who go through hardship. It refers to the ability of empathizing, of putting your self in someone else's shoes even if you don't know that person. In this sence, 'emotions are seen as the link between the individual and the social…and they are discussed not from an individualistic, personal perspective but from a social-cultural one' (Mascha 2019:151; see also Mascha & Vezyrogianni 2019).

This means that emotional attachments can also be political commitments, which do not lie in 'rational' organization charts but in an alternative organizational ethos, construed by affective engagements with one's job description. Hence the radical political imaginary that WCK fosters. Radical, in the sense that it parts ways with formalistic, rationalistic practices of liberal work ethics; political, in the sense that it descends into the realm of micro-determinations, flows, desires, beliefs and attractions (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 221); imaginary, because by inhabiting this ambience and by experiencing punctual events and new emergences, we can nurture affective inclinations through which high-energy happenings and breakthroughs tie in with the day-to-day in our routines, boosting our powers of existence and fostering conditions of inventiveness in which new solutions can gestate. Such micro-political affective dispositions can help to enact the unimaginable and to proliferate energies and innovations that scale up to effect macro-transformations or to animate and sustain them (Massumi 2015: 80-82).

Affective micropolitics

By affect I intend the pre-subjective attribute of one's character, which is socially and, hence, politically constructed. Affect is itself political and also constitutive of the political. It allows us to re-imagine the political (Pellegrini & Puar 2009). Laszczkowski and Reeves (2017: 2) claim that 'the substance of politics' is affective- a complex, dynamic and resilient reality that structures both opportunities and challenges for political actors and is constitutive of the acting subjects themselves (see also Athanasiou, Hantzaroula & Yannakopoulos 2008). Similarly, Rosaldo (1984: 142) argued that 'selves and feelings, shaped by culture, may be understood in turn as the creation of particular sorts of polities.' Thus, affect should not be ruled out of any study of the political. In fact, as Massumi (2015:113) puts it, 'alter-politics must also be an alter-politics of affect.' Similar to Laclau (1990), Massumi sees politics as a complex, diverse and uncertain terrain. Affect is a way of handling that margin of maneuver between alter-politics and conventional politics. It is this 'maneuver' that I am trying to fathom, in this section.

The women of WCK have a cognitive and affective engagement, being women themselves and employees of an entity that 'deals with all sorts of issues that women have,' as one of my interlocutors described the Center. They are aware that women are among those groups that are affected the most by the neoliberal restructuring of Greek economy, and that without the legal help of the Center they would not have been able to divorce or sue their husbands for abuse. They are aware that the women who benefit from their services cannot afford private psychological support or protection from their abusive spouses. To put it in the words of one of my interlocutors: 'they don't have anybody else. Just us.' Power, either market or male, affects the women of WCK, too, not just their beneficiaries. Power regimes -from neoliberal capital to masculinity- become increasingly affective insofar as they infuse our emotions and desires, fomenting feelings of fear, dependence, insecurity, impotence and sadness (Montgomery & Bergman 2017: 51, 53). Hence, the women of WCK, both as affected and as active agents of relief and care, are aware that their beneficiaries' reality is harsh and they don't have anyone else but them.

Hence, the awareness of them being the only support for women in need is not only a cognitive but also an affective assumption, which in turn transforms the engagement with the beneficiaries into a moral one. Moral understanding involves 'attention, contextual and narrative appreciation, and communication in the event of moral deliberation' (Walker 1989:19). In other words, it involves politics. In this sense, morality is political and it reproduces in many cases the political structure of our world. Hence, morality which stems from affective engagement reflects the reciprocity and the solidarity between the caretaker and the caregiver and, in this regard, it is alter-political.

As I already claimed above, the affective engagement of the women of WCK is indeed constitutive of their practice as caregivers of women in need. To give another example, when asked about what they deem rewarding from their job in WCK, the women told

me that when they see that a woman is able to resolve the problems she had when she visited them, they feel very fulfilled and, in a way, justified for having chosen to work there. The legal advisor told me that, although she had the chance to start a private practice, she felt that her role as a lawyer for WCK was more gratifying than practicing law as a private practitioner. They went on to say that physical contact with the women in need, like a hug or a strong handshake, is a reward which they value highly. To put it in the words of one them:

> You see, you get very deep into the human pain and the human soul. If you endorse this philosophy of help then you stay, if not, then you leave. It's black and white, there is no middle ground. If you expect to make money here…I am telling you this because it happens. There are people who offer to pay you… It happened to all of us. But I am very proud that neither me nor any of the other girls have given in to this. This is something that makes me sleep well at night. So, if you have in mind that this is your job here… of course I live off this job and if, at the end of the month, I can't get paid, I will be stressed but in reality this is all about helping people who really need the help. When you see them in town, you don't realize this, but when they come here, people 'get naked' and you see that they are in great need and you need to respect that. Then you get back a lot from this job (psychologist 2019).

The women of WCK are affectively aware of the lives they help take care of, and this awareness is quite rewarding both when their beneficiaries achieve their goals, but also when they stand next to them while they are trying to do that. 'It is the trip to Ithaka that matters, too,' one of my interlocutors told me after the end of our interview, implying that in the trajectory of a woman's effort to balance her life there is a lot to learn on both sides.

These narratives of my interlocutors describe a micropolitics of affect or affective micropolitics, that is, 'sensing potentials that have not been realized, bringing out new possibilities and lives' (*Report 1. The Political,* section 1.8 :83). These are brought to life through self-awareness and transforming practices of the self, which gradually become modes of subjectivation. In this context, the ethical subject is brought into being. As ethical subjects, the women of WCK do not only perceive themselves as caregivers, but they also instill ethics into their way of doing things among them. The open door of the director's office, the regular staff meetings, their coherent view of how the Center works, exemplify a political space in which decisions are being devised in an open, participatory, democratically-driven manner, evolving into collective rhizomatic micropolitics of affect (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 22).

But there is yet another practice that contributes to the alter-political ethos of WCK and this is closely related to care. In the next subsection, I will reflect on care as a central practice of WCK through the lenses of its ethics. When I say ethics, I mean the continual exercising, in the face of the need to decide, of a choice to be/act/think a certain way. Care ethics or ethics of care

sees persons as relational and interdependent…It thus elaborates values as fundamental and as relevant to political institutions and to how society is organized. A caring society might see the tasks of bringing up children, educating its members, meeting the needs of all, achieving peace and treasuring the environment, and doing these in the best ways possible to be that to which the greatest social efforts of all should be devoted. The ethics of care, as it has developed, is most certainly not confined to the sphere of family and personal relations. When its social and political implications are understood, it is a radical ethics calling for a profound restructuring of society (Held 2006:19).

It calls for a society of justice where all persons would have broadly equal access to the material and social means necessary to live a flourishing life. The ethics of care aims at a fully democratic society, where all people would have broadly equal access to the necessary means to participate meaningfully in decisions about things which affect their lives. In this democracy, people ought to cooperate with each other not simply because of what they personally get out of it, but also out of a real commitment to the wellbeing of others and a sense of moral obligation that it is the right thing to do (Wright 2018: 8).

The ethics of care is thus a politics of care. It implicates politics and it is about radical political imagination to the extent that it summons a new paradigm of political organization that revolves around 'us' and not 'me.' In light of this, the concept of the ethics of care is very apt for this work not only because it enables a descriptive analysis of WCK's practice, but also because it provides an analytical framework that relates affective work, such as the work carried out by the women in WCK, το politics. This is the topic of the next section.

Carving out an ethics and politics of care

One of the nursery teachers I interviewed during my fieldwork in Karditsa told me:

> We are just trying to help, to offer social services and relieve parents from their burdens; to serve them and that's why we try to take as many children as possible, especially those who belong to vulnerable family units such as single family households, immigrant and refugee children etc.…It is what we get from people… there are children who have been our pupils, and now they are college students and they still remember us, and they pass by to see us even now. Some families have sent here all their children and they never forget us, and this gives us joy and optimism to continue doing what we do. There is no greater joy for us than going out and seeing our kids and their parents who come and hug us. There is nothing better than knowing that you have helped women who found themselves in difficulty (Alexandri 2019).

Figure 5: The entrance of the nursery (photo by A. Voulvouli).

This narrative reflects closely the main features of the ethics of care as described by Virginia Held (2006:10). The first feature is that prospects for human progress and flourishing hinge fundamentally on the care that those needing it receive, and the ethics of care stresses the moral force of the responsibility to respond to the needs of the dependent. The second is that the ethics of care values emotions such as sympathy, empathy, sensitivity and responsiveness, and it regards moral inquiries that rely entirely on rationalistic deductions as inadequate. The ethics of care attends to this central concern of human life and delineates the moral values involved. The third characteristic is that the ethics of care identifies itself with, rather than distance itself from, the claims of particular others with whom we share actual relationships.

The narrative of the nursery teacher attests to that. The women of WCK feel responsible to the needs of dependent. They perceive their job as an offer to those in need, such as single parents and low-income households, and they think of themselves as caregivers. That's why they go to great lengths to accommodate as many children as possible, knowing that the service they provide is as rare as necessary. In an informal discussion I had with one of them, she told me that although some households do not qualify for daycare, they go out of their way to host more children as long as this is not at the expense of the rest of 'their children,' as she referred to them. In support of this narrative, one of the parents I interviewed told me:

> Sometimes the teachers take them in their arms to put them to sleep. My daughter tells me: 'Mom, I am going to sleep in Mrs Vasso's arms. She is gonna give me a hug, she will wrap her arms around me and I will sleep.' This is just so nice…Also they learn some rules such as to pick up their toys after they are done so when they come back home they do the same. There is a culture built here (Kaouna 2019).

Figures 6 & 7: The inside of the nursery (photo by A. Voulvouli).

This last remark attests to the kind of bonds developed in the context of daycare, which are also reflected in the language the caregivers use (i.e. our children). Furthermore, this narrative brings us to the fourth characteristic of the ethics of care, which, according to Held, is that it revisits traditional notions about the public and the private. The traditional view, built into the dominant moral theories, is that the household is a private sphere beyond politics, in which government should not intrude. At the same time, relationships and bonds which are developed in the public sphere are not as strong or as genuine as those developed in the private/household sphere. The women of WCK challenge these notions by delving into the lives of the beneficiaries and those of their families and by rendering thus public the private, or else rendering it political. As one of the parents told me:

> Unemployed women, too, need daycare for their children because they can look for work while their children are here. But even if you don't work and don't need a job, it is nice to have somewhere to take your children. It is good for them, too, because they learn to be creative, to socialize and be part of a team (Kaouna 2019).

Feminists have shown how the greater social, political, economic, and cultural power of men has structured this 'private' sphere to the disadvantage of women and children, making them vulnerable to domestic violence, often leaving women economically dependent on men and subject to a highly inequitable division of labor in the family (Held 2006:12). The parent mentioned above challenged the dominant division of labor. The phrase 'unemployed women, too, need daycare' contests dominant dichotomies of the public and the private that identify women with the latter. 'It is nice to have somewhere to take your children' and to claim space for yourself inside or outside your household. The women of WCK seem well aware of that. Similarly, when asked about the role of WCK, the project manager told me that the Center has a holistic

approach to women in the sense that a woman has a personal, a social and a professional life. 'Persons in caring relations are acting for self-and-other together. Their characteristic stance is neither egoistic nor altruistic…the well-being of a caring relation involves the cooperative well-being of those in the relation and the well- being of the relation itself' (Held 2006:12). In this sense, the ethics of care concerns both individual and political moralities (Slote 2001) of collective existence. The ethics of care is, indeed, a politics of care as a lay activity of daily resistance, contest, negotiation, creative initiative and defence of the establishment in local micro-contexts, brought into the ambit of the political and valorized as such. A politics of the personal and a singular modality of politics in the 'everyday.' By way of prioritizing personal experiences in gender relations and through collective discussion around shared feelings and concerns, [WCK] stimulates reflection on the political facets of personal life. Consciousness-raising activity enhances women's awareness of everyday oppression. It boosts the self-esteem of women as persons who should affirm themselves, who can become reflective agents and who bring their distinct contribution to politics by cultivating, for instance, values of sensitivity and care for the others (Hanisch 2006, Butler 1988: 523-524, Gibson-Graham 2006: xxiii).

WCK is definitely not a space that is autonomous from the state or, to put it more precisely, from the local government. As already mentioned, the buildings where the Center holds its activities belong to the municipality, and 70% of its budget comes from municipal funding. It is also not a case of commoning the material means of production. It is however a case of collective commoning, a locus of practicing alter-politics of affect which operate at the level of personal interactions both within -among the employees- and outside -among the Center and the women it serves.

5.2.12. The Stevia Agricultural Cooperative of Karditsa

The Stevia Agricultural Cooperative of Karditsa was founded right at the heyday of the crisis in 2013 by 47 local farmers and non-farmer shareholders, who all hold one equal share. The Cooperative has built a plant in Fanari, a village in the Mouzaki Municipality, with funding from the European Initiative 'LEADER.' Their state-of-the-art mechanical equipment is intended to support a fully integrated production (field-processing-distribution). In collaboration with the University of Thessalia, the aim of the Cooperative is to develop glucosides from the leaves of the plant and to begin processing the plant.

Figures 8 & 9: The external area of the plant and the processing zone (photo by A. Voulvouli).

According to Yiorgos Koulosousas (2019), the president of the Board of Management:

> The cooperative started after a discussion event organized by the Municipality of Mouzaki with the collaboration of some people from Athens, who are originally from here and they are interested in the development of the village and generally of the Prefecture. One of the participants was Kostas Petrotos from the Department of Agricultural Engineering of the Technological Institute of Thessalia, who talked to us about Stevia and the ways in which we can extract glycoside from the plant. It was an interesting conversation and those of us (farmers) who were interested set a date during the following week, and on the 28th of December 2012 we had the founding meeting of the cooperative…We are 47 shareholders, each of whom has contributed the amount of 3000 Euros, and we have 30 more optional shareholders, all local residents, in order to raise the capital to build the plant, but they don't have the same responsibilities that the producers do.

When asked why they decided to form a cooperative instead of establishing a private enterprise, Koulosousas replied that there was no other way to raise the capital needed to build the plant, but also because cooperatives are more accountable and transparent than private businesses. Organizationally, the cooperative is managed by a Management Board that convenes, as Koulosousas (2019) told us, quite often, and a General Assembly that convenes once a year unless there are important issues to be tackled. In that case, the General Assembly is held more than once. As he said: 'The Management Board cannot decide how many acres should be cultivated and how. All of us have to make such a decision.'

During the interview, we told Yiorgos that we are aware of the region's cooperative tradition, its pitfalls and the collapse of the agricultural cooperatives at the end of the previous century. We asked him what he considered to be different in their entity. His answer was somewhat disappointing to us (or at least to me):

> The difference between this cooperative and the old cooperatives is that we have invested a lot of money, whereas in the old cooperatives you could become a member by contributing a very small amount. When you invest a decent amount of money, you want to know what is going on in the cooperative and who will be your fellow partner. It has to be someone that has the same ideology with you. The ideology of cultivation, processing, marketing and profit (Koulosousas 2019).

The discontent with Yiorgos' reply resulted from the experience I had with my other interlocutors, who stressed Karditsa's cooperativist culture and how the Ecosystem was built on the tradition of this culture. I was not prepared for this reply, especially not for the explanation he gave regarding the failure of the older cooperatives, which he related to the amount of the contributions that they required from their shareholders. However, as the discussion progressed, I realized that his focus was neither on the profit they would make if the glucoside experiments they were conducting would be successful nor on the shares that he and the rest of his fellow partners contributed. Rather, the issue he kept bringing up was transparency:

> We have started from scratch, we have a new VAT number, we want to be crystal clear about our finances, and since we are only spending at the moment we have nothing to be afraid of. One of our main concerns is to ensure that those who will follow will not be able to break this rule…We have a moral code [of ethics] between us. Most importantly we agree on transparency. This is why we have a glass table. I asked for it so that no deals can be made under the table.

This interview excerpt reminded me that, when I met Yiorgos for the first time, he seemed very passionate about transparency. His insistence on the rules, the moral code between cooperativists and his concern about observing these rules in the future, brings to mind Massimo de Angelis' (2001) argument about the reproduction of the commons, which he regards as one of the central principles of commoning. For him, it is crucial to observe the rules of transparency and accountability in order for the cooperative to remain self-managed and autonomous from the state and the old form of cooperativism.
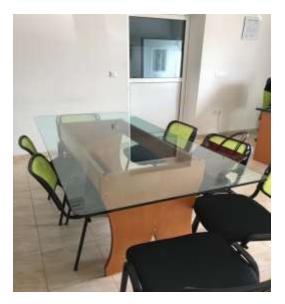
Figure 10: The glass table where the Management Board assembles (photo by A. Voulvouli).

It is these concerns, as well as the practices enacted by the Stevia Agricultural Cooperative, that call for an analysis through the concept of 'new-cooperativism.' The characteristics of new cooperativism can be summed up as follows:

(1) It emerges as a direct response of working people or grassroots groups to the crisis of the neoliberal model. (2) Its protagonists do not necessarily have tight links to older cooperative movements, beginning their collective projects from out of immediate social, cultural, or economic needs rather than from pre-existing cooperativist sentiments. (3) Its politics tend to emerge at the level of the everyday and tend to take on, when compared to capitalocentric frameworks, more equitable ways of redistributing social wealth and more ethical ways of engaging with the other and the earth. (4) It involves usually strong practices of horizontalized labour processes and decision-making structures, which are often premised on the collective ownership of social, cultural, or economic production, culturally-and gender-sensitive divisions of labour, and more egalitarian schemes of surplus allocation, compared to capitalist production and even to older or more traditional cooperative experiences. (5) It has stronger connections with surrounding communities than capitalocentric economic models; some of them embrace clear social objectives and local initiatives of community development (Vieta 2010:3).

SACK exemplifies this description of new cooperativism as it has been born in the middle of the Greek crisis and in response to it. As he characteristically said:

The rural world in recent years is losing income, so the cultivation of a new plant will give us added value especially if we move to processing…People have to organize, the state has to help and people have to organize and ask from the state to contribute towards this direction. United we definitely have a louder voice (Koulosousas 2019).

Their attempt revolves around organizing production and processing under a horizontal structure which entails equitable shares and strong ties to the community it belongs. Indeed, SACK does not share pre-existing cooperativist sentiments, as Yiorgos emphatically told us, and it is responding to current social and cultural needs. Nevertheless, its collective project is supported by the Ecosystem, which is seen by many of its actors as an evolution of Karditsa's long cooperativist tradition. This is not necessarily the recent state-controlled cooperativism of the 1980s and the 1990s, but rather the early twentieth century manifestation of cooperatives as forms of collective economic practices and social values which are rooted in 'mutual aid amongst ourselves,' as Kropotkin wrote over a century ago (Vieta 2010).

As Arnett Ferguson argues, when we consider the longevity of collective projects, one cannot separate the particular project from the social context in which it exists. This is particularly important for understanding the long-term success of cooperatives in places like the Bay Area, which can easily form vibrant networks to support each other. They exist in a community where there is a great deal of support for this kind of work, and they have a steady supply of highly motivated or politically sympathetic employees (Ferguson quoted in Sukhaitis 2010: 67). This is also relevant in the case of Karditsa with its long-standing cooperativist tradition. In this framework, SACK's ties to the Ecosystem are quite strong. It is one of the entities that Vassilis Bellis suggested I should look into as a successful example of agricultural cooperativism. In an informal discussion I had with Yiorgos:

> ANKA stood beside us since day one. They have helped us write our statute, they have drawn our attention to legal issues, they have given enormous help in everything we have asked from them and they still do.

SACK as a political project is messy and in progress. It does, however, embody a form of prefigurative politics endorsing horizontalism, democratic decision-making, community values (the moral code of the glass table as Yiorgos termed it). These are conspicuous, also, in the personal relationships of the cooperativists which I have witnessed during my fieldwork. In Yiorgos' (2020) words:

> Our personal relationships are excellent. There is always disagreement, but it is manageable and whenever that happens we discuss about it. At the end of the day we are all producers and we speak the same language.

5.2.13. Conclusions: Reframing the economy and the political

The idea of the creation of the Collaborative Ecosystem of Karditsa was born in the 1990s within the Development Agency of Karditsa, in an attempt to fill the gap that was created by the disruption of traditional cooperativism. Almost 25 years later and 10 years into the financial crisis, the ecosystem has grown considerably to include from agricultural to civic social and energy cooperatives as well as a financial institution and unofficial groups. In the framework of *Heteropolitics*, CEK was examined as a social and solidarity economy ecosystem that aims at substituting the lack of state welfare and also at democratizing the economy. CEK bears both non-

capitalist and capitalist aspects. In addition, the ecosystem was treated as a case of 'hybrid commons-based P2P' project, which entails the existence of a community around it and, hence, political deliberation. Our anthropological inquiry of CEK has concluded that it is a community of self-organized communities that pools and shares resources attempting to resist and cope with their abandonment by the state while engaging in transformative collective action, which is part of ordinary, face-to-face interactions, resistances and attempts at coping with everyday problems.

In the course of the fieldwork, it became evident that CEK had to be placed in a historical context in order to trace the social origins of what the entities of the ecosystem perceive as social innovation. Thus, in this Report, the community of CEK is observed as a project that builds on past self-organization, semi-autonomy, solidarity, cooperation and reciprocity, and it appropriates this past in a form of heteropolitical new-cooperativism. The ecosystem takes pride on the local expertise on social innovation and builds on this tradition by opening up transformative spaces of action informed by *moral rationality* and affective reflexivity. It creates a moral economy of social rather than financial value that parts ways with the dominant economistic interpretation of it. It also holds a potentiality to transform not just market capital into social and solidarity economy capital but also social and economic relations into bonds imbued with moralities of care, responsibility, solidarity and reciprocity. These are the features that make up social innovation in Karditsa, embedded in new cooperativism as well as in social financialization as opposed to dominant market financialization. These are the features of an alternative economic ecosystem where one does not compete but complete the other. In this sense, it is a minor, almost invisible space lurking in the world; a reality showing up in the cracks of Western modernity (Hage 2015: 1353) that bears the imprint of the past not as a tradition passed from one generation to the other but as value that sheds light on the political dimension of CEK as a conscious carrier of alternative social innovative practices.

In its entirety, CEK immerses itself in innovative alternative politics, horizontalism and democratic decision-making as opposed to hierarchical structures and high-handed commands. It shapes a multinatural space of distinct yet coexisting singularities; a community of people who decide how to be governed in common, opening up decision-making to ordinary people. As a community of communities, CEK produces, and is being produced, by radical political imagination. Hence, it is liminal, full of uncertainty and potentiality. Its liminality concerns both the uncertainty of something different and its relationship to the market, which is not exclusive and unproblematic but rather open, antagonistic and agonistic at the same time. CEK is situated between state and non-state spaces and strives to domesticate and civilize conflict warding off the extremity of lethal confrontation.

Nevertheless, as much liminal as it is, at the same time it is an 'intentional community economy' which creates a space of transformation and bears the imprints of something new. It is commonism, not 'epic communism' (Graeber 2011), featuring alternatives

ways of being in the world. By asserting and creating multiple other ways of acting, it robs capital or the state of its monopoly and its singular definitions of time, space and value, disturbing thereby its hegemony. The Cooperative Bank of Karditsa plays a vital role in this by 'transvesting' capital from the mainstream market to social and solidarity economy initiatives, and also by instilling a *moral rationality* into doing 'business.' By doing this, the bank subscribes to heteropolitical choices by shedding light on the uneven power relations between creditors and debtors and by attempting to balance them.

SACK, debtor itself of the bank, exemplifies this moral rationality. The cooperative has not yet produced the product it aims at producing, but the heteropolitical policy of the bank does not exclude cooperative entities based only on their projected profit but also on their cooperative value. Besides, being both parts of the community of the ecosystem means working together. In this way, the moral rationality of the bank becomes hegemonic within the community of CEK, which evolves as a hegemonic subject that reframes both the economy and the community.

A similar reframing occurs in the context of WCK in terms of rhizomatic microdeterminations, flows, desires and beliefs. In this regard, the Womens' Center of Karditsa stimulates the political imaginary of everyday interactions permeated by the affective engagement with ones' work subjects and the ethics of care that circumscribe their work. These result in the practice of affective micropolitics that enact the unimaginable, proliferate innovations and animate micro-transformations that have the potential to effect macro-transformations, initially in the ecosystem and gradually beyond its borders.

Having said the above, I by no means claim that CEK and entities like SACK and WCK, which have been discussed in this Report, are outside the state or even the market sphere. As argued in the foregoing, CEK is a hybrid Commons-Based Peer Production which is neither anti-capitalist nor non-capitalist, and as such it is subject to institutional constraints. It benefits from the queereness of the capitalist state by 'eroding' the already existing cracks of capitalism. In its political formation it is rhizomatic and prefigurative of an uncertain political future, which is yet potentially 'happening elsewhere as long as there are a few people that support it, believe in it and inspire other people to trust them,' as Yiorgos (2020) told us.

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