

The 'commons' as an answer to 'living well'

Teloni Dimitra-Dora, MA, PhD

*Technological Institute of Athens,
Department of Social Work*

Lost in Translation?

Commons in Greek = Kena (κοινά)

Κοινά has mainly two meanings:

1. Common goods (water, landscape etc)
2. Participation in commons = active citizen, participation in politics

Struggling and creating: Grassroots welfare structures derived by the movements

Solidarity and Resistance

- If commons is about rights, democracy, implementation of rights in real life
- If commons attempt to create in the community the structures that promote these rights through democratic and emancipative procedures

Then

Social movements such as the Solidarity and Antiracist Movement can teach us a lot...

While neoliberal agenda is promoted through austerity at the same time an alternative example is developed

Presentation Outline

- The context: Humanitarian and Refugees' crisis in Greece
- The response of the movements: Promoting the well being of the people
 - Case A: Solidarity Clinics
 - Case B: Antiracist Movement from 1995 until today

The context: The neoliberal agenda results in the physical and mental damage of the people

The austerity measures had tremendous impact to the Greek population

- Raise of unemployment and poverty
- 2.500.000 dropped out of the national health system
- Raise of suicides, HIV incidents and drug use, mental health problems

(for more see website of Alliances to fight poverty third session available at

<http://www.alliancestofightpoverty.org/human-rights-as-an-answer-to-the-social-damage-of-the-crisis/>)

The response of the society to austerity → The continual activity of the movements

- Massive demonstrations, strikes (struggling process)
- More than 350 grassroots welfare initiatives run across Greece (solidarity movement)
 - Solidarity Networks for provision of food and services
 - Free education to children, social music schools.
 - Reclaim of public space
 - S.O.S Chalkidiki (protection of the environment against private investment for gold mining)
 - Solidarity Clinics

The response to racism → Antiracist movement (legal advice, lessons of the Greek language, antiracist festivals, demonstrations, provision of food and medical care to refugees)

Solidarity Vs. Philanthropy

| Solidarity | Philanthropy - Charity |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Provision of material goods and services | Provision of material goods |
| Horizontal, bottom-up procedure | Hierarchical, top-down procedure |
| Raises critical consciousness, political action | Maintenance of the status quo |
| Worldview deconstruction, and political action | Keeps distance from the poor, no further action for social change |
| Respect | Humiliation |

I don't believe in charity;
I believe in solidarity.
Charity is vertical, so it's
humiliating. It goes from
top to bottom. Solidar-
ity is horizontal. It re-
spects the other and
learns from the other.
I have a lot to learn
from other people.



EDUARDO
GALEANO



Case A: Solidarity Medical Clinics: The right to the primary health care

- Covered the primary health needs of the people dropped out of the health security system (2.500.000)
- Health workers and volunteers
- The majority of the SMD derive by the movements
- Solidarity and Resistance
- Involvement of tens of social workers, psychologists etc. (Teloni & Adam, 2016, submitted)
- A new paradigm for public primary health sector?
- New practices against the criteria of the deserving/undeserving poor (Adam & Teloni, 2016 in print)
- Limitation of the means testing procedures

Case B: Immigrants and refugees in the Greek welfare system: The response of the Antiracist movement (1995 until today)

Micro practice based on the needs of the people

The movement has developed grassroots welfare activity in the community. This was achieved either through the provision of food, medical help and support in the refugee camps (Patras, Igoumenitsa) or by other structures such as the Greek school for immigrants, language school, legal advice from lawyers and so on.

Antiracist movement (cont.)

**Listen to the needs → Planning – Acting -
Reflecting**

- Food and clothes
- Integration: Greek lessons, activities
- Legal advice
- Information center: Social worker, psychologist and public servant
- Health care in the camps

Greek school for immigrants



2. Antiracist movement (cont.)

Action in macro level

Anti-racist movement, through collective action and in coalition with other organisations, pressurises political parties and governments for the rights of immigrants/refugees.

Examples: Demonstrations, community interventions, political pressure, campaign

Example : 2005 “No to racism from the cradle” campaign

ΕΠΑΝΕΡΧΟΜΑΣΤΕ ΜΕ ΤΗΝ ΑΠΑΙΤΗΣΗ:

ΟΧΙ στο ρατσισμό από την κούνια

Να εκδίδεται πιστοποιητικό γέννησης
στα παιδιά των μεταναστριών/ων
που γεννιούνται στην Ελλάδα
και να εγγράφονται στα δημοτολόγια



ΔΙΑΔΗΛΩΣΗ ΔΙΑΜΑΡΤΥΡΙΑΣ
Σάββατο 7 Οκτωβρίου 2006 3 μ.μ.
Πλατεία Δημαρχείου (οδός Αθηνάς)
απέναντι από το παλιό Δημαρχείο της Αθήνας

ΚΑΛΟΥΝ
Ένωση Αφρικανών Γυναίκων africanwomen@yahoo.com
Πανελλαδικό Δίκτυο Μεταναστριών womenmigrants@yahoo.gr

ΣΤΗΡΙΖΟΥΝ ΟΙ ΟΡΓΑΝΩΣΕΙΣ ΠΟΥ ΜΕΤΕΧΟΥΝ ΣΤΗΝ ΕΠΙΤΡΟΠΗ ΠΡΩΤΟΒΟΥΛΙΑΣ
Ελληνικό Κέντρο Μεταναστών, Πανελλήνιο Παιδί Για πάντα, Εθνικό Ίνστιτούτο για την Εργασία (ΕΕΕΕ), Φοιτητικό Κέντρο Αθήνας, Σύλλογος Αφρικανών Γυναικών, Ομοσπονδία Αφρικανών Σχολικών Παιδιών Ελλάδας, Διεθνές Ίνστιτούτο Έργων (ILO), Εταιρεία Καταγωγών Βελγίου, Εθνικό Ινστιτούτο Σύνταξης Εργαζομένων, Ελληνικό Κέντρο για την Εργασία, Διεθνές Κέντρο για την Εργασία, Προσφύγων και Μεταναστών, Εταιρεία Συστήσεων Μεταναστών, ΣΟΣ Ρουμανίας, Κοινωνία Ανοικτού Μυαλού, Εθνική Περιφερειακή για τα Ρουμανικά, την Ουγγρική και την Σλοβενική Ρ.Ε.Μ. "ΝΑΤΟΝΑ".

Antiracist movement (cont.)

Social policy

The antiracist movement has proposed specific measures and structures such as Open Centres for Refugees Vs Detention Centres which result in systematic violation of human rights (Teloni & Mantanika, 2015)

Antiracist movement (cont.)

Bottom-up procedure of good practices

In 2008 the antiracist network of organisations started to register racist attacks on immigrants, a gap identified by Pavlou (2007) and it denounced all repressive or racist incidents. The registration of racist incidents was later adopted by NGOs. (Teloni & Mantanika, 2015)

The new (old) Refugees' crisis

- The wars and poverty result in refugees' crisis the last 14 years
- In 2015 more than 500.000 refugees landed in Greece
- About 3000 people, among them many children, had lost their lives from January 2015 (IOM)
- Still: Fortress Europe, Anti-Immigration Policy

Greece: Humanitarian and Refugees' crisis...again and again...

- Trapped refugees in poor countries → Blame the countries
- The role of NATO & Frontex

Consequently:

- Hundreds of dead refugees in Mediterranean sea
- Tens of thousands trapped in Greece due to the closed borders (about 15.000 refugees in Idomeni) in March 2016. In May 2016 50.000 refugees in Greece

Trapped in Idomeni



Photo by Marios Lolos



Photo by Marios Lolos

One message across Europe



Photo by Marios Lolos

The response of the society to the refugee's crisis: Map of solidarity



Doctors in Greek Islands October 2015



**Travelling from war to “peace”:
Baby was born few minutes after the boat with
Syrian refugees reached in Lesvos/Greece**



Lack of housing for the refugees → The response of the antiracist movement

- Self – organized/occupation of empty hotel City Plaza
- Today 385 people (180 children, 22 single parent families, people with disabilities)Afghans, Kurds, Syrians, Palestinians, Iranians, Iraqis and Pakistanis.
- *“Each family lives in a separate room of the hotel, while all inhabitants are provided with breakfast, lunch and dinner, as well as with hygiene products and other essentials. Nearly all are covered through solidarity offerings, while the few purchases that need to be made are financed through donations sourced from within Greece and from abroad.”* Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/sol2refugeesen/posts/1575681932724144:0>



Immediate Needs

for Refugee Accommodation Center

City Plaza

29.04.16

- Washing powder
- Shaving foam
- Wettex pads
- Kitchen paper
- Summer trousers for babies and children
- Men's and women's shoes
- Men's and women's slippers
- Fruit juices
- Croissants

For the time being - we do NOT need any more plastic cups and tea



“In a framework of self- organization and coexistence, there are teams for cleaning, cooking, security, education and childcare, medical care, communications, reception, as well as regular assemblies of refugees and solidarians. Initiatives such as that of City Plaza, apart from granting obvious rights and needs, also put in practice a conception of everyday life which aims to, through self organization and “bottom up” emancipation, ultimately form a space of freedom and creativity, which will act as living proof of the society which we envision.” (ibid)

*“Refugee Accommodation Space City Plaza had and still has as its founding principle the ensuring of dignified living space for refugees, in an attempt to act as a paradigm for tackling the housing issue faced by over fifty thousand refugees trapped in Greece - and not only that. In the face of the terrible conditions of thousands of refugees being cramped in so called “hospitality centers” off the urban grid, **we propose coexistence and cohabitation in the centers of cities.**” (ibid)*

“We do not, of course, believe that the problem can only be solved through squatting, as the provision of shelter is a fundamental obligation of the state; we do, however, believe that squats can act as a means for claiming rights and for struggle, so that a definitive solution may be given to the issue of permanent housing, as well as to issues pertaining to social inclusion of economic and political refugees, relating to their access without restrictions to social services, the granting of asylum to those who wish it and, of course, to securing that which is needed for those who wish to continue their journey to their destinations...” (ibid)

The contribution of the movements to the well-being of the people (a vision for social services?)

- Collective action
- Bottom up procedures (emancipation & democracy) within the real involvement of 'users'
- Services based on the needs of the people Vs bureaucratization and managerialism
- Horizontal decision making process
- Create communities that implement the rights but they do not substitute the public services
- Create in real life an alternative example of 'social services'

Recommendation



Photo Marios Lolos