

Ex airports as metropolitan commons:

Challenges, opportunities and contradictions around three case studies

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Abstract¹

This research project addresses former airports in cities, as urban voids and cases of exception, and examines three case studies (Elliniko/Athens, Tempelhof/ Berlin and Mariscal Sucre/Quito). They are being discussed as potential urban commons, while acknowledging the cultural, historical, political, economic and urban complexities and specificities that each of the three cities and the respective countries entail. The paper comments on the experiences of MET, an ongoing experimental workshop on this theme, in order to highlight the case of former airports in cities in a state of transition and the implications this condition implies.²

The main questions being asked in the context of the research workshop are:

Is it possible for cities and their citizens to actively co-shape their futures? Is it possible to generate meaning, reshape the collective imaginary and instigate change dictated through collaborative processes? What does large scale imply for the urban commons? Can urban commoning be understood as a viable governance model? Is there any way to imagine, conceptualize and implement the concept of commoning at a metropolitan scale?

Some organizational and strategic attempts are outlined as well and the current steps are discussed and future ones are introduced.

1. Introduction

An empty ex-airport site in a city is the size of a large neighborhood, or the size of a small town. Its flat openness surrounded by urban life feels strange. Its empty runways were not made for the human scale, and they are reminiscent of their past lives or, perhaps of the Nazca lines in the Peruvian desert. As an urban void, an ex-airport in the midst of the urban fabric presents itself as an anomaly, a heterotopia, or a terrain vague. Even for urban planners their ontological nature remains problematic, and for a good reason: there is an arbitrariness to any kind of decision-making about their future with the citizens absent from it. Some are being perceived as a future metropolitan public space or park, while others are being threatened by privatization and real estate speculative development. But it may be that both approaches are lacking in something. The city is a form, and the right of participation in “*trans-forming*” it

¹ The submitted and accepted abstract had two authors: Nicholas Anastasopoulos and Natalia Avlona.

² The MET Workshop is an acronym and refers to the initials of the three former airports, Mariscal Sure, Elliniko and Tempelhof, in Quito, Athens and Berlin respectively. It also refers to the metropolitan scale of these urban voids. See <https://themetworkshop.wordpress.com>

should be addressed (Lefebvre 1996; Harvey 2012). It presents the challenges, differences, similarities and possibilities of ex-airport sites to be understood and developed under the category of *metropolitan commons*, a term being used here in the place of urban commons to indicate a condition which refers to the metropolitan scale. In spite of the extensive discussion and writing, the notion of urban or metropolitan commons which appears to be timelier than ever, remains poorly explored. In times of economic recession, these contested and ubiquitous places are in urgent need to be re-defined. Which legal tools could be used in order to: a) explore airports as urban commons and map the existing legal framework around airport property and b) suggest urban and legal acts or policy making proposals for their recognition and function as metropolitan commons remains to be seen. The envisioning of these heterotopic spaces as urban commons can extend and at the same time fortify the discussion around material commons in terms of current legal and urban thought and political theory.

An experimental tri-national workshop is being organized around three case studies, all of them ex airports in the midst of the urban fabric of three capital cities. It is inspired by the richness of P2P production between individuals, collectivities, movements and institutions, and attempts a transfer of that experience in physical space, and specifically in the realm of the concept of the 'metropolitan commons'. It foresees an opportunity to explore the concept of participatory governance and management. But behind this cooperation being established between the three cities, the working hypothesis is peer production, participatory planning, new forms of governance and policy development, and the regeneration of urban commons at a metropolitan scale. It is an outcome of the participation in research with the FLOK Society project (flokociety.org) last year in Ecuador, specifically in the research stream 5 which was concerned with infrastructure common to collective life.

2. History

Inspiration and bits and pieces of thoughts that led to this research project go way back producing interestingly enough a full circle, as much originated in Athens, my hometown, to return recently here, having travelled in the meantime to many places with stops in Istanbul, Belo Horizonte, Quito and back. Meanwhile, several other threads some of which are better known to some people than others have been unfolding. Theoretical development, based on the research that took place on the occasion of the FLOK Society Project and the Mapping the Commons-Quito workshop.³ The discussion began picking up after an invitation by transmediale for the project to be featured in this year's 'Anxious to Act' stream. A regular skype meeting began occurring between the author and Oliver Lenore Schultz, which was later joined by Adam Burns, and Ben Vickers.

³ See flokociety.org and mappingthecommons.net/es/quito

3. Methodology

Systems theory claims that a system composed of many parts is always more than the sum of its parts. In that respect, while people in three cities may be dealing with similar issues, and while three local groups may be discussing together similar problems, the outcomes resulting from the exchange between them may not be entirely known and anticipated. It is in this very principle that the research and the workshop itself is founded. The outcome of this type of collaboration may not be anticipated and is unpredictable.

The difficult aspect regarding this workshop is indeed methodological. Search in hybrid research areas where design meets, politics, and theories on common systems and theories and complexity may be able to provide our new replies and exits from our current local and hyperlocal deadlocks. The work being done by cyberneticians around the self organization and viability of systems hailing back to pioneering research in the field carried by Stafford Beers has served as source inspiration (Beer 1959; Beer 1985; Espinosa and Walker 2011) So far some main stations which function as milestones and define themselves certain practical steps, while at the same time they advance the agenda are three local workshops in each of the three cities, which function as introduction and opportunity for some participants from all three cities to participate and exchange with each of the local group participants. This occurs taking advantage of the possibility of skype connection and exchange with those found in the other two cities.

The purpose of the local workshops is to introduce the concept of the MET Workshop in each context, to introduce each group to the other and to foster familiarity, solidarity, and perhaps even some sort of peer communities.⁴ This is an arduous process which builds gradually on steps and stages which are based to some extent on a trial and error process.

In addition, part of the research is the investigation of one or more protocols, for communication and collaboration between the various actors getting involved, both at the local level and at the tri-national exchange level. *Participatory Action Research* involves practitioners in the research process from the initial design of the project through data gathering and analysis, to final conclusions and actions arising out of the research.

4. Theoretical precepts

The metropolitan commons is not a new concept, neither are the ideas of participation in the production of the city (Bauwens, 2012; Salingaros, 2010) but currently they appear to gather momentum. Small scale has always been a convincing justification of representative democracy. Any reference to direct democracy today stumbles in scale and complexity issues, while large scale and complexity require other tools, protocols and institutions. Stakes around direct democracy emanate from new participatory governance methods involving the scalar

⁴ Three local workshops in each of the three cities have been designed. The first one took place in Quito, September 2 and 3 at FLACSO and at Parque Bicentenario. Two more are being scheduled (the Athens workshop has been scheduled for November 1 and 2 and the Berlin dates are yet to be confirmed sometime in December).

responsibility of citizens. Although policy is not the subject of the workshop, there is no doubt that the political dimension of such a venture is potentially important, as the three cities involved happen to be in countries which live at times in their history, where one has a particular meaning or effect for the other.⁵ The commons, local and virtual networks, P2P theory, systems theory, complexity and cybernetics, are amongst the theoretical pylons and precepts of the MET research workshop. These are briefly being introduced in the context of the workshop below.

4.1. Reconceiving urban space as Commons

Cities are generally being understood today as an aggregation or assemblage of infrastructures, buildings, relationships and networks that are either public or private.

In a global market economy most urban infrastructures and buildings are designed to facilitate consumption and cities can be seen as complex large scale 'machines' engineered to promote more often than not the flow of capital, over social processes and a cooperative ethos (Harvey 2000; Polanyi 2001; Meretz 2013). Corporate urban development serves primarily the flow of capital. As the capitalist and neoliberal model of urban development invades all aspects of life, it colonizes the collective imaginary. Spaces induce specific types of behavior and emotions. Citizens' attention is constantly being redirected to products and services which form part of a model of achievement. Happiness is linked to constructed needs for possessions, while social relationships are relegated to a lifestyle which favors competitive consumption, rather than cooperative practices. Basic human infrastructures, such as housing or health systems, are no longer produced to satisfy people's needs, but are turned into commodities to fulfill the logic of profit. In the past decades, housing has been seen as a possibility of speculative gain, and the recognition that every person needs a shelter has been overlooked (Harvey 2012).

Urban enclosures are commonplace but they differ in density and character from one culture and one city to another. Corporate enclosures include enclosed resources which have been expropriated, privatized, commodified, incorporated into the market economy and consequently abused (Linebaugh 2014). Thus, practices favoring the wellbeing of a community and commons ethics are being deprived, in a context of urban spaces, buildings and infrastructures that suppress any expression of the commons. Yet, things haven't always been like that. Europe in fact has a rich tradition in the commons and communing ethics which was gradually undermined by the Industrial Revolution process (Bravoand Moor 2008). and has

⁵ Germany and Greece are found in tense relationships as a result of the ongoing debt and financial crisis in Greece and the austerity measures being imposed by Germany in Europe and with particularly devastating consequences in Greece. At the same time, Ecuador represents a country which was found in a somewhat similar situation in 2006 when Alianza Pais came to power. The new government questioned the validity of the accumulated debt of the country, and through an International Debt Audit Commission proved a significant percentage of it to be illegal.

been then taken over by the neoliberal project and the more recently intensified by the current economic crisis (Sassen 2014).

4.2. Systems theory

Concepts such as urban planning, politics and governance, control, and participation involved in a complex situation, require new tools and approaches to understand (Batty 2013; Easterling 2014; Graham 2009). The concept of a system has been established and understood in early twentieth century as a collection of interrelated parts with a purpose, that work together to create a coherent whole (Von Bertalanffy 1969a).

One basic characteristic of a system has been said to be that a system is more than the sum of its parts. This means that the emergent life of a system, the qualities it exhibits and the results it achieves are going to be more and perhaps different and unexpected from the qualities and results each part exhibits. In the case of the workshop being discussed, each separate city and airport case study is being understood as a complex system, itself a whole, composed of many other separate sub-systems.

At the workshop level, it is expected that the triangulation between three cities, three working groups consisting of academics, citizens and others, each consisting of sub-systems with their internal conflicts, clash of interests and ideologies, their respective cultural luggage, experiences, expertise, emotions and affect, will contribute each one to the emergence of unpredictable qualities of a system in the making, the one that the workshop itself proposes and provides the infrastructure for creating. Perhaps we have access to the tools and the methods and perhaps we will possess the desire for a different governance in which the informed opinion and participation of every citizen counts. What could be the process to facilitate this change?

4.3. The emergence of P2P cultures

Peer to Peer Theory and Peer Production have posed a radical, utopian -and until the advent of the internet and the forms of communication it affords- indeed an unthinkable proposition. That proposition implies that it might be possible to overcome geopolitical borders, and promote collaboration between individuals in a common project, and beyond this condition, it offers the glimpse into a post-capitalist future, in which societies and economies are based in cooperation and commons-based economy (Kostakis and Bauwens 2014). We have seen it happening already at various levels of sophistication. It has been one of the outcomes of some of the basic qualities of human nature and of the connectivity which exists today. Humans are social and collaborative beings able and willing to exchange information, and cooperate in complementary ways in order to produce something. Most of us may have taken part in peer to peer activity by collaborating with co-workers, colleagues or friends. The beauty of this “cloud” of human ingenuity and energy which combines forces between various individuals towards the production of something new, is that it can acquire large scale and critical significance. Not only

is the production of useful works to everyone highly sophisticated and increasingly gets to be even more popular and widely accepted, but it is that it imperceptibly forges a new ethics and code of conduct which needs to be highlighted.

Open Source is an outcome of the open processes afforded by the structure of the internet and of code writing. As a development model it promotes universal access via free license to software, or hardware including design or blueprint for products, and universal redistribution freely accessible and open to subsequent improvements by anyone. Since the introduction of the term which went viral, “open source” has become an accepted meme to highlight a paradigm shift in production that is open, participatory, transparent and accountable (Bollier 2014, 123). Emerging P2P practices, production, and ethics provide a common ground for developing this horizontal laboratory bringing in collaborative practices three disparate working groups. P2P theories and practices in conjunction with urban commons, examined across three case studies characterized by asymmetric power and geopolitical dynamics in process, form the context of this workshop.

5. Three case studies: things in common and traces of commoning

The setting and the framework of this project derives from the author’s knowledge of three ex airports in three cities and his research interests in spatial and urban commons and P2P production. The Elliniko case in Athens was followed by a few opportunities to experience Tempelhof. Later on, a nine month stay as post-doctoral researcher in Quito, was an opportunity to research the Mariscal Sucre ex airport, currently Parque Bicentenario. A horizontal remark concerning all three have to do with the realization of the importance of these spaces. All three of them happen to fall in the category of airports that have served a major metropolitan area, a capital city in all three countries. They are all central in regards with the urban fabric of their respective city. What follows below is an introduction into, and brief history of the three case studies.

5.1. The old Mariscal-Sucre, currently Parque Bicentenario, Quito

The old Mariscal-Sucre airport (1960-2013) sits in the center of the now expanded city of Quito. Three months after its closure as an airport it was transformed into “Parque Bicentenario de Quito”. With a total area of 125 hectares, this new park is one of the largest in the District of Quito. The masterplan calls for an ambitious environmental scheme of high ecological value and according to official programmatic plans it will feature recreational, educational and cultural areas. Since its inception it has been functioning as an urban park available to citizens, and it quickly became a favorite spot for recreation activities which include walking, biking, airplane model flying, etc. Artistic activities have also taken place in its relatively short life as a park. Meanwhile real estate in combination with future metro access has put high pressure on Parque Bicentenario for development plans. Recent discussions between President Rafael

Correa and Qatari investors present scenarios of private Qatari investments for the construction of a convention center, a stadium for spectacles and an aquarium.⁶ More recently, the Parque Bicentenario was used to host the visit of the Pope in July of 2015. A huge stage was installed and the vast space of the ex airport was filled with hundreds of millions of people. In a symbolic sense for believers the space was consecrated in the collective imaginary of the people and was elevated to the public sphere.

5.2. The Ellinikon, Athens

The old Elliniko airport Elliniko (1938-2001) was the international airport of Athens, for sixty years up until 2001, when it was replaced by the new Athens International Airport. During the Nazi occupation the site was used in 1941 as a Luftwaffe air base. After World War II, the Greek government allowed the United States to use the airport from 1945 until 1993. By agreement with Greece, the USAF operated out of the airport for four decades. The airport was a base of operations by the Greek national carrier Olympic Airways and the main international airport of Greece. After its closure the northwest portion of the airport was redeveloped, converting runways into a sports park that housed the 2004 Summer Olympics venues for canoe/kayak slalom, field hockey, baseball, and softball. One of the airport's western hangars became the main Olympic fencing venue and one of the larger Olympic indoor basketball arenas. An international competition for a metropolitan park on the former site of the Ellinikon Airport was held in 2005. By 2012 and in the context of the severe crisis in the country, the Greek government has had plans to attract investors and develop the site commercially bypassing the completion. Meanwhile, the National Technical University of Athens (NTUA) proposed alternative plans and neighboring communities have been stout advocates and activists over the airport to remain a metropolitan park. Various activist collectives, and citizens have been envisioning and practicing successful commoning activities for the past six years.

Recently there have been actions taken by the Greek government to proceed with a long-term leasing contract of the site to private interests for development for profit, which have been temporarily halted for legal reasons.⁷ The debt crisis is being used as a tool for privatization and the largest enclosures in recent Greek history. In recent times, the Elliniko remains closed. The adjacent municipalities have requested permission to use part of the space for waste management.

⁶ <http://www.telegrafo.com.ec/noticias/quito/item/grupo-qatari-confirma-inversion-de-5-000-millones-en-obras-para-quito.html>

⁷ <http://www.thepressproject.gr/article/70370/Pagos-stin-polisi-tou-Ellinikou>

5.3. Tempelhof, Berlin

Tempelhof airport presents an interesting case study. The former Berlin airport (1923-2007) is a large plot of land, emotionally charged with heavy references from the Nazi history of the country. Since 2007, and while speculative discussions about its future were raging, it has been used consistently as a metropolitan space with an identity which is formed by it functioning as a hybrid space much more than a typical park, by containing temporary activities, such as art exhibits, collective urban gardening and recreation, administered by citizens. The enormous popularity and success of the former airport began to address the emergence of a "commons ethics" among Berliners. In a recent Referendum over Tempelhof's future (25/5/2014) the "no buildings" concept expressing the people's vision won over the *Abgeordnetenhaus*. The latter was the municipal government's masterplan concept of development. The referendum now protects the Tempelhof Field from sale, development and partial privatization and makes it available to the public in its entirety, without any permanent restrictions. The decision recognizes the site's importance as a historic site and a place of remembrance and serves the future of leisure and recreation, as well as its function as an inner-city air cooling region, and as a habitat for plants and animals. Most importantly, it provides the basis for a commons future for Tempelhof.⁸

More recently, new activity has been taking place around the conceptualization of citizens' participation around the theme of "*hack tempelhof*" and various projects and initiatives around this goal have been developing, while Tempelhof infrastructure is being used to host Syrian refugees.

6. Urban futures and city governance models, Ex-airports as metropolitan commons

The fundamental concept behind commons theories is a governance model which allows for collective access and management of a resource. Such a resource could be conceptualized to be the city itself in terms of its land as well as its infrastructure. The idea of a metropolitan commons as an idea, addresses the concept of urban commons at a grand scale. The three case studies present a problem relating to the entire city, due to their centrality and they offer the scale that justifies the term of metropolitan commons, and the important role they may play in their futures.

Based on the common infrastructures that these spaces share, the possibly vast differences which may exist between different cultures present a challenge to be bridged. It is an equivalent of the familiarity that a chain of a store or multinational headquarters present, by applying a set of similar principles to structures found in disparate places in terms of culture and climate zone. Of course this could be easily dismissed as superficial, as it might be the case with a café chain store to be found everywhere, but as it also relies on the emergent P2P cultures which move ahead bypassing such impediments, it has equal chances of getting

⁸ https://www.wahlen-berlin.de/abstimmungen/VE2014_TFeld/ErgebnisUeberblick.asp?sel1=6053&sel2=0799

somewhere, currently not known. Each one of the three case studies is firmly embedded in the urban fabric of its respective city. It is in that sense symbolically placed in the collective imaginary of each city's citizens.

Tempelhof is an airport that has been embraced by Berlin's citizens immediately as a participatory open space and park. A period of several years has already gone by in which it has functioned as such and used by large numbers of people. The observations over each airport's potential in becoming a commons relate to its recent history and the obstacles being encountered and tools being used. We observe early on that the trajectory of each airport's future related to the openness that has been implemented in the recent past.

The future of humanity and stakes of democracy and social justice is evolving in cities, where as it is known now lives more than half the world's population. As more than half of the human population lives now in cities and this trend is bound to continue, the urban futures are crucial to our survival.⁹ Why should the important decisions for the future of the city belong to the jurisdiction of any government, as progressive that may be?

Neither the future of cities, nor the future of governance are known. In fact they both are put to questioning and become the object of research or contestation. Governance is a term implying the spheres of politics and economy and it addresses the way that a body is being managed in terms of decision-making, distribution of wealth and resources. Current models of representation in government have been contested globally in recent years denouncing corruption, oligarchy, unequal distribution and exclusion.

Interestingly all three cities and three case studies have had resurgence on discussions around the commons and a growing interest which expresses itself over a variety of actions.¹⁰ It appears therefore that there is a fertile ground in all three cities in terms of a culture which supports and investigates the commons.

1.1. The viability of urban commoning as a governance model

Certain theoretical questions spring out of this research, which this workshop attempts to address, in an effort to understand alternative paradigms for an urban future. Is there such a thing as an urban commons, and if so, where is it manifested? The questions and headaches that sheer logistics of scale and complexity rise when it comes to today's cities, their

⁹ The topic will be addressed with a sense of urgency later next year in Habitat III.

¹⁰ Berlin has hosted conferences and other major events (UN|COMMONS Conference 22-24/10 <http://berlingazette.de/uncommons/>. Athens was host of the third Commonsfest <http://commonsfest.info/en/> and of the first Mapping the Commons workshop (2010) which was taken to more cities around the world, Quito being the most recent (2014) <http://mappingthecommons.net/es/quito/>. Due to the ongoing crisis Athens is home to many initiatives around the commons but in one form or another this is also true for Berlin and to a lesser extend for Quito as well, so all three cities either at an academic level or at a grassroots level have been experiencing substantial activity on the topic. As it would be expected this takes different meaning being part of a different cultural context in each one.

management and governance, require the deployment of new tools. This type of research is currently being carried out at different places. Tempelhof for instance has become the hub around which various types of digital tools and software are being tried out (ie Liquid Democracy, etc). VSM emerges as another type of management tool coming from the cybernetics tradition (Espinosa and Walker 2011; Beer 1985).

1.2. Cultural and geopolitical backgrounds and contradictions

How can people in three different cities meaningfully communicate with one another in order to discuss an issue that each addresses in their own backyard? Is there a language barrier which needs to be addressed? How does culture relate to these attempts?

Public property, its relation to public space and national sovereignty vary between national to European, and international levels. Every culture as well as every city have their own proper set of values and ways. This particularity is being reflected in how they are being run. This may seem obvious, but it tends to be overlooked, and there is a need that it should be taken into consideration from the start. Especially in attempts to bring people together from different cultures to collaborate and exchange knowledge, the need to mediate information in a foreign language is only one obvious part of the problem, as the cultural translators besides ordinary translators, sometimes may prove to be even more critical in order to get a message across. When it comes to expressing values over the commons, it seems that the cultural lens worn by every participant are the ones that really define the dynamics, the flow or stoppage of information and exchange.

Airports vaguely perceived as public spaces, can be “constitutional twilight zones”. The once liberal emphasis to individualized private property rights has nowadays led to the enclosure and subsumption of public space to supranational companies. What is to be done?

Ex-airports are under threat of various types to be subsumed, primarily as urban land for privatization. This threat has been looming on all three case studies and has, or has not been fended off.

2. Steps taken, steps anticipated

Two local workshops have been conducted up until the moment of this writing. The first two-day workshop took place in Quito Ecuador, on September 2 and 3 2015. The first day was at FLACSO, and was based on a schedule which involved presentations and discussion. It incorporated an introduction by the author. This was then followed by two skype presentations representing a brief history of Elliniko and Tempelhof, each of the airports in the two other cities of Athens and Berlin respectively, and they occurred via teleconference. These were offered by Antonios Broumas, a technology lawyer and activist in Athens, and Oliver Lenore Schultz an academic (philosophy, history of science, transmediale) in Berlin. These two presentations were followed by another presentation, by Janaina Marx and Hernán Espinoza, both architects, who presented some of the work and methodology of the Grupo Indisciplinar –

UFMG/Brasil with case studies from the defense around the struggles of the urban commons at Belo Horizonte.¹¹ The event ended with a discussion amongst participants and was moderated by Marco Cordova, researcher and professor at FLACSO.

The second workshop took place in Athens on November 1 and 2 2015. It involved a tour of Elliniko and a workshop. The first day, a Sunday consisted of a guided tour within the Elliniko vast and compartmentalized grounds. The second day was based on a schedule which involved presentations and discussion and took place at the Athens University Dept of Communication. It involved an introduction by the author explaining the concept and background. This was followed by a presentation on Elliniko by Fereniki Vatavali, an architect-urbanist. A skype presentation was offered then by Adam Burns, a specialist on local digital networks, residing in Berlin and closely involved with Tempelhof. Ilias Marmaras presented a case study of commons in communities from the north of Greece. A discussion which was informed and inspired by the diverse information, topics and presentations followed, allowing for follow-up steps to be taken.

Besides these local workshops and milestone conference presentations (BTO/2015 in Goteborg, Urban Commons in Bologna and Acting Together in Belgrade) the workshop will participate by invitation in the Transmediale festival in Berlin in February 2016, and it will use the event as a platform for staging a moderated virtual debate with participants from the three working groups. The progression of the process itself together with the data, ideas and proposals may become the subject of exhibitions that will be organized in the three cities.

2.1. Current findings

From recent updates, studies of the histories of each one of the three localities, site visits and fieldwork in the spaces of the former airports themselves as well as their respective cities, interesting information emerges which reveal societal structures, related to existing spatial structures. It is clear that urban commons are directly linked to active communing, that is the sum of acts which are related to active participation at various levels. They are also related to spatial, cultural and even climatic specificities of a particular place and community. *Commoning* is an act as well as a habit and a life principle that is acquired and is also cultivated. Where it doesn't exist, it may be triggered by various motives and occasions. Therefore, in order to better understand the state of the three former airports in the urban commons scale, it is important to study and assess the state of communing of their respective cities and societies. This is not being done here fully, as this research project is still at an early stage, yet a reading of the each former airport site and its respective city is being attempted.

¹¹ See <http://blog.indisciplinar.com/>

2.2. The case studies urban context

Quito is a city with a strong tradition in communing which is an integral part of the culture of indigenous peoples of Ecuador, which is manifested in the tradition of *mingas*, a tradition of collective communal work towards a common goal such as harvesting, construction and maintenance of community structures or infrastructures. In the case of Quito the Kitu Karas, the local people which preexisted colonial times, and their traditions remain very much alive and they have also imbued to some degree the larger mestizo population, which Quito consists of, and the urban culture at large. Even though the presence of urban commons is not immediately evident, it has become clear that the city's parks of which there are several, serve that purpose to a large degree, and there are cases which the author has been studying of various degrees of communing and community commons to be found in the larger urban area of Quito.

Athens is a city which lacks drastically in public spaces and parks. Those that do exist, are in a bad state of neglect and enjoy a low level of recognition, use and care by the citizens. Athens is also characterized by enclosures, in the sense that whatever public space does exist, it is heavily compartmentalized, divided, fenced and enclosed. This condition mostly reproduces itself and breeds indifference. Athenians live for the most part in apartment buildings typologically known as *polykatoikia*, a building type based on maximum land use and housing seen as an exchange value for profit. This typology has totally minimized or completely excluded the presence of communal spaces, with dire consequences on peoples' shaping behaviors characterized by a privileged private sphere and a corrupted sense of public life, in terms of relations and a code of conduct. People's attitudes towards public life may be characterized as contrived (Anastasopoulos 2012). Yet the crisis has formed a new context of awakening, followed quickly by collective initiatives towards the reclaiming, protection and management of public space in various forms, acts which, no doubt, clearly constitute acts of communing (Anastasopoulos 2013).

Berlin is perhaps the antithesis of Athens in terms of percentage ratio between private and public. With the reunification of East with West Berlin, it is endowed with abundant public spaces and parks, and a highly structured and complex public life and code of conduct. This condition forms the context for a different use, awareness and stake of citizens in the public sphere. The typical Berlin housing block consists of a square of four or five storey buildings with an internal courtyard, which provides the basis for a sense of communing and urban commons at the daily life level. There is a huge variety to be found in the identity and use of these inner courtyards which may contain playgrounds, community spaces, shops and communal gardens among several functions that are hosted. At the same time active participation, use and experience within the public domain is vibrant and is forming a tradition. Commoning becomes an outgrowth of this already existing reality and experience.

2.3. The current state of former airport case studies

Parque Bicentenario, the former Mariscal Sucre airport in Quito, had the fortune to be christened a park soon after it divested its role as an airport, thanks to the then mayor of Quito, Augusto Barrera. The motivations that politicians have are not transparent, but the end result is. The space became public and “green” through relatively mild interventions, which included an implemented plan of planting of trees and shrubs, the addition of signage and public toilets and outdoor structures such as children playgrounds, seating areas, etc. some of the infrastructure of the existing buildings have been refurbished and have become headquarters for the Quito Tourism agency of the municipality of Quito.

Elliniko in our site visit revealed a highly compartmentalized vast area, most of which is fenced, it is in terms of the state of urban commons, bluntly described as a sum of enclosures. A group of active citizens has consistently been involved in the “Agros Elliniko” communal gardening project, in an area which strictly speaking is not part of the former Elliniko airport, but sits adjacent to it.¹² Adjacent to it the Metropolitan Community Clinic of Elliniko has been successfully applying a remarkable and innovative structure of health care in a cooperative context which allows for underprivileged individuals which have lost their health coverage (a condition which has become commonplace in the context of the prolonged and severe crisis that the country is experiencing) or never had health care coverage, as in the case of many immigrants, to receive health care.

Tempelhof has been enthusiastically embraced and fought for as a public space where citizens adopted the runways for biking and the lawns for pick-nicking, urban gardening, artistic events, music concerts and many more types of activities. The shape of the airport plays an important role in this as does perhaps the presence of nature in the form of old and large trees within its boundaries. Countless mobilizations and actions have been taking place regarding Tempelhof’s future around the collective desire and collective imaginary to maintain it a public space. In reality behind the term “public space” the notion of a metropolitan commons has been gradually forming and taking shape. This very project (The MET workshop) because of that has resonated and has been invited to form part of one of the highlighted projects of the Transmediale festival, taking place in Berlin every year, emphasizing in the role of new media in the shaping of new cultures and urban conditions.¹³

¹²See Agros Elliniko at <http://agroselliniko.blogspot.gr/>

¹³See Transmediale <http://2016.transmediale.de/>

3. Conclusions: (Air)-Ports for people and ideas: Assessing the challenges and expectations of a transnational, transdisciplinary endeavor

From the above brief descriptions it becomes clear that various factors are at play in the shaping identity of each space.

Yet, all airports share some common infrastructure: runways, control towers, hangars, and so on. It is some sort of common language developed over time to service the normal functions an airport accomplishes. Ex-airports are endowed with this inheritance and challenge. This is therefore perceived as an invitation to examine the types of social, technical, legal and operational infrastructure there may be. The [air] port indicates that it is a space about transfer.¹⁴ Airports have traditionally been connecting points between places and ports are connecting between devices. The particular project implies that airports which used to carry people and goods good turn into ideas-ports, carrying people's creativity, willingness for collaboration, exchange, desire to know and discover, desire to co-create!

Equally, in an effort to design our urban futures together, in common and discovering and weaving the metropolitan commons through a P2P production, the challenges are many, some of which may be imagined and anticipated, while some others cannot. They relate to such obvious difficulties, as communication and technological challenges, to less obvious ones, such as organizational diagrams of the collaborators, the openness of people being involved allowing for a fluidity of energy or obstructing it, problems of consistency and commitment. information and dynamics vs more closed, controlled and rigid groups which are usually dictated by funding or formal organizational structures which will soon be addressed, especially as the project seeks to maintain a dialog between academic research and activist and or citizen initiatives. Social technologies like *Open Space*, *World Café*, i and cybernetic technologies like VSM are being examined and possibly some of the above will be deployed into the protocols being needed. At the same time virtual debate and decision-making technologies and tools such as *Liquid democracy* may also come into use.

While the steps become increasingly clear and the path is being revealed as it is treaded upon, the outcome may not be predicated, as this is an open-ended process based on local research groups and peer collaboration, and dependent on the dynamic complexities of both local societies and their interaction.

¹⁴ In the traditional sense, a **port** is a location on a coast or shore where ships can dock and transfer people or cargo to or from land. In computing a port serves as an endpoint in an operating system for many types of communication. It is not a hardware device, but a logical construct that identifies a service or process. (as described for both this terms in Wikipedia)

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