

# Nodes of Future Change: The Workers' Clubs network in Athens, Greece

Foteini Georgakopoulou

## Abstract:

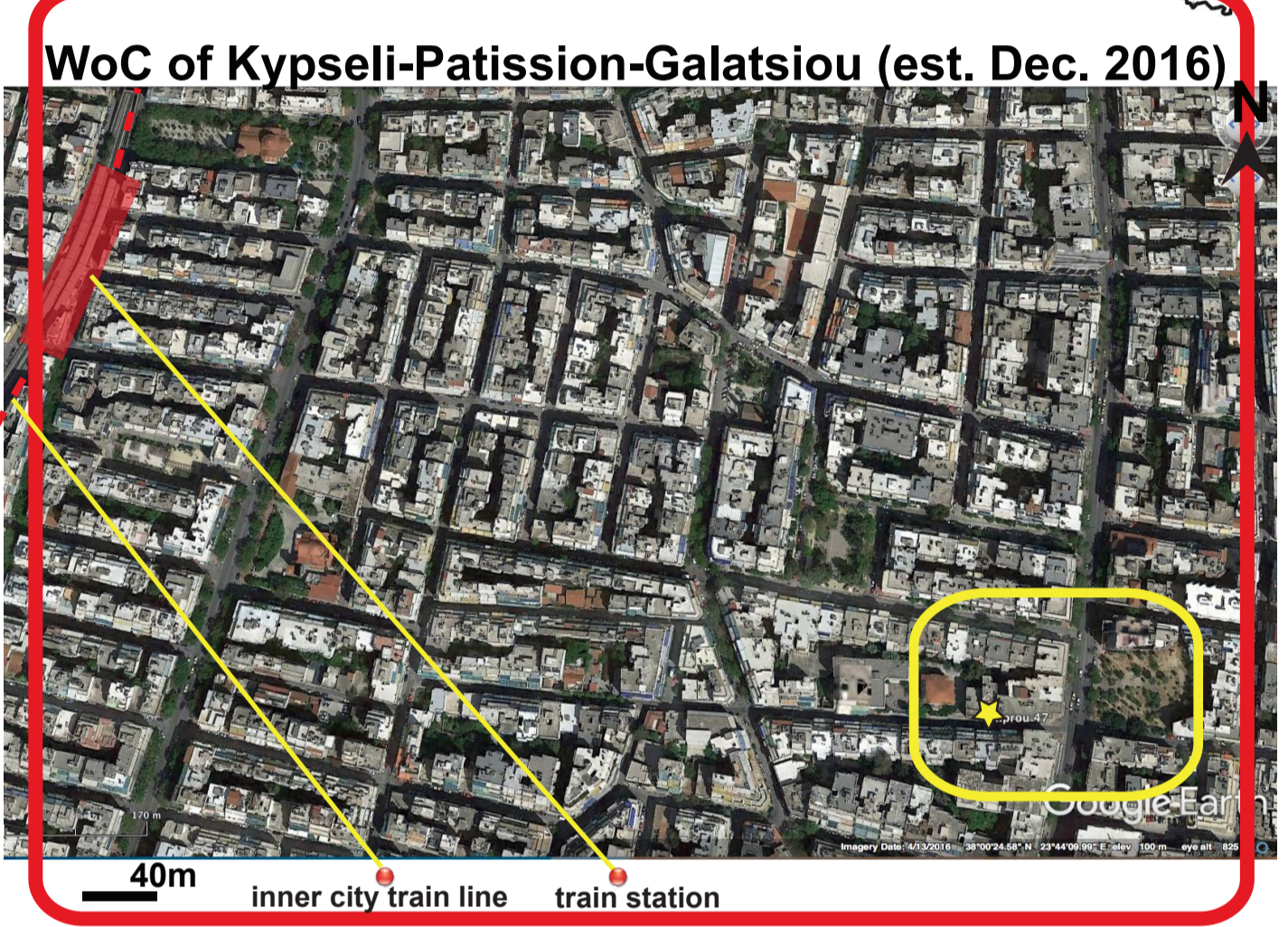
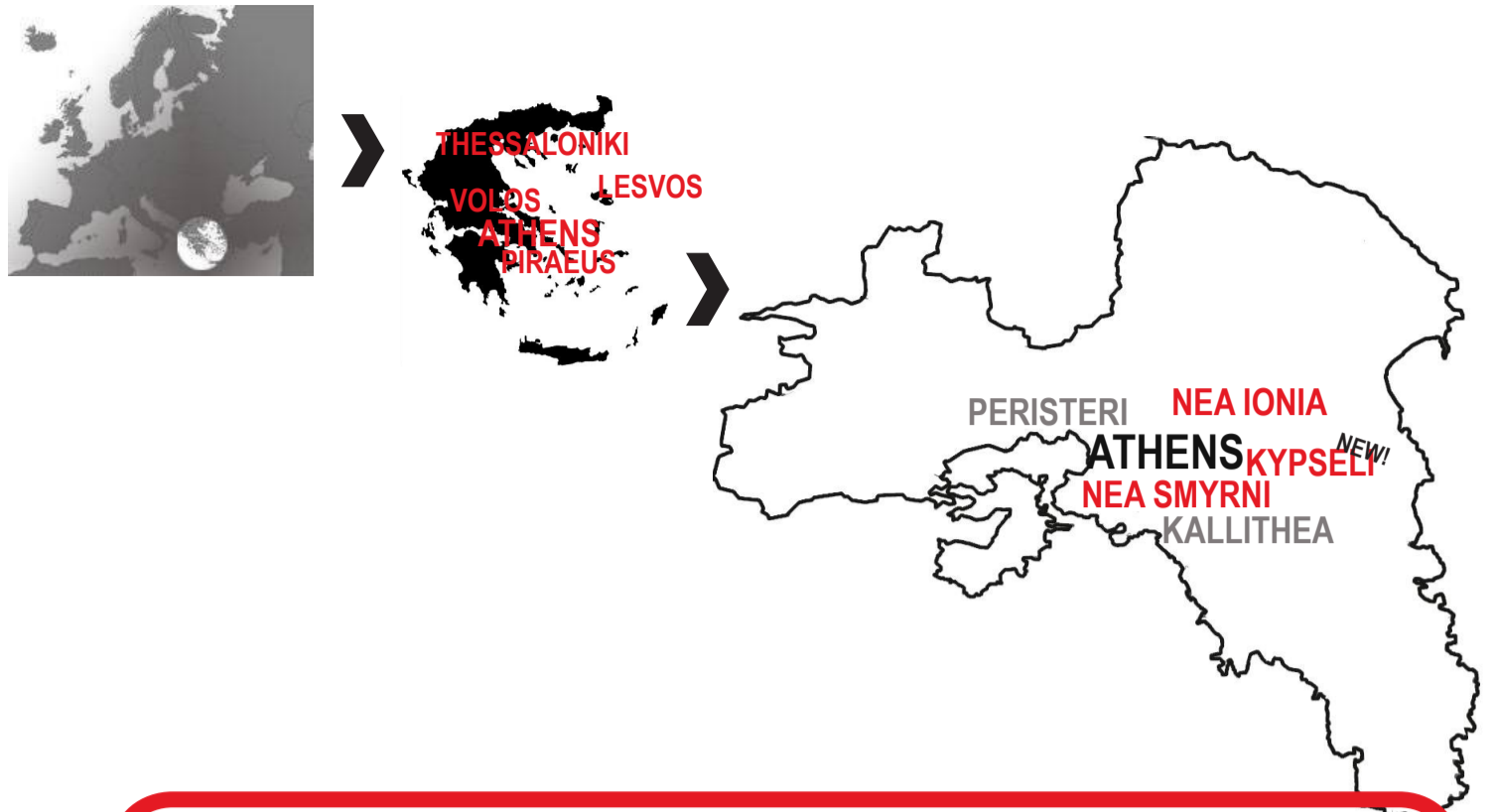
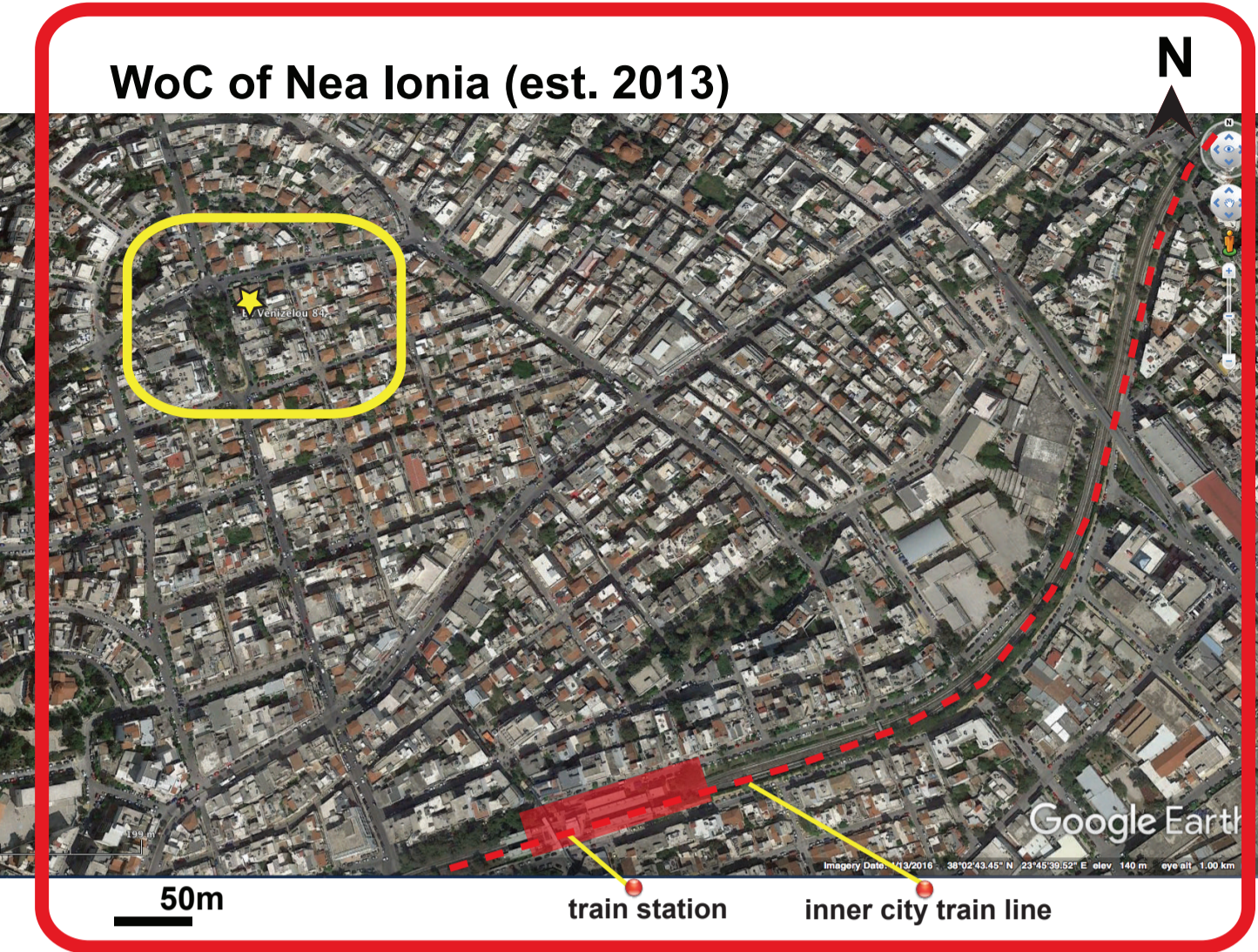
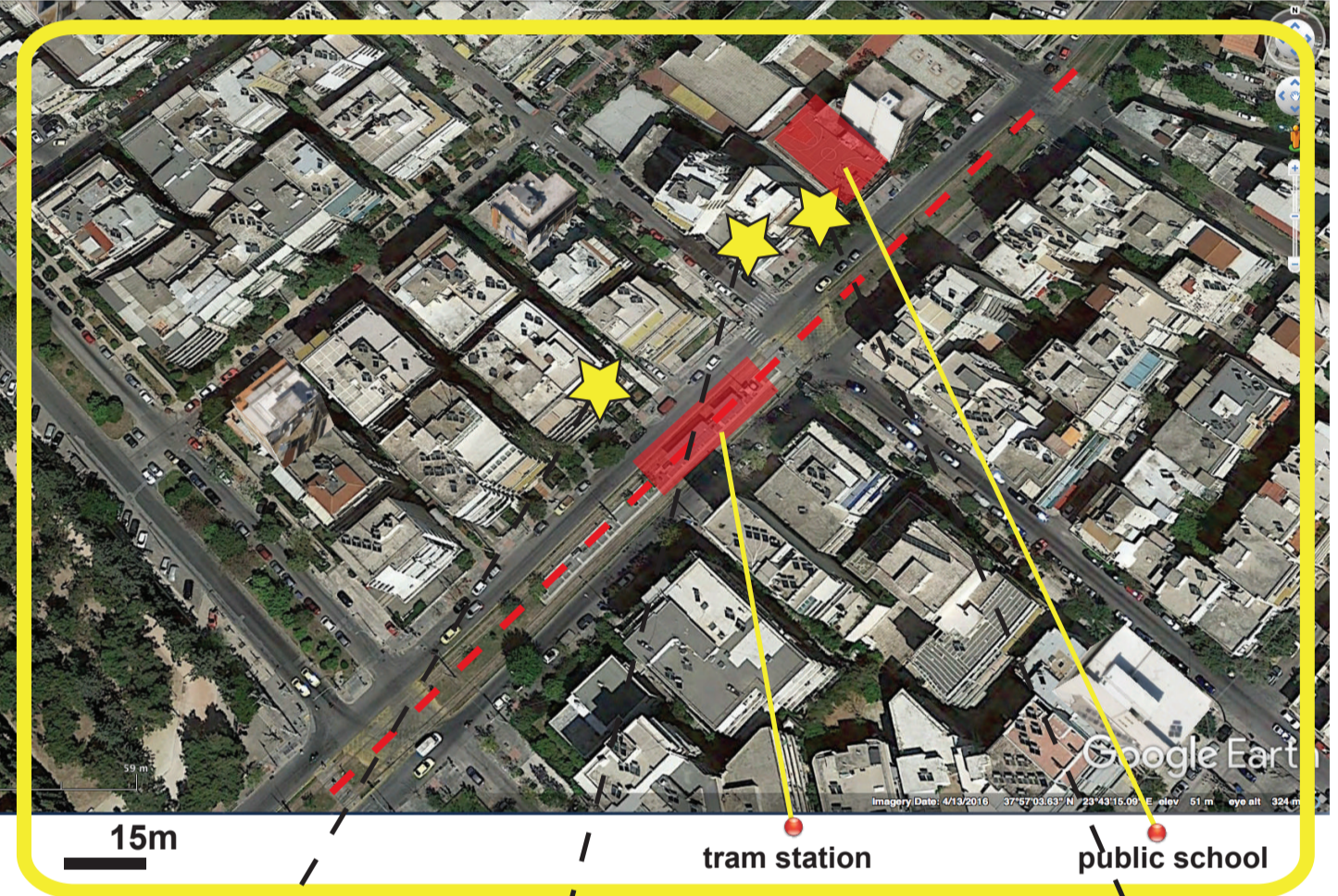
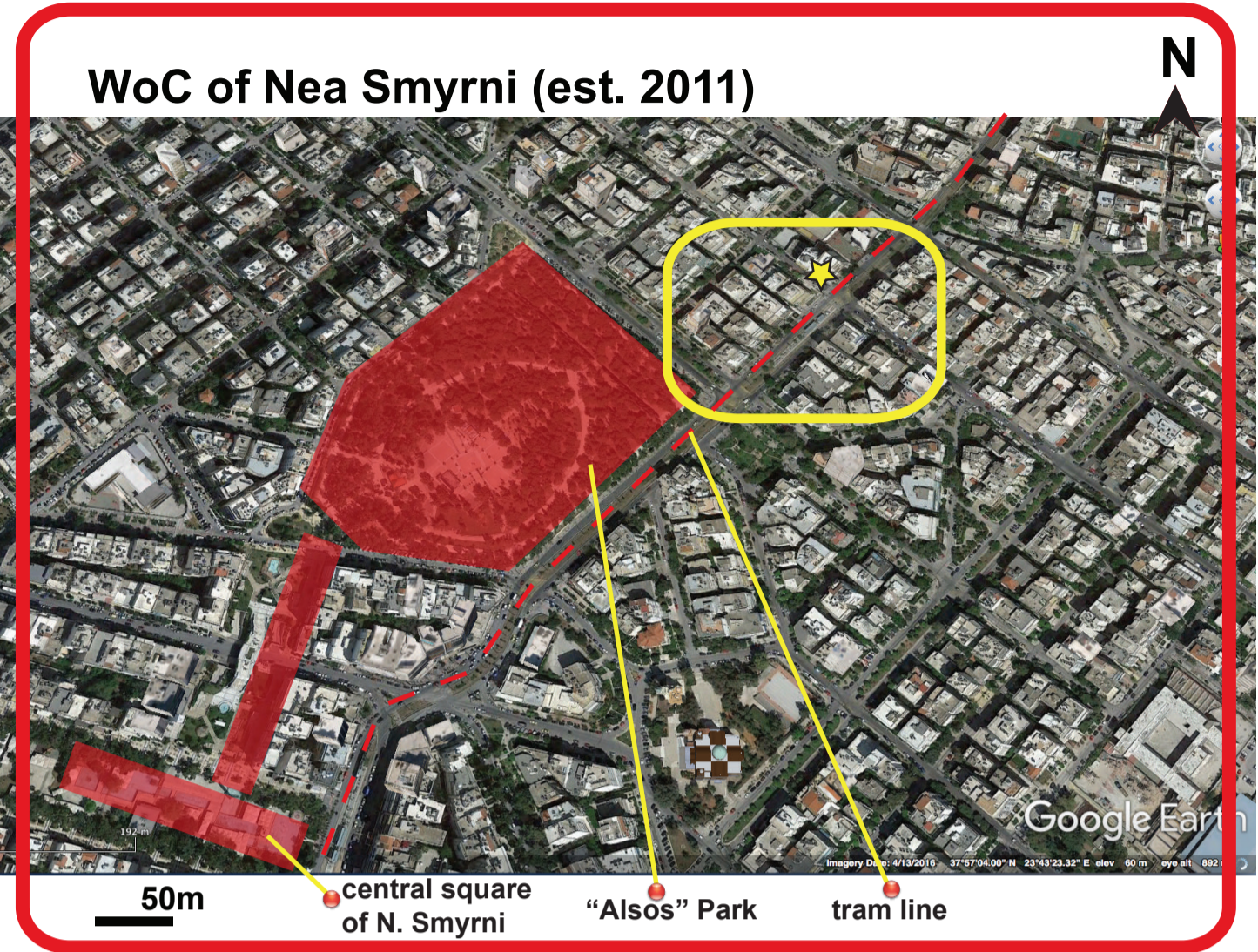
Greece and especially Athens has seen a proliferation of self-organized community spaces that spread all-over after 2008, starting point of a profound social and, after the winter of 2009, a financial crisis as well. The majority among them has a distinctly anti-hierarchical profile and aspires to challenging and providing alternatives to the prevailing model of capitalist subsumption: assemblies' hangouts, workers' clubs, markets without intermediaries, recycling collectives, community kitchens / parks / time exchange banks. As the crisis deepened these spaces supported substantially more and more people who increasingly suffered by the austerity measures: even first degree health structures were added to the aforementioned initiatives' list. Among them the example of the Workers' Clubs network stands as an impressively functional model offering a collective new paradigm to the onslaught of the ongoing crisis. This paradigm originated in 2011 from an already politically active group of ordinary working people who decided to act against the pervading misery in a threefold way: in Solidarity – by Culture – in Workers' Support. Solidarity is very crucial since within the harsher and harsher working environment the overworked or chronically unemployed are often left behind, already too exhausted or even crashed to react and participate. The Workers' Clubs collect and distribute food to those in need and also offer supplementary school lessons to the children of poor families. These actions though are absolutely not meant as charity from the haves to the have nots but as help from those below to those who have an equal standing. The same goes with Culture that starts with and proceeds to: traditional dance lessons, foreign languages lessons, poetry readings, film projections, theater performances, music concerts, all offered for free. This is possible by reaching more and more members who support the initiative each according to his/her capability and thus sharing effectively the maintenance costs. The ultimate goal is the formation of emancipated subjects who through participation will be in a position to demand not only better working conditions but on the whole a dignified life as well. Workers' Clubs are located centrally within their neighborhoods and have been slowly but steadily expanding since their start. Mostly they occupy rented spaces and are not squats, enjoy increasing visibility and often are more active than the established and more or less funded municipal / state facilities. The paper aspires to examining the multiple ways in which these new open spaces change their communities by interacting positively with their respective neighborhoods by conducting interviews with founding members of three representative initiatives. Also, more specifically the spatial models of the clubs' locations are studied through map/land use analysis and their respective "imprints" are discussed in order to hopefully establish a relation between the tangible and intangible zones of influence.

## Working hypothesis

The informal network of WoCs in Athens as well as in Greece, contrary to the decline of many initiatives, seems solid enough not only to maintain its position, but in some cases, even to contemplate its expansion, in the face of growing social and economic adversity.

In this light, I assume that:

1. there are lessons to be learned from below regarding the *spatial characteristics* of the WoCs and these may prove valuable for the [re] education of students of architecture and professionals alike
2. the emphasis on the working issues that is crucial for the WoCs makes them an exemplary platform for opening the discussion about *alternative, socially relevant work paradigms*, up to the point of possibly creating new work content
3. these alternative work models, investigated and/or applied, could be *testing the limits* of the dominant exploitative attitude towards production, environment, and ultimately, *of our way of life* itself



## spatial characteristics:



1: Public Transportation

## towards socially relevant work paradigms:

- creative ~~destruction~~<sup>2</sup>
- cooperation
- knowledge **creating+diffusing**
- resource **accumulation**
- brand **community** building
- socially **engaged** innovation<sup>3</sup>

2: as in the Schumpeterian term  
3: a D. Harvey term

testing the limits of our life style:

DEGROWTH?  
**[IF] DEGROWN, NOT LUDDITED!**

## indicative\* REFERENCES:

- 1) Schumpeter, J. (1942) *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*. [online] Available at: <http://cnqzu.com/library/Economics/marxian%20economics/Schumpeter,%20Joeseeph-Capitalism,%20Socialism%20and%20Democracy.pdf> [Accessed 25 May 2017]
- 2) Harvey, D. (2016) *Bad Infinity and the Madness of Economic Reason*. [online lecture from the Series "Marx and Capital: The Concept, The Book, The History"]. "Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cehxITrzDiA> [Accessed 25 May 2017]
- 3) Georgakopoulou, F. (2015), *Self-organised social centers as counter-culture structures*, radiobubble, [web radio broadcast discussion]. Available at: <http://www.deplaced.gr/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/stekia-radiobubble.mp3> [Accessed 25 May 2017] (in Greek)

\* for complete references pls go to the full-paper

## Acknowledgements:

A debt of thanks to Dimitris Z. from the WoC of N.Smyrni, to Ageliki V. and Antonis L. from the WoC of N. Ionia, also to Anna K. from the WoC of Kypseli

## Contact information:

Foteini Georgakopoulou, Architect - Independent Researcher, Athens, GREECE, fgeo@tee.gr