

Cooperative Media in Greece. Obstacles, lessons learned and the way forward

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For many years, the field of alternative media in Greece constituted a terra incognita both in theory as in practice. This situation changed quite radically after the onset of the Greek economic crisis that brought to light several initiatives that flourished under the cooperative model. Against the backdrop of the pro-austerity reporting and the disconnection between mainstream press and society, informal selforganized groups and networks of independent journalists, filmmakers, documentary producers and other media personnel started emerging, exploring new models of production based on social values such as trust and collaboration rather than economic benefits (Iosifidis and Boucas 2015; Siapera and Papadopoulou 2016). At the same time, various academics started to take notice of this emerging field and tried to record and analyse it.

Notwithstanding this interest, there is a consensus that the study of cooperative media in Greece deserves further exploration since there is still a significant research gap in that field (Lekakis 2017). This can be attributed to the fact that, as in relative literature, alternative media are often analysed with reference to either content or production practices (e.g. Couldry and Curran 2003; Fuchs 2010). What is missing is an approach that combines theory with practice bringing together academic analysis with the real life challenges and problems that cooperative media face.

The aim of this panel is to function as a bridge between what we know theoretically so far about cooperative media and what actually happens in practice. Is the cooperative model a viable model? What kind of advantages do media cooperatives have –if they have- in the media market? What are the most important challenges they have faced till now and how did they respond to them? To answer these questions and discuss further about the problems and the future of cooperative media, three representatives of cooperative media will take part in this panel; Dina Daskalopoulou from Efimerida ton Syntakton (EfSyn), Konstantinos Poulis from Press Project and Stavroula Poulimeni from Alterthess.

Efimerida ton Syntakton (EfSyn) is the country's first national cooperative newspaper. EfSyn was established in 2012 by media workers who went unemployed after the bankruptcy of Eleftherotypia, a newspaper that was founded in 1975. Eleftherotypia used to be one of the country's most widely circulated outlets and one of the leading daily Greek newspapers. After it went bankrupt, several members of its staff raised capital, launched EfSyn and ran it as a cooperative. Its first issue was published on 5 November 2012. Ntina Daskalopoulou will present the founding values of the cooperative and the everyday challenges of a media that is owned by 120 people.

Press project was established in 2009 and today constitutes a reader-funded, open-access cooperative digital media. ThePressProject is a member of a number of international journalism networks: The Intercept, Project Syndicate, openDemocracy, PoliticalCritique.org, The European Center for Press and Media Freedom, International Press Institute, and Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso. Contributors to ThePressProject have included Julian Assange, Mark Blyth, Srećko Horvat, Paul Mason, and Yanis Varoufakis. It played a crucial role in 2013 when the country's right wing government abruptly shut down

Greece's PMS. Efimeros, PressProject's late founder and his team tapped into satellite signals broadcast surreptitiously by PMS employees and posted them to the group's Web site and on social media. Poulis will talk about the challenges of their business model that is exclusively based on their readers and does not accept any funding from political or banking interests.

Finally, Alterthess is a small independent media cooperative based in Thessaloniki. Recently, it made it to the headlines as one of their journalists, Stavroula Poulimeni received a lawsuit by an executive at the firm Hellas Gold demanding €100,000 in damages over an article the site had published on 27 October 2020. The lawsuit also threatened Poulimeni with criminal sanctions. Various Press Freedom organizations condemned this SLAPP lawsuit pointing to the chilling effect that it might have on critical journalism. Poulimeni will talk about the way small media cooperatives can navigate these kind of threats without negotiating their journalistic freedom.

Ultimately this panel aims to bring together representatives from a variety of media cooperatives and initiate a long overdue conversation about the ways they can overcome the challenges they meet. This discussion could lead not only to synergies among those initiatives but also function as a roadmap for aspiring future media cooperatives.

References

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