

## **From Inside the Rhizome: Mapping the Greek Alternative Mediascape**

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We use the rhizome metaphor to approach the highly elusive and contingent field of alternative media. We explore the multiplicity of alternative media practices employed by diverse social actors, critically reflecting on the rhizome's capacity to foster cooperation and synergy, building alliances. At the empirical level, the article maps the Greek alternative mediascape; highlights the multiple paths that lead participants into it and explains the heterogeneity of the field; evaluates the diverse ways in which alternative media projects challenge hegemonic power; and explores connections within the alternative mediascape, revealing the presence of both cooperation/solidarity and isolationism/fragmentation. Last, we discuss how these findings feed back into the concept of the rhizome in the context of alternative media.

*Keywords: alternative media, rhizome, hegemony, ideology, Greece*

This study looks inside the alternative mediascape in Greece, focusing on its internal logics and existential conditions. To this aim, it draws on the notion of the rhizome, as conceptualized in the seminal work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987). The idea of the rhizome can work as a powerful metaphor that emphasizes "fluidity" and "kinesis" (Downing, 2015) and may have "heuristic consequences" (p. 101<sup>2</sup>) regarding how the destabilization of rigidities and certainties "is discursively and materially played out" (Carpentier, 2016, p. 5) in the alternative mediascape. Alternative media have been envisaged as rhizomatic media (Bailey, Cammaerts, & Carpentier, 2008; Gilman-Opalsky, 2013); yet, a systematic operationalization of the rhizome to look into its internal relations in the context of alternative media has yet to emerge. In

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<sup>1</sup> Both authors contributed equally to this work.

<sup>2</sup> Downing (2015) acknowledges the merit of the rhizome metaphor in stressing spontaneity and connectedness but considers it another "static metaphor" in the reductionist terms of "represent[ing] a spatially anchored network" (p. 102).

the present study, we attempt to fill this gap; we explore the Greek alternative mediascape as a whole, making its “cartography” and addressing a thorny question: What are the prospects of the alternative media rhizome to build alliances by articulating different visions of radical politics in a course of combined autonomous action, and which factors hinder this process?

The article, first, reflects on the alternative media studies tradition, highlighting the need for development of a framework that accommodates different types of alternative media practices and allows for the examination of networks developed among them. Then, it employs the rhizome metaphor to explore the alternative mediascape in its entirety. Probing the experiences of alternative media producers, the study maps the “multiple entryways” of alternative media in Greece, discerns a number of ways (“lines of flight”) through which alternative media produce troublesome situations at the edges, and explores whether alternative media function as nodal points where various civil society actors and struggles meet. The findings evaluate the heterogeneity of the Greek alternative mediascape, the diverse ways in which alternative media challenge hegemonic power, and the (dis)connections among alternative media projects.

### **Alternative Media Studies**

Since the 2000s, an impressive volume of research (for collective works, see Atton, 2015; Couldry & Curran, 2003; Downing, 2010; Howley, 2010) has studied a wide range of alternative media in different regimes. Different perspectives point out aspects of the form (format, size), content (critical, political, anti-), process (funding, organization, production), agency (community, civil society, social movements), and purpose (empowerment, social change) of these projects, and the employment of new technologies (Atton, 2002; Coyer, Dowmunt, & Fountain, 2007; Downing, 2001; Lievrouw, 2011; Pajnik & Downing, 2008).

Accordingly, considerable effort has been poured into the theorization of the field, producing numerous terms (*radical*, *counterinformation*, *grassroots*, *social movement*, *community*, *participatory*, *citizens'*, *tactical*, and *alternative media*). Each of these terms “carries its pluses and minuses” (Downing, 2010, p. 52) and affords significant nuances to the study of public communication. *Alternative media* has been employed as an umbrella term to classify relevant media practices (see Bailey et al., 2008; Jeppesen, 2015/2016). Such synthesized taxonomies provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of similarities and differences among diverse approaches and genres.

However, the scholarship obsession with the definitional has hampered the development of a theoretical framework that reflects on the multidimensional, dynamic, and always flourishing alternative mediascape. At the definitional level, the development of a conceptual framework suitable for exploring the alternative mediascape in its entirety in a given geographical and sociopolitical space and, on the other hand, mirroring its dynamic and always flourishing nature has not been satisfactory. Further complications have resulted from the emergence of hybrid media types that cross the boundaries of the archetypical mainstream–alternative relation (Harcup, 2003; Kenix, 2015) and the proliferation of contradictory practices in the “digital era.”

What different types of alternative media have in common is their commitment to contest media power, highlighting imbalances and inequalities, and expressing an “alternative vision to hegemonic policies,

priorities and perspectives" (Downing, 2001, p. v). At issue here is how ideological struggles work through, explicitly, rupturing the dominant ideology (in terms of a strategic, revolutionary plan), or indirectly, disrupting specific ideological practices and discourses (entitling, voicing the underrepresented). "[Each form of alternative media] is particularly strong at challenging certain ideological formations or regimes of truth, but also has its limitations" (Jeppesen, 2015/2016, p. 74). A long-standing challenge for alternative media is to assemble a common ground, working together across differences, to enhance their capacity of challenging hegemony.

### ***The Rhizome Metaphor***

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) lay out a schematic description of the rhizome as the exact opposite of "arborecent systems," which are "centered (even polycentric) systems with hierarchical modes of communication and preestablished paths" (p. 21). The rhizome metaphor denotes a model for the nonhierarchical and autonomous politics Deleuze and Guattari envision: "autonomously organized 'micropolitical' acts of revolt" in a network of underground growth that eventually "break out into the above-ground world of society, culture, and politics" (Gilman-Opalsky, 2013, p. 12). In contrast to tree-like structures and systems of signification, the rhizome is characterized by multidirectional or even omnidirectional modes of connection among different elements: "Any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 7). Such connections, which bring into play heterogeneous entities/agents, serve the ever-changing nature of multiplicity.

This quality of the rhizome enables it to be in constant movement, a perpetual state of "becoming"; entities move in "directions in motion" (p. 21), without fixed sets of rules (Bailey et al., 2008), and are subjected to fundamental change once they shift to a different dimension. This process is described as *asignifying rupture*: "A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given time, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 9). Central in the conceptualization of the rhizome is the notion of lines: the various dimensions according to which the rhizome is stratified, signified ("lines of segmentarity"), and disrupted ("lines of flight") such that movements and flows are rerouted in new pathways ("deterritorialization"), creating the rhizome again ("reterritorialization").

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) make a final point: "The rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance . . . the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction" (p. 25). Rhizomatic assemblages foster relations "in the middle," between actors coming together; these relations, despite being highly fluid, contingent, anarchic, and nomadic, fall within a logic of cooperation, concerted action, and synergy.

These aspects of the rhizome guide the study of the alternative mediascape in its entirety. For Deleuze and Guattari (1987), the "rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight" (p. 21). This study maps the entryways through which different entities (people, practices, cultures, and discourses) enter it, identifying dimensions according to which the rhizome is organized and challenged, exploring also what kind of connections alternative media create among them.

### ***Alternative Media as Rhizome(s)***

Few scholars have envisaged alternative media as rhizomatic. Sakolsky (1998) describes hundreds of diverse and unregulated “free” or “pirate” radio stations created by the Italian *Autonomia* movement of the 1970s, stating that their “quest was not a search for roots, but what Guattari has called rhizomatic links that would deterritorialize the airwaves and offer a way out of the oh so manageable bureaucratic box constructed for radio” (p. 9). According to Gilman-Opalsky (2013), “Deleuze and Guattari’s [1987] work was always in some way about opening up new horizons for political and creative resistance to the homogenizing tendencies of capitalism” (p. 12). Gilman-Opalsky’s study sees culture jamming, a prominent form of alternative media, as a paradigmatic instance of micropolitical rhizomatic action, as “it occurs in unpredictable moments of intervention, poisoning the visual landscape of capitalism” (p. 31).

In addition, the rhizome metaphor has been used as one approach, among others, to multitheorize alternative media (Bailey et al., 2008). Through this lens, Santana and Carpentier (2010) analyze two Brussels radio stations as rhizomes, capturing their role in establishing linkages among civil society, the state, and the market. In doing so, alternative media assume different positions toward hegemony, sometimes fiercely confronting the status quo and sometimes “playfully us[ing] and abus[ing] the dominant order” (collaborating with state and/or market organizations), “without necessarily losing their proper identity, and without becoming incorporated and/or assimilated”; this dual role renders them “transhegemonic media” (p. 28).<sup>3</sup>

### ***Politics of Connection***

By embracing contingency and elusiveness, the rhizome provides a nonessentialist framework to go beyond specific alternative media projects and attain a holistic view of an entire alternative mediascape, probing into the “micropolitics” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 22) of a space situated at the crossroads of diverse counterflows and antagonistic practices.

In this regard, the investigation of the alternative media rhizome’s potential to build alliances is at issue: its capacity to connect “different types of organizations, social movements and struggles” (Carpentier, 2016, p. 5) within civil society. As nomadic, anarchic, and diverse a rhizome may be, there is a pressing need to allow, as Mouffe (1993) puts it, the “common articulation” of different struggles. Mouffe’s agonistic position, drawing on the principles of heterogeneity and pluralism, acknowledges the conflictual (rather than consensual) locus of everyday politics (along with the different subject positions experienced/expressed by the political subject) and echoes the recurrent and dynamic interface between multiple social actors and different alternative media practices. Each of these interplays conveys an imaginary relationship to the various political, social, and material constraints underlying specific ideological assumptions. These mediated spaces “are

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<sup>3</sup> Not everyone agrees that this “softening of their antagonistic relationship” (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 28) toward the market and the state leaves alternative media’s capacity to challenge the dominant order intact. Gilman-Opalsky (2013) criticizes contemporary forms of culture jamming (such as subvertising and promotion of “responsible consumerism”) that are “perfectly compatible with capitalism” (p. 24) for having degenerated into a “liberal fantasy,” “a caricatured cooptation of the situationist idea of *détournement*” (p. 27).

parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs" (Fraser, 1993, p. 123). Still, the evaluation of the multiplicity and polycentrality of counterpublics needs to consider the ways "constituents of these publics interact and intersect . . . in relation to the internal politics" (Squires, 2002, pp. 447–448).

A nuanced understanding of a common articulation of different struggles raises critical questions about the "politics of connection" developed across it and the extent to which different projects succeed in "constructing the intersecting social circles that radical coalition politics require" (Carroll & Hackett, 2006, p. 100). From this perspective, possible limits of alternative media in assembling a unifying common ground are addressed as well. Alternative media's capacity to realize their alliance-building function is weakened by certain factors, for example, isolationist positions taken by alternative media organizations, their perspective toward reforming or bypassing mainstream media, or the propagation of "one over-powering type of social struggle" (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 29).

## Method

### *Operationalization and Research Questions*

Against this background, the study adopted a rhizomatic approach to alternative media in Greece. Although alternative media have a long tradition in the country, there are very few relevant studies<sup>4</sup> prior to the 2008 and 2011 uprisings. Since then, there has been growing scholarly interest for alternative media practices, viewed mostly from a digital activism perspective.<sup>5</sup> Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari (1987), our conceptual framework operationalized principal characteristics of the rhizome, reflected in the following research questions:

*RQ1: Multiplicity and heterogeneity: What are the multiple entryways from which the heterogeneous actors enter the alternative media rhizome?*

*RQ2: Asignifying rupture: What are the lines of flight or deterritorialization in the alternative media rhizome?*

*RQ3: Alliance building: Do alternative media function as nodal points where various civil society actors and struggles meet, building alliances?*

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<sup>4</sup> See Barboutis (1994) and Theodosiadou (2010) on noncommercial/pirate radio; Vatikiotis (2005) on grassroots press, radio, and Internet practices.

<sup>5</sup> Two trigger events were the "December 2008 Greek riots" against police brutality and the wave of demonstrations and strikes that followed, and the 2011 "square movement" and the formation of Greek Indignados (Aganaktismenoi). Relevant studies examine a Greek emblematic alternative network (Miloni, 2009), the employment of new media practices in the December 2008 riots (Vatikiotis, 2011) and by the Aganaktismenoi movement (Papa & Miloni, 2016; Theocharis, 2016), the (re-)creation of the antifascist movement in Athens around frictions over digital technologies (Croeser & Highfield, 2015), independent documentaries as antiausterity activism (Lekakis, 2017), and the communicative practices of the Greek antagonistic movement (Siapera & Theodosiadis, 2017).

To answer these questions, we carried out interviews with producers in 16 alternative media projects. To address Research Question 1, we asked interviewees about the course of the project, as well as their personal life trajectories connected to it, namely when, how, and why they became engaged in it and whether they had prior experiences with alternative media production and the context of this experience. Within Research Question 2, we inquired how alternative media producers conceive their counterhegemonic role through engagement in the projects. The questions probed into the core philosophy and the aims of the project and the issues on which media production focuses. Furthermore, interviewees were asked to reflect on the role of the project in the public sphere and civil society in general and with respect to mainstream media in particular. Also, participants were probed to reflect on the overall impact of their alternative media work up to that point. To address Research Question 3, we asked interviewees about their collaborative practices with similar projects. To understand how producers positioned their projects in the broader alternative media realm, we asked them to describe the Greek alternative milieu, express their opinions and feelings about it, and describe the relation of their own project to this milieu. In addition to the interview material, the analysis was complemented with information and documents available in the projects' websites (e.g., mission statements, project description and aims).

### ***Sampling and Recruitment***

The selection of Greek alternative media was guided by Atton's (2004) definition: "a range of media projects, interventions and networks that work against, or seek to develop different forms of, the dominant, expected (and broadly accepted) ways of 'doing' media" (p. ix). This definition captures the double nature of alternative media, namely the creation of critical content and modes of production. Yet, the contemporary mediascape in Greece (and elsewhere) is much more complex in ways that further blur traditional distinctions between "mainstream" and "alternative." Hájek and Carpentier (2015) introduce the seemingly paradoxical notion "alternative mainstream media" to describe hybrid media that differ significantly from the ideal type of alternative media, yet represent alternatives within the mainstream. We employ the related term "'alternative professional' journalism" to refer to media projects that were recently established in Greece by professional journalists who had either been laid off or resigned from mainstream media, and were characterized by a collaborative organization and ethos. Such projects, to the extent that they either provided alternative/critical content or developed alternative economic models, were included in the initial selection.

The 16 selected projects were *10%*, *Athens Live*, *Black-Tracker*, *Anarxeio*, *RebelNet*, *Clandestina*, *Infowar*, *Omikron*, *Omnia TV*, *radiobubble*, *ResPublica*, *eagainst*, *Void Mirror*, *Babylonia*, *Shedia*, and one project that is indicated as *M* in the analysis to safeguard the producers' anonymity (as it was produced by only two people). To arrive at this sample, we first created a comprehensive list of alternative media projects from various sources (lists aggregating alternative media in Greece, search engines, lists provided by the most well-known alternative media sites). Sixty alternative media were originally included, and we independently studied the documents and media products of the projects. Next, the 60 projects were categorized according to the following characteristics: aims, core identity (topical focus, relation to social movement, political affiliation), frequency of activity, and media type (print, online, radio, TV, etc.). The next step was to group the projects in five general categories: advocacy media, alternative professional

journalism, mainstream media intervention, media and activism (including social movement media), and information as commons (see Table 1).

**Table 1. The Greek Alternative Mediascape.**

| Approach                                     | Projects                                                                  | Discourses, aims, cultures                                                                                          | Connections: related entities, individuals                                                                                                                                                    |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Advocacy media</b>                        | <i>10%</i>                                                                | against gendered oppression, LGBT issues                                                                            | LGBT groups and LGBT media                                                                                                                                                                    |
|                                              | <i>Shedia</i>                                                             | street paper, support of homeless people, solidarity                                                                | International Network of Street Papers, Homeless World Cup, NGOs and groups against homelessness and poverty, individual journalists                                                          |
|                                              | <i>Clandestina</i>                                                        | support immigrant and refugee struggles                                                                             | immigrants' groups, migrant-related collectivities and ventures (strikes, occupations), migration-related journalists-bloggers, network of translators, <i>No Border camp</i>                 |
| <b>"Alternative professional" journalism</b> | <i>Athens Live</i>                                                        | independent professional journalism, start-up journalistic cultures                                                 | professional news/analysis media, independent online magazines, informal associations, European crowd-funded media                                                                            |
|                                              | <i>Infowar</i>                                                            | independent professional journalism, Marxist analysis of news                                                       | radio and documentary productions, selected independent professional media                                                                                                                    |
|                                              | <i>radiobubble</i>                                                        | grassroots radio, citizen journalism                                                                                | radio producers, amateur grassroots journalists, intellectuals, bloggers, geeks, other alternative media projects (occasionally)                                                              |
| <b>Mainstream media intervention</b>         | <i>Omikron</i>                                                            | crisis (counter)discourses; improve mainstream media's quality of reporting                                         | correspondents of foreign mainstream media, other 'creative commons' projects                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Media &amp; activism</b>                  | <i>Void Mirror</i>                                                        | artistic interventions in the public space; counter-hegemonic discourses through the connection of art and politics | <i>Void Network</i> (various subcultures, cultural and political groups, artists and intellectuals), collaborated, self-managed ventures (social center, park, theatre, antifascist festival) |
|                                              | <i>ResPublica</i>                                                         | political and philosophical theory; unite people from diverse political spaces of the "antagonistic movement"       | informal relations with groups, bloggers centred around direct democracy, academics                                                                                                           |
|                                              | <i>Babylonia</i>                                                          | political analysis on social, cultural and philosophical issues, support the anti-authoritarian movement            | Anti-authoritarian Movement (and related networks – <i>Beyond Europe, No Border</i> ), International Anti-authoritarian Festival (b-fest), <i>collaborative, self-managed</i> social center   |
|                                              | <i>"M"/Black-Tracker/Anarxelo/RebelNet/eaqainst (now only as archive)</i> | support the anarchist movement                                                                                      | anarchist collectivities                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Information as "commons"</b>              | <i>Omnia TV</i>                                                           | independent, grassroots, non-partisan media                                                                         | various alternative media projects, people from different social movements                                                                                                                    |

We then selected 31 projects based on this categorization, aiming at reflecting as much as possible the diversity of these media projects by including cases from all categories and across platforms. Up to three e-mail invitations were sent to each project, followed by telephone calls (where available). Eighteen producers involved in 16 media projects replied positively. The final sample reflected the diversity of the original mapping, as all main categories were represented.<sup>6</sup> We conducted in-depth, semistructured interviews, face-to-face or through teleconference, individually or in groups of two.<sup>7</sup>

### **Analysis: The Greek Alternative Media Rhizome<sup>8</sup>**

#### ***Multiplicity and Heterogeneity***

The rhizome is “altogether different.” An important characteristic of the rhizome is that it has multiple entryways that form an open and connectable map, “as opposed to the tracing, which always ‘comes back to the same’” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 12). The alternative mediascape in Greece has multiple entryways, evident in the diverse life trajectories and experiences of alternative media producers. Five entryways emerged through the interviewees’ narrations: (a) outbursts of social unrest; (b) social movements; (c) the financial crisis, social problems, and injustice; (d) institutionalized civil society; and (e) professional, mainstream media.

The first entryway, identified by many participants, was outbursts of social unrest that ignited a process of “politicization” or formation of “political consciousness,” which gave birth to alternative media projects or transformed existing endeavors. The December 2008 uprising came up often as a crucial trigger event in this respect, as it also drove people with no previous experience in alternative media production to enter the field as politically concerned subjects:

When . . . I got to step further out and saw exactly what’s going on . . . [I saw] that there is horrible injustice in the world, a horrible injustice that I had never fully realized. I had never realized the size of it. (Periklis, *Omnia TV*)

During that time, young people involved in *Omnia TV* were active social media users, commenting on news websites, running blogs, making YouTube videos, and so forth. After “meeting” each other

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<sup>6</sup> A notable omission, due to nonresponse, was projects focusing on labor issues. Also, *Indymedia* was not included as its producers objected to the commercial publication of research results.

<sup>7</sup> Thirteen interviews were held with 18 interviewees: Five interviews were held with two participants in the same projects, whereas three interviewees were involved in (and covered in their interview) more than one project. Interviews lasted from 43 minutes to 2.5 hours. Five interviewees were women. All interviewees cited have been assigned fake names.

<sup>8</sup> Most interviewees made clear that they did not speak as official “representatives” of their respective media projects, reflecting the principles of horizontal structure and philosophy of these projects, and that their interviews expressed their personal interpretations and experiences; hence, they did not express a “collective voice.” The analysis text, therefore, should be read through this lens. Yet, the interviewees did not refrain from talking about their project as a whole and often emphasized the rapport in their collectives.

frequently online, they decided to bring their interests and abilities together to create a grassroots (counter)information platform. The turning point was the emergence of Greek Indignados in 2011. The extensive social unrest and widespread participation in occupation of public spaces ("the squares") functioned as a wellspring for the creation of many grassroots media, *Omnia TV* included. December 2008 was a key moment also for *radiobubble*, created in 2007 by a group of both media veterans and radio amateurs interested in music and fed up with the constraints of mainstream radio. December 2008 transformed *radiobubble* from a music radio station to a grassroots news media project. The social turmoil that followed (strikes, demonstrations) spawned the need for *radiobubble*'s producers to "intervene" (Ermis, *radiobubble*). An open publishing mechanism for producing reliable news was set up mainly through Twitter, aiming at supporting the movement. Also, for both participants in *eagainst* and *ResPublica*, the December 2008 uprising was marked—"it changed the political discourse" (Iraklis, *eagainst/ResPublica*)—as a starting point for their active involvement with politics.

The organized social movement milieu (mostly related to anarchism) was a second significant entryway. A host of actors entered the rhizome from the outer "margins" of the political sphere. For the long-lived alternative media project *Void Mirror*, the first entry point was the student and pupil unrest of the 1990s in Greece. The second was the international antiglobalization and peace movement, when the group participated in an organized fashion in major protests, acquired explicit political identity, and formed an international network. The December 2008 and 2011 "square movements" were further important turning points that brought new people into the group. Membership in the anarchist movement was the sole point of reference for participants involved in various alternative media projects; the latter were created to support and advance the movement. For the *M* producer, it was a way to re-enter the movement after a long period of detachment from collective action:

For many years I had retreated from the [anarchist] "field." . . . [Through *M*] I continue the fight. I continue the fight, it's that simple. . . . It's the most important part [of my political action]. (Markos, *M*)

For both interviewees of the magazine *Babylonia*, participation in this project is a vital aspect of their political engagement in the antiauthoritarian movement.

The third entryway refers to feelings against social problems and injustice, triggered by the Greek financial and immigrant/refugee crises. The migration-focused project *Clandestina* entered the rhizome in 2007, created by three Greeks, one Albanian, and one Turk as a website, aiming at providing independent information for refugees and migrants, registering and supporting their struggles (Pinelopi, *Clandestina*). The street magazine *Shedia* supports the homeless in Greece. Its creator, sensitized in the homeless problem, created the Greek "homeless" football team and, later, after becoming involved in the *International Network of Street Papers*, came up with the idea of launching a street paper to alleviate suffering:

*Shedia* is the product of my anger for everything happening around me . . . at the end I feel it's my holy duty, not in the fucked-up sense but this is what I want to be doing, man, be next to you. So, I don't feel that I'm doing this because I belong somewhere, we are doing this because we are who we are. (Orestis, *Shedia*)

The financial crisis was a trigger for the people who started the *Omikron* project in 2012. Equipped with a rich experience in such diverse fields as political science, media relations, advertising, and social entrepreneurship, they aimed at “changing the story” told about Greece by international media (Xristina, *Omikron*).

The fourth entryway to the rhizome was the institutionalized civil society organizations, but out of frustration with their lack of radical thinking. Pavlos (10%) recounted how he, as a volunteer in an HIV-related nongovernmental organization in the 1990s, experienced first-hand the extent of neglect and discrimination against gay HIV patients and the deep-seated and widespread homophobia. The nongovernmental organization’s unwillingness to acknowledge the strong link between discrimination against HIV patients and homophobia and their reluctance to fight it led him to join a group of people and create a new organization (Synthesis) in 2000, which focused specifically on the struggle against homophobia, using as a “Trojan horse” the campaigns about safe (gay) sex. The 10% magazine was born to realize this aim.

Last, some alternative media producers entered the alternative mediascape from mainstream media. *Athens Live*, a crowd-funded news project, came out of the need to report about the Greek crisis in English while one of its producers was working for professional media organizations (Alekos, *Athens Live*). Professional journalists (e.g., *Infowar*) entered the alternative mediascape in a period of economic and political turmoil in the Greek legacy media, when long-lived established media organizations shut down and a large number of professional journalists were laid off. Under these circumstances, many of these journalists sought to create alternative new media outlets that would be editorially and financially independent and structured according to self-organizing and collective principles:

In 2008, I realized that . . . the trade can kick you outside the system altogether and especially after I was let go . . . I started to see that the field was closing up for professional journalists. . . . Then I realized that you could be outcast permanently . . . and I needed to have a presence of my own, my own point of reference. (Leonidas, *Infowar*)

Overall, the multiple entryways of the Greek alternative rhizome reflect the heterogeneity of social actors, cultures, and discourses brought into play, as well as the different approaches to the very alternative media practice (see Table 1, third and first columns accordingly).

### ***Asignifying Rupture: Lines of Flight***

The multiple entryways of the Greek alternative mediascape reflect a rhizomatic movement that explores its potential to produce troublesome situations at the edges, to create ruptures and destabilize power relations. The actualization of this potential, shooting away into new paths reflects on a number of ways (lines of flight) through which alternative media challenge hegemonic power.

Three lines of flight can be discerned in the Greek alternative rhizome: (a) creation of critical political subjectivities within or beyond existing political constellations, (b) creation of new models of media

production, and (c) putting forth partial alternative discourses without a comprehensive critique of power. These methods differ extensively in how they perceive hegemony and resistance.

First, various media projects aim to create new political subjectivities as a way of opening fractures in the status quo. *Clandestina* sees alternative media as an attempt to create a genuinely public space that can potentially “create prolific discussions” (Pinelopi, *Clandestina*). For *Void Mirror*, which advocates freedom of expression in the public space, the way to challenge hegemony is the production of new critical subjectivities, articulated in the concept of the “cultural activist,” which emerges from the elimination of boundaries among the producer, the artist, and the audience (Damianos, *Void Mirror*). *Babylonia*’s counterhegemonic struggle is informed by “a Foucaultian understanding of power” as a “multiple network” through which they “are trying to find their own way by making fissures” (Zoi, *Babylonia*). *Babylonia* strives to “politicize” issues and “articulate a more radical discourse” by aiming its critique “at the root of the problem,” namely capitalism and powerful actors (Athina, *Babylonia*). Anarchist media perceive their counterhegemonic role as an explicit political project creating structures for counterinformation, sharing movement-related resources through torrents (*Black-Tracker*) and a digital library (*Anarxeio*), and translating important works (*RebelNet*). On the other hand, *ResPublica* aims to overcome any ideological rigidities; one of its producers (Iraklis, *ResPublica*) critically reflects on the left’s inability to understand society beyond its own scope, as well as anarchism’s self-enclaving in the remnants of past counterculture movements and its dismissive stance toward any political subjectivities that deviate from its own norm.

Second, other projects attempt to build new<sup>9</sup> models of media production. *Infowar*, through the production of news and opinion pieces, a regular podcast, and a series of documentary films, aims to put timely news in a historical context, providing a thematic analysis of events and a critical reading “between the lines.” Its counterhegemonic role lies in the fact that “it gives a voice to other journalists, collectivities, and even scientists who could not be heard in the mainstream media” (Leonidas, *Infowar*). *Radiobubble*’s producers proudly described its role as deeply “interventionist” in normative terms: its ability to create new models in terms of media production, “a new culture,” “a new consciousness,” and even a new politics. This is achieved by creating an “open media community,” which builds a set of principles and an ethical code, as well as an open publishing model for “producing reliable news,” while remaining “essentially open and inclusive” (Dimitris, *radiobubble*). *Athens Live*, left-oriented in its editorial stance and independent from corporate funding, aspires to become a “professional” yet independent news organization.

Last, other alternative media stay clear of a comprehensive critique of power, restricting themselves to particular social problems or aspects of hegemony. *10%* works against gendered and sexual oppression, engaging with diverse LGBTB issues and “fighting homophobia” (Pavlos, *10%*). *Shedia*’s aim to alleviate the homeless is informed by a humanitarian ethos, evident in the deep and intense feelings of solidarity expressed by its members. In respect to the journalistic part of the project (the content of the magazine) and in contrast to many other alternative media, *Shedia* distances itself from critical, denunciatory, and “negativist” discourses and opts for a style of reporting that is “optimistic and humorous,” advocating a “solution-oriented journalism.” The *Omikron* project does not aim at broader social change

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<sup>9</sup> “Novelty” was stressed by the interviewees themselves to describe their media practices, although these practices in themselves are not always new or innovative.

either. Its much more moderate goal is to improve mainstream media reporting (in terms of discourses about Greece and other crisis-stricken countries; Xristina, *Omikron*).

Overall, the lines of flight of the Greek alternative media rhizome vary in regard to their “directions” (process, practice, content) and “dimensions” (aspects of the critique of power).

### ***Alliance Building***

#### *(Dis)connections Among Alternative Media*

To explore the rhizomatic connections between the sampled alternative media and the extent to which they assemble a common ground (“building alliance”), we asked interviewees about their relationships with other media projects, their dispositions toward them, and their cooperation patterns. The most important elements are summarized in Table 1 (fourth column).

On the whole, Greek alternative media are rather weakly and very selectively connected to each other. Positions of cooperation/solidarity and isolationism/fragmentation are both evident. Based on the connection patterns reported by interviewees, four categories of projects can be drawn: isolated, selectively linked, topical micronodes, and nodal points.

The “isolated” projects reported no or very few, and always informal, connections with other Greek alternative media. *Shedia* is perhaps the most distinctive case of isolationism, as it is not linked to any Greek alternative media. *Shedia*’s producer attributed it to substantial differences between *Shedia* and other alternative media, such as the latter’s adherence to antihierarchical organization principles. Similarly, the migrant-focused *Clandestina* abstains from cooperation with other media of the alternative milieu or with immigration-related nongovernmental organizations, except when the people engaged in the project participated in immigration-related events (No Border camp). The same is true for the online political magazine *ResPublica*, apart from an exchange of opinions with a related political magazine. Interviewees from *Babylonia* see plenty of media projects as potential connections; yet, few are currently actualized, except in terms of content sharing (republishing articles) or during events (“b-fest”). Most interviewees were explicit about the absence of competition or antagonisms among alternative media; instead, they attributed the lack of linkages to the different functions each project fulfills.

Tighter but selective cooperation, usually on an ad hoc basis, was reported by other participants. The LGTB magazine *10%* collaborates with other “linked initiatives” based on a core shared identity, bonds of friendship, and common aims. *Athens Live* has selective connections with some alternative media, such as the colocated magazine *popaganda.gr* (editorial cooperation), the professional news and analysis service *macropolis.gr*, and the parliamentary observatory *vouliwatch.gr*. *Infowar*’s producer contributes to two other media that can be labeled “alternative professional media” (*efsyn* and *Unfollow*) and used to be the chief editor of another one. *Radiobubble* occasionally provides a forum to other alternative media matching its aims and values. Yet, it draws a clear line from projects that either became outright commercial or are permeated by professional values and practices that are incompatible with its own philosophy.

"Topical micronodes" is another category, exemplified in our sample by *Void Mirror*. *Void Mirror* is an integral part of the underground group Void Network, which is itself in many ways the epitome of a rhizome. Void Network involves various subcultures with diverse origins (e.g., psychedelia, abstract art, urban culture, youth subcultures); different actors come together in a persistent and interactive coexistence, on an explicit political basis, that culminates in ad hoc common projects in the public space. It is a common platform that aims to "transfuse each underground culture with elements of the others" (Damianos, *Void Mirror*). Another rhizomatic connection enabled by Void Network is the connection between art and politics, which breaks the isolation of art from everyday life and enables artists to "become intellectuals" (Damianos, *Void Mirror*) enacting this role in the public sphere. Also, anarchist-oriented projects aim to function as micronodes for the anarchist movement. *Indymedia Athens*, in particular, emerges as a central hub for the media affiliated with the anarchist political milieu, not only for providing counterinformation, but also for organizing collective action. It is the reference point for many participants in anarchist media projects:

I always thought *Indymedia* was and still is a nodal medium in Greece . . . even though it has been devalued a lot now, but at least some years ago . . . jokingly we said that if something wasn't on *Indymedia* it hadn't happened dude. [laughter] *Indymedia* is a hub, until 2008 it was a point of reference. (Manolis, *Black-Tracker, RebelNet, Anarxeio*)

Finally, the project that envisages its role more clearly as a nodal point in a broader alternative media network is *Omnia TV*. Its nodal function is based on the principle of inclusivity. The boundaries that delimit its core identity (grassroots, independent project providing news and views that are avoided by mainstream media and reflect various social struggles) are permeable, as it strives to "reach as many people as possible . . . beyond particular political groups" (Periklis, *Omnia TV*), especially beyond the anarchist circles. The core members of the project conceive this space as a third domain comprising socially oriented media projects.

Information . . . is a common good. This has to be serviced by a third pillar, apart from the state and the private media, there has to be a pillar of projects that belong to the commons, the socially oriented projects . . . regarding what we achieved, I would say that . . . we conquered the creation of a small node in this network. (Andreas, *Omnia TV*)

#### *Prospects and Challenges for Building Alliances Within the Alternative Media Rhizome*

The prospect of a broader alliance among Greek alternative media was addressed by interviewees from different perspectives. Andreas (*Omnia TV*) envisages a strong and vibrant network of grassroots media comprising existing and new nodes that would operate with at least a minimum degree of coordination and with diverse but compatible principles and aims. *Infowar's* producer expanded this line of thought, arguing that alternative media need to find ways to reclaim some rights reserved for professional journalism such as the public frequencies, which should be civic property instead of being a "product" within a different political economy that defines information as a "commons."

Few attempts to build collaborative structures among alternative media have been made, such as the *Media From Below* forum (2012 and 2013). According to *Omnia TV* producers, this forum did not result

in any regular and firm structure of cooperation among alternative media, mainly due to lack of time and resources, which is typical in projects relying on volunteer work and self-financing. Overall, the interviewees identified problems and challenges regarding the realization of a broader alternative media movement, which boil down to the theme of ideology, apart from practical issues.

Ideology emerged from the interviews as the most important factor that prevents the building of alliances. Most alternative media studied situate themselves either "pro ideology," viewing their activity as part of an ideological project, or "against ideology," distancing themselves unmistakably and firmly not only from expressing ideological tenets, but also from other alternative media that choose to do so. Here, "ideology" is thought of as support, advocacy, or identification with an explicit political ideology (such as anarchism or the political left) and not the political more broadly that cuts through various societal fields, such as advocacy for certain causes or expressing criticism of social and political realities. The rest expressed ambivalent positions, occupying the middle ground (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Position in Reference to Ideology.**

Distance  
from ideology

Part of an explicit  
ideological project



| against ideology                                                                                                                                                     | ambivalent                                                                                                                                               | pro ideology                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Omnia TV</i></li><li>• <i>Shedia</i></li><li>• <i>10%</i></li><li>• <i>Omikron</i></li><li>• <i>radiobubble</i></li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Void Mirror</i></li><li>• <i>Babylonia</i></li><li>• <i>Clandestina</i></li><li>• <i>ResPublica</i></li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Infowar</i></li><li>• <i>Black-Tracker</i></li><li>• <i>RebelNet</i></li><li>• <i>Anarxeio</i></li><li>• <i>"M"</i></li><li>• <i>eagainst</i></li></ul> |

Starting from the projects that distance themselves from ideology, Pavlos (*10%*) is extremely skeptical of alternative media promoting a certain political ideology. To him, a close association of *10%* with such "extreme" media would unavoidably lead to the exclusion of a significant part of their audience with different political leanings. "Ideology," perceived here as an overt identification with and promotion of a political project, prevents *10%* from joining forces with political struggles that could overpower and marginalize the project's aim. Pavlos considers overtly ideological media "allies"; however, he would not risk the survival of his own project by openly joining forces with them:

Completely deliberately and premeditatedly, we tried not to identify with either end of the spectrum. . . . So we didn't want much give and take with anything extremely politically colored, yet without hiding any tendencies and inclinations we may have.

Similarly, Alekos (*Athens Live*) was utterly dismissive of *Indymedia* as an example of "ideological" alternative media, which are considered as manifesting the same inexorability and rigidity of the Greek left. *Athens Live* strives to move beyond this kind of "malaise" through the process of "deideologization." *Shedia*

attempts to keep ideological positions, narrowly defined, outside the magazine. *Omikron* shares this position, consciously staying clear from any collective ideological identification to maintain its “credibility”:

No, we are inclusive. We are not labeled. And this is what probably differs from the rest.  
(Xristina, *Omikron*)

Andreas, from *Omnia TV*, shared the same reservations about certain alternative media, which “have become instruments of specific political actors, from the left or anarchist groups.” In *Omnia TV*, contributors with personal political affiliations are welcome, as long as they do not use the platform as a mouthpiece for their respective parties or organizations. However, the core members of *Omnia TV* do not belong to any political party, nor are they affiliated with a specific political bloc, which safeguards their “independence.” Although not advocating an apolitical stance, Andreas considers such tactics of aggressive political militancy and overemphasis of a “counterinformation” approach unnecessary, if not harmful, for reaching out to broader publics:

We don’t have a problem with the term “counterinformation.” We simply don’t want to characterize it like that. We always had in the back of our minds another way to be a bit more largely accepted. Meaning you don’t have to say “I am anti- . . .” beforehand. Not to hide your position but there is no reason to say “do you accept me? I’m anti- . . .” Present the information the right way . . . without lies, without misinformation, without spin, distortions, or isolated truths to support a point of view, and finally the other will decide whether your position makes sense or not.

In a similar vein, *radiobubble*’s interviewees stressed the project’s unique attempt to overcome ideological identifications to create new norms by which genuine political dialogue could take place and a space of freedom for grassroots artistic and journalistic production:

People didn’t believe in us because we were good leftists . . . they started leaning on us because we gave them the freedom to do what they wanted. (Dimitris, *radiobubble*)

“Ideology,” then, is considered to create a significant, if not insurmountable, difficulty for building a broader alliance among alternative media in Greece.

Interviewees from other projects expressed their ambivalence toward ideology. Void Network, the collectivity that produces *Void Mirror*, is an explicitly anarchist, libertarian collectivity, and a relatively tight group; yet, it “embraces contradiction” and includes people who do not necessarily present “a dogmatic commitment to an anarchist dogma” (Damianos, *Void Mirror*). The interviewees involved in *Babylonia* were equally ambivalent regarding ideology. On the one hand, they stressed the project’s identity as being “beyond ideologies.” At the same time, they acknowledged that the project situates itself squarely in antiauthoritarian politics that emphasizes, above everything else, the struggle against power:

Our motto is “beyond ideologies,” but this doesn’t apply so, it can’t apply, for sure that’s an ideology too, but maybe more flexible than other ideologies. (Athina, *Babylonia*)

Iraklis (*ResPublica*) clearly distanced himself from “ideological” media, based on his experience in the *eagainst* project, an anarchist website with a sharp demarcation of its political boundaries, which tended to exclude opinions deviating from a perceived “orthodox” political stance. Instead, he envisages a project that advances a political discourse beyond ideology:

I want to create an aside, a political discourse, an imperative that won't be attributed to the anarchist, the left wing, the right wing, the neoliberal.

*Clandestina* is equally ambivalent; although the people engaged in it have shared roots in the “Greek social movement milieu, or its margins,” and share the same values (e.g., self-organization, solidarity), their primary concern is to maintain a media project that is “slightly detached” from the participants’ other political activities in order to stay “credible” (Pinelopi, *Clandestina*).

Among the projects that embrace ideology, the most prominent group is those closely related to the anarchist movement. These projects are often composed of groups with close-knit ties built on long-term lived experiences. *M*, described by its producer as “a media project of the broader social movement milieu,” situates itself in a political spectrum ranging from “extreme left” to anarchism in its various manifestations and political currents (e.g., anarchosyndicalism, anarchocommunism, social anarchism). Anarchist media are primarily connected to each other; yet, occasionally even this connection is precarious. For instance, fundamental disagreements in terms of principles and political philosophy prevented cooperation between *Indymedia Athens* and *Indymedia Thessaloniki* (according to information provided by interviewees). Likewise, other anarchist-related media projects remain somewhat isolated, even within the particular counterpublic; *Anarxeio* and *Black-Tracker*, for instance, has not developed connections with other groups or projects. Manolis situated this “introversion” in a general downside of the broader social movement milieu, the anarchist movement included, which is manifested in a less intense production and circulation of ideas “and a lack of impetus” compared with the past. In a critical self-assessment, Manolis believes that these projects could have been more “extrovert” to acquire a “nodal” place:

[Regarding] *Anarxeio*, or *RebelNet*, or *Black-Tracker*, the negative thing was that . . . we didn't open it up more, like it should be. *Anarxeio* especially . . . we wanted it to be a hub . . . maybe we should have tried to be more extroverted.

*Infowar* also belongs to the “ideological camp” of alternative media. Its producer, despite having been trained as a professional journalist and still espouses this identity, provides a “Marxist analysis of current events,” outright rejecting objectivity and declaring an openly subjective reading of political reality. Still, he recognizes the limits of “ideologized” news discourse, mostly because it tends to confine its carriers in “preaching to the converted”:

Few times . . . we managed . . . to open up to a world to which we had no relation beforehand . . . whoever is politically and ideologically against you . . . you don't win them over easily . . . we provide arguments and information to our own people and very slowly, maybe there is an expansion. (Leonidas, *Infowar*)

An additional inhibiting factor toward building a broader alliance, brought up by many interviewees, is practical considerations such as lack of time, because a broad coordination of activities among alternative media is regarded as extremely time-consuming and almost prohibitive for projects typically in a permanent state of shortage of resources.

### Conclusions

This study has attempted to enrich and deepen the theorization and investigation of alternative media, seen as an ecology of mediated practices. At the theoretical level, the study illustrates how Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) rhizome can open new paths for gaining a profound understanding of entire alternative mediascapes, moving beyond single-case approaches, which tend to be the norm in rhizomatic analysis of alternative media. It is our contention that the proposed operationalization of the rhizome metaphor will enable alternative media scholars to gain a view from inside their vibrant space. Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome offers powerful concepts with explanatory power to probe into distinctive alternative mediascapes in different contexts.

The rhizomatic approach of an entire alternative mediascape highlights the diverse paths that lead participants into it (multiple entryways) and explains the heterogeneity of the field (the consolidated and structuring practices, cultures, and discourses). It evaluates the diverse ways (challenging hegemonic power) in which alternative media projects may deterritorialize the space (lines of flight). Last, it explores connections (and disconnections) within the alternative mediascape and interrogates the rhizome's potential to foster cooperation and synergy (build alliances). The latter is an aspect of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) conception that is rather overlooked and underutilized, at least in the field of alternative media research. Compared with the qualities of fluidity, contingency, and nomadism, which have gained prominence, the call of Deleuze and Guattari (along with other postmodernist thinkers such as Debord, Foucault, Derrida, and Lyotard) for joint action of alternative media with other radical actors, for internationalism and collective action (Gilman-Opalsky, 2013), has been somewhat lost. Yet, the question of building a broader alternative media movement becomes vital, especially as the reality of alternative media producers becomes more and more "messy" because "alternativeness" is claimed by emerging types of media with values and practices sometimes hardly compatible with traditional types of alternative media. Regarding this challenge, we side with Hájek and Carpentier (2015), who ask for "protect[ing] the alternative media signifier more" (p. 365) to prevent its "emptying" (p. 379), adding our call to focus on how alternative media can articulate a common vision of radical politics and action, finding unity within heterogeneity.

At the empirical level, the rhizomatic analysis of the Greek alternative mediascape contributes to a thorough understanding of its logics and conditions, and evaluates its dynamics, along with challenges and questions raised. This exercise at "mapping" the Greek alternative mediascape reveals diverse life trajectories and experiences of alternative media producers that led them to enter the field. The multiple entryways of the Greek alternative rhizome link to such diverse sources as broader sociopolitical and economic developments (financial and migration crises, exacerbated social problems), social movement activity, ideological membership, and the inadequacy of institutionalized civil society to address injustice, as well as the crisis within the professional media environment. The "heterogeneity" of the field in regard to alternative projects' locus (empowerment, performance, discourse) and perspective (comprehensive or

partial critique of power) points to the diverse ways/lines in which alternative media form the rhizome. The rhizome's potential deterritorialization reflects on the diverse ways according to which the various projects perceive hegemony and resistance (lines of flight), ranging from the creation of critical political subjectivities within or beyond existing political constellations, to the constitution of new models of media production, to more "revisionist" aspirations to redress particular social problems. In this respect, the relationships among alternative media are characterized by both cooperation/solidarity and isolationism/fragmentation. Overall, however, their connections are rather weak, selective, and informal, with micronodes of topical or ideological reference instead of connecting nodal points. Regarding the key question of alliance building, the analysis revealed the crucial role of ideology, which emerged as the main obstacle, apart from practical difficulties, that seems to prevent Greek alternative media from assembling a common ground and potentially building an alternative media movement that could enhance their capacity to challenge hegemonic power.

Finally, the rhizomatic approach can be employed by other researchers to explore alternative mediascapes in different regions and cultures and further investigate whether the tendencies revealed by this study<sup>10</sup> are emerging as global issues for building alternative media movements. A particularly interesting question that invites further inquiry is the tendency toward "deideologization," advocated by many practitioners in this study, rising out of the fear of being overpowered by other social struggles, a deep frustration with the practices of left political actors, and a critique of the "orthodoxies" of radical political movements, as well as a desire to attain the necessary credibility to reach beyond the converted. This distancing from ideology challenges traditional understandings of alternative media as overtly ideological. Coupled with the "crisis of objectivity" observed in at least some of their mainstream counterparts (McNair, 2017), this drift raises intriguing questions about both alternative and mainstream media epistemologies in the era of postfactuality.

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<sup>10</sup> The study is not without limitations. Despite its broad perspective, which reflects on diverse alternative media projects, the study does not elaborate on the dynamics of specific fields of alternative projects' implementation (e.g., the emerging field of alternative journalism in Greece). Moreover, the consideration of different projects under an umbrella term (grassroots, alternative) has been a "barrier" to get further input from the field. For instance, some alternative media producers expressed mistrust against the research project, stating discomfort with terms used, such as "alternative media," arguing that their project was not described fairly by this notion. Future studies can combine practitioners' perspectives with the analysis of the content produced by alternative media to investigate textual counterhegemonic practices.

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