Within the last decade, the escalating consequences of the financial crisis in Greece have placed the country among the three poorest in the Eurozone. Although the crisis did not result in extreme cases of poverty and hunger, the politics of austerity have had a considerable effect on the social cohesion of the country and the everyday lives of its people. In Athens, which concentrates almost half of the country’s population, cases of social discrimination and exclusion are becoming more and more evident. The spatial expression of these effects is reflected on the east–west division of the city. The river–highway flow of Kifissos runs in the middle of this division, currently acting as a boundary between “higher” and “lower” social groups.

The interaction between different groups is further discouraged by the mental condition of a society in crisis. Fear and anxiety—caused by the economical, political and social instability of the country—have become an integral part of the way people think, act and behave. The counterbalance of this growing condition of uncertainty is the cultivation of a conservative way of thinking that excludes openness to diversity and experimentation.

The idea of the current thesis is to create a new topography in the city which will work as a connective landscape. The quality of connection does not only refer to the relationship of the river, the highway and the city. It also aims to create an integrative landscape that is open to various acts of appropriation, working as a common surface between different groups. For this reason, the new topography is combined with the function of the transformation laboratories: re-used old factories that combine educational, technical and social programs oriented towards the transformation of the post–industrial areas of the city. The purpose of these places is to provide people with the necessary means to become active participants in this transformation.

The participation in the transformation of the city has a great potential to reduce the feeling of helplessness that the Greek society is experiencing during the last few years. As Kaplan and Kaplan suggest, opportunities for exercising one’s effectiveness serve as important examples of meaningful action… Participation in creating and sustaining a meaningful local resource can enhance personal identity and connectedness. Daily contact with such treasured local nature places can foster greater self-esteem, trust, and hope.

The same applies for the connection with nature. The natural environment has a particularly strong restorative effect for many people. Nature places are often sought for respites, for regaining one’s capacity to face demands. Thus, the experience of nature, provided by the new opportunities for strolls along the river and the planted hills, as well as by possible community activities of gardening on those newly available green surfaces can also help to soften the stressful tension that characterizes the everyday lives of the Greek population.

Goal 4
“Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning”

The transformation laboratories address the goal for inclusive education by providing an alternative model of learning through active participation and by incorporating input from the people. Such a model does not include strict hierarchies and divisions between teacher and student. It rather forms a common platform for the exchange of collective knowledge and technique.

One could argue that there is no way to know if this alternative way of learning would work. However, the large number of people involved in self-organized social movements that informally and “from bellow” organize practices of activism suggest that informal organizations, outside of prominent hierarchies have a great potential in fighting the consequences of the crisis. Furthermore, the importance of informal urban practices in the history of Athens, suggest that a less strictly

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3. Ibid
organized, and more open model of education could be more compatible with the city and its population. The transformation laboratories could be included as an experiment towards this direction.

**Goal 9**
“Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation”

Although the project is not directly focused on sustainability, it involves the concept of “reuse” in different scales. Firstly, the empty, inactive, and residual spaces are reused to create a coherent landscape tissue that folds around the river–highway flow. The topography itself is created by reusing the land that is covering the river to create hills. At the next level, a number of abandoned old industrial buildings are re-used as transformation laboratories. There, the waste material is recycled to be reused in the construction process. At the same time, this transformative building activity is seen as an opportunity to offer work to unemployed local people.

As a result, an alternative approach towards production as well as more associative industrial and building functions are encouraged. The experimental character of the transformation laboratories, their openness and the fact that they are not bound by a strict orientation towards profit, possibly increases their potential into discovering innovative knowledge and technique.

**Goal 15:**
“Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss”

The project departs from the intention to establish a more dynamic balance between the natural and the engineered. In the case of a concrete city, like Athens, and of a river system covered to its 70% the desired balance requires that nature is somehow brought back and recovered. In one of the tributaries that has maintained, in a controlled way, its natural form, one can find a rich variety of species, despite the proximity to densely urbanized areas. The combination of the wet, fertile alluvial soil with the mild climate encourage biodiversity. This fact not only suggests that not only soft and yet safe river banks are possible, but also that they produce a pleasant atmosphere and a leisure landscape; a destination in the city.