

# Civic Solidarity in Transnational Spaces

## Organisation and Institutionalisation of Solidarity Within the European Union

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### 1 Introduction

Solidarity is a firm reference point of modern societies. It is not only part and parcel of caring relations within informal groups and communities (families, kinship, peers, neighbourhoods and so forth), but also a well-established principle of European nation states. Also, the European Union (EU) has committed itself to this principle by introducing it into its legal framework. Following the Treaty of the European Union (TEU) (Article 130a-e) and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) (2007), the community is devoted to enhancing social cohesion, cooperation and solidarity among its Member States in some policy fields, even as an explicit reference point of coordinated action (for example, asylum and immigration, economic cooperation, energy and security). The political aim of this principle is obvious: to guarantee the co-operation of Member States in regard to policy issues that transcend the problem-solving capacity of single nation states, thus requiring joint efforts. While European law primarily addresses institutional actors, namely governments and the European institutions, the treaty also expresses the desire to deepen solidarity between European peoples, thus acknowledging that the principle and spirit of solidarity among institutional actors depends also on the willingness of the European citizens to support public policies and/or actively engage in additional or complementary activities.

Against this backdrop, it is necessary to address the level of citizens' actions and to engage in an analysis of social or civic solidarity within the EU. This topic is a highly relevant area of research within the social sciences in general, and within sociology in particular, because solidarity

is intimately linked to the social integration of modern societies. Following the seminal work of Durkheim<sup>1</sup> and later Parsons,<sup>2</sup> it is known that solidarity plays a key role in societal integration. In addition, research in the tradition of de Tocqueville<sup>3</sup> has stressed that citizens' initiatives, groups and organisations have helped to establish a public sphere of civil society that is devoted to solidarity and integration at the national and grass-roots level.<sup>4</sup> However, while research has provided several insights into the ways complex societies organise, institutionalise and stabilise solidarity, it is unclear whether this wisdom applies to the EU as a multinational community with a marked multilevel structure.

In the aim of this chapter is to develop a sociological framework for the analysis of civic solidarity within multi- and transnational spaces. I will argue that solidarity in modern societies is organised and stabilised on various levels of aggregation and institutionalisation (informal networks, civil society, welfare states), and I will highlight that these various levels are interrelated in a more or less complementary manner. This situation changes, however, once transnational solidarity comes to the fore, given that solidarity relations transcend national borders and need to bridge spatial and social distances. Against this backdrop, I will focus on transnational solidarity within Europe, arguing that the EU furnishes an instructive case that enables us to better understand the challenges, structures and dynamics of transnational civic solidarity. In fact, European citizens have been actively engaged in cross-national activities of support, particularly in reaction to the various EU crises (for example, the Great Recession or the so-called refugee crisis). Moreover, the EU seems to provide a partially beneficial context, given the existence of Europeanised informal networks, organised civil societies and citizenship rights. The analysis will show, however, that the situation of transnational solidarity within Europe shows some deviation from the national situation. It will be argued that the interrelations between the various levels of aggregation and institutionalisation are much more fragmentary, unstable and contradictory, thus leading to a more segmented and fragile form of European civic solidarity.

<sup>1</sup> E. Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, trans. W. D. Halls. (New York: Free Press, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> T. Parsons, *The Social System* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1951).

<sup>3</sup> A. de Tocqueville, *Alexis de Tocqueville on Democracy, Revolution, and Society* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

<sup>4</sup> E.g., R. Putnam, L.M. Feldstein and D. Cohen, *Better Together: Restoring the American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003).

## 2 Conceptual and Theoretical Issues

Solidarity is a specific type of social relation. Recurrently, scholars define solidarity as mutual help or support between members of a group.<sup>5</sup> This support can be based on charitable donations (for example, the sharing of time, goods, money or knowledge). However, these examples are a rather restrained aspect of a more general commitment to act and speak out on behalf of others (for instance, raising awareness for their needs, supporting their political claims or legal rights). Solidarity thus implies that individuals recognise each other's needs and claims as a shared concern and task. In this sense, solidarity is a social relation that is marked by three elements: reciprocity, mutual responsibilities and obligations, and group commitments.

Scholarly works have underscored the importance of these components. In the first instance, they stress that solidarity is a social relation based on mutuality and reciprocity.<sup>6</sup> Everyday life observations might indicate that this is not necessarily the case, because specific acts of solidarity are very often marked by an asymmetric relation of giving and receiving help. These observations are close to the notion of altruism, philanthropy or empathy. All of them assume that somebody is in need of support, while others are able to provide help. However, these suppositions do not reflect the specific traits of solidarity. On the one hand, the provision of support is a responsibility and/or obligation of individuals by which they recognise the situation of others as marked by legitimate needs and interests. On the other hand, the relation of support is reciprocal because one's own and the other's situations are interchangeable. The support of others implies the expectation that others will help oneself when in need of support later on. Solidarity is thus based on the notion of mutual responsibilities and obligations as members of (imagined) communities or groups. Or in other words, solidarity is tied to membership in specific communities and groups, whose members are called on to

<sup>5</sup> S. Stjerno, *Solidarity in Europe. The History of an Idea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); S. A. Hunt and R. D. Benford, 'Collective identity, solidarity, and commitment', in D. A. Snow, S. A. Soule and H. Kriesi (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 433–57; A. E. Komter, *Social Solidarity and the Gift* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> L. D. Molm, J. L. Collett and D. R. Schaefer, 'Building solidarity through generalized exchange: a theory of reciprocity', *American Journal of Sociology*, 113 (1) (2007), 205–42; H. Lengfeld, S. Schmidt and J. Häuberer, 'Is there a European solidarity? Attitudes towards fiscal assistance for debt-ridden European Union Member States', Report No. 67, University of Leipzig (2015).

safeguard and maintain the groups' integrity by replicating and defending shared ideas, norms and rights.

This conceptualisation helps us to understand why the discussion about egoism versus altruism, and voluntariness versus involuntariness is of secondary importance when addressing solidarity. On the one hand, solidarity is a social relation enabling egoistic and altruistic intentions and motives at the same time. This is due to the reciprocal structure of solidarity mentioned before. Supporting others can be an ego-centred investment in a relation from which one expects to benefit in the future.<sup>7</sup> However, solidarity is a risky investment not necessarily guaranteeing future 'returns'. Even if we assume some sort of immediate 'gratification', solidarity always involves costs and thus some sort of sacrifice to a common good or goal.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, it is highly probable that civic solidarity is driven by various norms at the same time. Helping others might be driven by the rationale calculation of *quid pro quo*, arguing that solidarity is a mutual exchange of help that in the long run is beneficial for everybody.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, however, support might also be propagated as a civic duty that limits cost-benefit calculations in the name of norm-conformity and sacrifices to common welfare.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, solidarity also involves different degrees of voluntariness. At first sight, solidarity presupposes the voluntary commitment of individuals to help others. However, this voluntariness is not that easy to ascertain, given that solidarity is based on the notion of mutual responsibilities and obligations. In line with Parsons, we might expect that these obligations are fulfilled 'voluntarily' by group members only as long as they have internalised group norms and values. According to Parsons, it is not force but 'voluntary action' that allows for the mobilisation of individual commitments in a sustained manner, thus guaranteeing the reproduction of groups and communities in the long run.<sup>11</sup> However, even Parsonian 'voluntarism' argues that sanctions are a correlate of normative expectations and roles. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive of a situation that is free of social pressures; at least some sort of soft, informal sanctions granting or withdrawing esteem, reputation or status

<sup>7</sup> M. Hechter, *Principles of Group Solidarity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988).

<sup>8</sup> M. Hoelzl, 'Recognizing the sacrificial victim: the problem of solidarity for critical social theory', *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, 6(1) (2004), 45–64.

<sup>9</sup> Hechter, *Principles of Group Solidarity*.

<sup>10</sup> Hoelzl, 'Recognizing the Sacrificial Victim'; Lengfeld et al., *Is There a European Solidarity?*

<sup>11</sup> T. Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1937).



will be in place even in cases where participants stress the voluntariness of their support. Consequently, rather than focusing on the question of voluntariness or involuntariness, which are difficult to measure empirically, it is necessary to focus on the different degrees of bindingness of mutual responsibilities and obligations. Mutual support can be stipulated in a group as: an optional ('can'), a desired ('should') or an obligatory ('must') commitment. The third is clearly the most binding. The inherent assumption is that the degree of formalisation and institutionalisation will grow from optional to obligatory commitments, and with it the degree to which related commitments will be organised and regulated. In some communities and groups, solidarity might be imposed on members, for instance, by compulsory contributions that are not necessarily made willingly. In these cases, however, membership contributions are only a valid measure of civic solidarity, as long as the related norms and expectations are internalised by group members. In these cases, it is thus important to assess the degree to which group members perceive solidarity obligations as acceptable and/or legitimate.

The assumption that solidarity is tied back to groups does not exclude the possibility that individuals engage in supporting 'outsiders' living within their immediate surroundings (social distance) and in far-off places (spatial-social distance). Local, national and transnational solidarities are not necessarily opposing dispositions and practices. The contrary seems to be the case. In fact, studies have shown that European citizens engaged in solidarity activities within their own country are also more likely to be active on behalf of individuals living in other European countries or outside Europe, while citizens refraining from transnational solidarity are less likely to be active in regard to their fellow citizens.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, in conceptual terms, there is little reason to separate transnational solidarity strictly from other expressions of solidarity. In fact, this type of support can also be defined as group-bound social relations. Transnational solidarity only diverges in scope and size, when compared with more spatially restricted forms, given that it is tied to bigger entities, possibly even to the most encompassing (imagined) group: humankind. Individuals commit to 'borderless' transnational solidarity because they believe that distant others are part of humanity; and as members of this community, individuals are called to act in solidarity in order to conform

<sup>12</sup> C. Lahusen and M. Theiss, 'European transnational solidarity: citizenship in action?', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 63(4) (2019), 444–58; J. Kiess and H. J. Trenz, 'Ties of solidarity and the political spectrum: partisan cleavages in reported solidarity activity across Europe', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 63(4) (2019), 459–74.

to global rights, obligations and responsibilities. In this regard, notions of cosmopolitanism, global civil society and democracy are widely discussed as a normative reference point of transnational and/or universal solidarity.<sup>13</sup>

What makes transnational solidarity unique, is it universalist orientation (Gould, Chapter 2 in this volume). Any other, more specific solidarity involves a more particularistic approach, because it ties and limits solidarity to specific social entities (for example, groups, communities, societies). Particular solidarities thus limit the membership, and this implies that 'others' will be excluded from solidarity relations. Particular solidarities thus have integrative and disintegrative implications. Solidarity is an integrative force because it establishes reciprocal relations, responsibilities and obligations among its members, while erecting group borders between insiders and outsiders. Solidarity unleashes disintegrative forces, because different groups and (imagined) community (for example, nation states, regions, localities, transnational diasporas, subcultures, professions or corporations) start to compete with each other by mobilising and organising solidarity among their members. This means that a proper understanding of civic solidarity needs to take the integrative aspects into consideration as much as the disintegrative, contentious and conflict-related dimensions. As we will see, this is particularly important for an analysis of solidarity within larger and complex social formations, such as the EU.

### 3 Solidarity Within the 'Container' of the Nation State

On this conceptual basis, I propose to define solidarity as dispositions and activities of mutual support within (imagined) groups that are tied to group-specific norms and expectations, rights and obligations. Moreover, solidarity is enacted and organised on various levels of aggregation: Social solidarity is enacted at the micro-level on the basis of face-to-face interactions and immediate social relations (informal solidarity); it is an organised practice that is facilitated, co-ordinated and regulated at the meso-level in terms of voluntary groups, civic associations and networks (civil society solidarity); and it is institutionalised at the macro-level by means of (redistributive) policies, programmes and measures (welfare state solidarity). These levels share the basic traits of solidarity,

<sup>13</sup> H. Brunkhorst, *Solidarity. From Civic Friendship to Global Legal Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

but exhibit a different degree of organisation and institutionalisation. What distinguishes the macro- and meso- from the micro-level is the degree of formalisation and codification. Solidarity develops an increasingly impersonal trait because it leaves the face-to-face interactions space for the sphere of organisational and/or fiduciary solidarity. Individuals either participate in organised forms of solidarity tied back to specific associations, membership rolls and action repertoires, and/or they delegate solidarity to public authorities, whose activities they support through financial or symbolic means. Solidarity is thus exposed to a gradual abstraction and generalisation of mutual responsibilities and obligations. At the same time, it becomes patterned and more strongly mediated by law and legally defined rights and obligations, as well as formally defined relations of support.

This analytical argument is well founded in empirical research within the social sciences. There are numerous studies published in this context, but a closer inspection shows that most strands of research conform to the various levels of analysis presented before. First, solidarity has been extensively studied at the micro-level. Many of these studies have dealt with forms of interpersonal help and support.<sup>14</sup> Sociological analyses argue that solidarity relations are an important ingredient in group-formation and reproduction, and that much of everyday life is patterned by these relations of reciprocal action.<sup>15</sup> In particular, the analysis of social capital has evidenced that interpersonal support and norms of reciprocity provide the 'glue' for social cohesion, essential for maintaining social relations, informal networks and/or larger communities.<sup>16</sup>

Research has shown, however, that informal solidarity at the micro-level is tightly patterned by the organisational fields of civil society and the institutional structure of welfare states. In fact, informal solidarity seems to interact with associational involvement, for instance, in terms of associational membership and participation in civil society organisations.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, the macro-level matters as well, in

<sup>14</sup> D. Schroeder, A. Penner, A. Louis, J. F. Dovidio and J. A. Piliavin, *The Psychology of Helping and Altruism: Problems and Puzzles* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1995); P. Scheepers and M. T. Grotenhuis, 'Who cares for the poor in Europe? Micro and macro determinants for alleviating poverty in 15 European countries', *European Sociological Review*, 21(5) (2005), 453–65.

<sup>15</sup> Hecter, *Principles of Group Solidarity*; Komter, *Social Solidarity and the Gift*.

<sup>16</sup> Putnam et al., *Better Together: Restoring the American Community*.

<sup>17</sup> W. van Oorschot, W. Arts and J. Gelissen, 'Social capital in Europe. Measurement and social and regional distribution of a multifaceted phenomenon', *Acta Sociologica*, XLIX (2006), 149–67.

particular when speaking about the impact of the welfare state. Research findings are inconclusive, but tend to suggest that the crowding-in and crowding-out effects of the welfare state on informal solidarity are to be expected. On a general level, evidence shows that higher levels of welfare provision stimulate associational involvement and social capital by increasing the availability of resources, encouraging generalised trust and spurring feelings of social responsibility.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, however, social-democratic welfare states tend to substitute private forms of philanthropy with public programmes more often when compared to liberal welfare states,<sup>19</sup> and conservative and residual welfare regimes tend to promote solidarity within 'natural entities' like the family and the neighbourhood. Informal solidarity is not necessarily crowded out, but patterned and shaped by the organisational and institutional context in which citizens reside.

A second strand of research has centred on the meso-level of civil societies and social movements.<sup>20</sup> Solidarity is not only a mission of civil society organisations and social movement networks, but also a prerequisite for the development of their collective actions.<sup>21</sup> These organisations and networks need to arouse identity and solidarity among their members.<sup>22</sup> These forms of organised solidarity are an established pattern of mobilising and sustaining solidarity in modern societies. They also have palpable effects on individual solidarity, because the latter is often motivated and sustained by the affiliation, membership and/or adherence to specific organisations, networks or movements. The latter provide incentives to participate, role models for acting, and norms and

<sup>18</sup> J. Gelissen, J. H. Wim, W. van Oorschot and E. Finsveen, 'Does the welfare state influence individuals' social capital? Eurobarometer evidence on individuals' access to informal help', *European Societies*, 2012 (2012), 1–25; S. Kumlin and B. Rothstein, 'Making and breaking social capital: the impact of welfare-state institutions', *Comparative Political Studies*, 38(4) (2005), 339–65.

<sup>19</sup> Scheepers and Grotenhuis, 'Who cares for the poor in Europe?', p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> H. K. Anheier and L. M. Salamon, 'Volunteering in cross-national perspective: initial comparisons', *Law and Contemporary Problems*, 62(4) (1999), 43–65; M. Giugni and F. Passy, *Political Altruism? Solidarity Movements in International Perspective* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield (2001); J. Smith, 'Bridging global divides? Strategic framing and solidarity in transnational social movement organizations', *International Sociology* 17 (4) (2002), 505–28.

<sup>21</sup> Hunt and Benford, 'Collective identity, solidarity, and commitment'.

<sup>22</sup> E.g. J. Bandy and J. Smith (eds.), *Coalitions Across Borders. Transnational Protest and the Neoliberal Order* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005); D. della Porta and M. Caiani, *Social Movements and Europeanization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).



identities to motivate and/or justify solidarity.<sup>23</sup> This allows for the decoupling of organised solidarity from the (potentially erratic) support of individuals, for instance, by widening constituencies, formalising membership rolls and contributions, and relying on the strategic planning of full-time staff.

Scholarly writing has shown that these organisational dynamics open the door to cooperation and alliances across organisations, networks and fields,<sup>24</sup> while remaining responsible for arousing tensions between competing and/or antagonistic organisations or movements that struggle to mobilise and sustain solidarity for different issues and missions.<sup>25</sup> Hence, organisations might be the basis for expanding and sustaining solidarity across borders, that is, organising solidarity transnationally.<sup>26</sup> However, they expose transnational solidarity to the fragmentations, cleavages and contentions prevailing within and between countries. Moreover, scholarly writing has shown that national differences between civil society and social movement organisations are quite marked, because their missions and functions are patterned by political and institutional factors. Volunteering for associations diverges considerably between welfare state regimes, depending on whether service provision is a matter for the state, or delegated to welfare associations and/or individual philanthropy.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, social movement organisations tend to reflect the political and institutional opportunities provided by their national environment.<sup>28</sup> Hence, we need to take into consideration that organised solidarity, even when reaching out beyond national borders,

<sup>23</sup> E. L. Hirsch, 'The creation of political solidarity in social movement organizations', *The Sociological Quarterly*, 27(3) (1986), 373–87; D. C. Minkoff, 'Producing social capital. national social movements and civil society', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 40(5) (1997), 606–19.

<sup>24</sup> C. Chase-Dunn, C. Petit, R. Niemeyer, R. A. Hanneman and E. Reese, 'The contours of solidarity and division among global movements', *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 12(2) (2007), 1–15; C. Lahusen, M. Kousis, U. Zschache and A. Loukakis, 'European solidarity in times of crisis: comparing transnational activism of civic organisations in Germany and Greece', *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie, Supplement 1/43: Power and Counter-Power in Europe* (2018), 173–97.

<sup>25</sup> C. K. Ansell, *Schism and Solidarity in Social Movements. The Politics of Labor in the French Third Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>26</sup> Della Porta and Caiani, *Social Movements and Europeanization*.

<sup>27</sup> Anheier and Salamon, 'Volunteering in cross-national perspective: initial comparisons'.

<sup>28</sup> H. Kriesi, R. Koopmans, J. W. Duyvendak and M. G. Giugni, 'New social movements and political opportunities in Western Europe', *European Journal of Political Research*, 22(2) (1992), 219–44; S. Tarrow, 'States and opportunities: the political structuring of social movements', in D. McAdam, J. D. McCarthy and M. N. Zald (eds.), *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

will reflect national compartmentalisations, for instance, in terms of breadth and intensity, topics and claims, as well as normative orientations and missions.

Finally, social science research has insisted on the assumption that solidarity in complex societies is organised and institutionalised by means of redistributive policies and measures, and is thus basically institutionalised in the form of the modern welfare state.<sup>29</sup> Conversely to traditional charity and care, as provided by the family, church, neighbourhood or nobility, solidarity is a legally codified right, thus implying enforceable obligations and entitlements on the side of recipients and contributors. What we learn from empirical research on the public support of the welfare state, however, is that institutionalised and legally codified solidarity is an empty shell if not enforced, re-enacted and legitimised by societal actors. Hence, not the legal provisions themselves, but rather the active and/or passive support of these rights, policies and measures by citizens is what matters most.<sup>30</sup> The prospects of institutionalising solidarity within the EU are thus dependent on the arousal of sufficient public support from citizens.<sup>31</sup> In this respect, research has insisted on the contentiousness of institutionalised solidarity, because citizens tend to diverge in the amount of support they express. Additionally, research has devoted itself to the analysis of public discourse in the mass media to show that the principle of solidarity is highly contested, particularly when speaking about the economic and fiscal crisis, and the European measures to assist countries most severely hit by them, such as Greece.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> E.g., K. Banting and W. Kymlicka (eds.), *The Strains of Commitment: The Political Sources of Solidarity in Diverse Societies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>30</sup> S. Svallfors, 'Worlds of welfare and attitudes to redistribution: a comparison of eight western nations', *European Journal of Sociology*, 13(3) (1997), 283–304; P. Rehm, J. S. Hacker and M. Schlesinger, 'Insecure alliances: risk, inequality and support for the welfare state', *American Political Science Review*, 106(2) (2012), 386–406.

<sup>31</sup> S. Mau, 'Democratic demand for a social Europe? Preferences of the European citizenry', *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 14(2) (2005), 76–85; J. Gerhards, H. Lengfeld, Z. S. Ignácz, F. K. Kley and M. Priem, 'How strong is European solidarity?', *Berlin Studies on the Sociology of Europe* (BSSE), 37 (2018), 1–37.

<sup>32</sup> Y. Mylonas, 'Media and the economic crisis of the EU: the 'culturalization' of a systemic crisis and *Bild-Zeitung's* framing of Greece', *tripleC*, 10(2) (2012), 646–71; P. Wilde, A. de Michailidou and H. J. Trenz, *Contesting Europe. Exploring Euro-scepticism in Online Media Coverage* (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2013); S. Papatthanassopoulos, 'European media views of the Greek crisis', in S. Schifferes and R. Roberts (eds.), *The Media and the Financial Crises. Comparative and Historical Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 103–18.

Overall, previous research findings have testified that solidarity is aggregated, organised and stabilised at various levels of analysis. Additionally, it shows that intensities and forms of solidarity at the micro-, meso- and macro-levels are interrelated. To a varying degree, national welfare states codify binding rights and obligations, delegate service provision to civil society, and promote normative expectations about active social citizenry, while civil societies provide an organisational field of voluntary groups and associations that arouses, organises and sustains citizen involvement in solidarity activities. At the same time, however, civil societies and welfare states also depend on the readiness and ability of citizens to engage in organised activities and to morally and financially support public policies and programmes of redistribution.

#### 4 Solidarity within the European Union

The assumption that solidarity is aroused, organised and institutionalised at different levels also applies to the EU, given that a significant share of the European citizenry subscribes to the idea of European solidarity,<sup>33</sup> that an organised field of European associations and networks has been established,<sup>34</sup> and that the EU has included the principle of solidarity in its legal framework.<sup>35</sup> However, the current state of solidarity and its prospects are very different when compared to the situation within the European Member States, given that the EU is a much more complex social formation. This also means that the mobilisation, organisation and institutionalisation of solidarity at the micro-, meso- and macro-levels will most probably be exposed to a different set of constraints and limitations. These limitations are related to the sheer size of the

<sup>33</sup> Mau, 'Democratic demand for a social Europe?'; Gerhards et al., *How Strong Is European Solidarity?*; S. Baute, B. Meuleman and K. Abts, 'Welfare state attitudes and support for social Europe: spillover or obstacle?', *Journal of Social Policy* (2018), 1–19; C. Lahusen and M. T. Grasso (eds.), *Solidarity in Europe. Citizens' Responses in Times of Crisis* Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

<sup>34</sup> S. Smismans, *Civil Society and Legitimate European Governance* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2006); R. Balme and D. Chabanet, *European Governance and Democracy. Power and Protest in the EU* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008); B. Kohler-Koch and C. Quittkat, *De-mystification of Participatory Democracy. EU-governance and Civil Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>35</sup> M. Ross and Y. Borgmann-Prebil (eds.), *Promoting Solidarity in the European Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); E. di Napoli and D. Russo, 'Solidarity in the European Union in times of crisis: towards "European Solidarity"?', in V. Federico and C. Lahusen (eds.), *Solidarity as a Public Virtue. Law and Public Policies in the European Union* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2018), pp. 195–248.

European community, but also to the fact that the EU is composed of various nation states that provide targets and arenas of civic solidarity, and thus might monopolise solidarity dispositions and activities. Consequently, European solidarity has to overcome problems associated with the size and structure of the EU. A closer inspection along the heuristic model introduced before promises to identify the main challenges and core implications.

First, informal solidarity at the citizens' level is particularly demanding, because the EU provides few possibilities for rooting civic solidarity in individual, face-to-face relations of cross-border help and exchange. Previous research even suggests that social solidarity is strongly attached to grown communities, where proximity seems to play a certain role. The readiness to support others seems to be stronger in regard to those who feel closer and share a sense of identity and belongingness, thus distinguishing between countrymen and foreigners.<sup>36</sup> This is associated with the underlying notion of reciprocity, which privileges relations of solidarity among people that maintain direct or close social relations.<sup>37</sup> This evidence, however, does not rule out the possibility that citizens engage in European solidarity all together. Two arguments can be extracted from previous research. On the one hand, studies on transnationalism provide ample evidence that proximity, identity and reciprocity are not necessarily tied back to a physical territory, because contact networks and everyday life practices can transcend national borders.<sup>38</sup> These studies insist that European integration and globalisation promote transnationalism, because they establish new opportunities that increase cross-national mobility, communication and networking.<sup>39</sup> On this basis, transnationalisation might create horizontally opened spaces of mutual support and

<sup>36</sup> W. van Oorschot, 'Who should get what, and why? On deservingness criteria and the conditionality of solidarity among the public', *Policy & Politics*, 28(1) (2000), 33–48; M. Coenders, M. Lubbers and P. Scheepers, 'Support for labour-market discrimination of migrants in Europe', in W. Arts and L. Halman (eds.), *Value Contrasts and Consensus in Present-day Europe. Painting Europe's Moral Landscapes* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2013), pp. 73–94; E. B. Peral and A. Ramos, 'Neighbours: determinants of whom Europeans want to keep at a distance', in W. Arts and L. Halman (eds.), *Value Contrasts and Consensus in Present-day Europe. Painting Europe's Moral Landscapes* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2013), pp. 117–41.

<sup>37</sup> Molm, Collett and Schafer, 'Building solidarity through generalized exchange'.

<sup>38</sup> J. Delhey, E. Deutschmann, T. Graf and K. Richter, 'Measuring the Europeanization of everyday life: three new indices and an empirical application', *European Societies*, 6(3) (2016), 355–77.

<sup>39</sup> E. Recchi and A. Favell, *Pioneers of European Integration. Citizenship and Mobility in the EU* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2009); S. Mau and J. Mewes, 'Horizontal Europeanisation



help. On the other hand, we might expect national forms of solidarity to spill over at the European level.<sup>40</sup> Citizens supportive of redistributive policies within the nation state seem to be more sympathetic to extending solidarity measures at the EU level.<sup>41</sup> It is thus to be expected that the levels of public support for European solidarity thus mirror local and national contexts.<sup>42</sup> Welfare countries with higher rates of approval of institutionalised solidarity would be more supportive of European solidarity policies, but also countries with a greater need for solidarity, such as the crisis countries.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, we must expect that informal European solidarity will be highly fragmented both between countries along the opportunities and constraints that national contexts provide, as well as within each country along the divisions between proponents and opponents.

Second, organised civil society plays a particularly important role in arousing and stabilising European solidarity under these circumstances. Research has corroborated that this field of organisation has grown substantially at the EU level as a consequence of the construction of the EU.<sup>44</sup> It thus provides organisational agency and entrepreneurship in order to mobilise, organise and maintain civic solidarity across borders. Several studies have testified to the ability of these European associations, multinational networks and issue coalitions to co-ordinate support and protest activities transnationally in different issue fields.<sup>45</sup> However, this form of organised solidarity also has limitations. In the first instance, the organisational field is mainly devoted to political advocacy and interest representation, and is thus strongly accommodated in the institutional structures and working procedures of the EU.<sup>46</sup> The organisations

in contextual perspective. What drives cross-border activities within the European Union?', *European Societies*, 14(1) (2011): 7–34.

<sup>40</sup> Baute et al., 'Welfare state attitudes and support for social Europe: spillover or obstacle?'

<sup>41</sup> Baute et al., 'Welfare state attitudes and support for social Europe: spillover or obstacle?'; Gerhards et al., *How Strong Is European Solidarity?*

<sup>42</sup> Mau and Mews, 'Horizontal Europeanisation in contextual perspective'.

<sup>43</sup> Gerhards et al., *How Strong Is European Solidarity?*; Lahusen and Grasso, 'Solidarity in Europe. Citizens' responses in times of crisis'.

<sup>44</sup> Smismans, *Civil Society and Legitimate European Governance*; Kohler-Koch and Quittkat, *De-mystification of Participatory Democracy*.

<sup>45</sup> Balme and Chabanet, *European Governance and Democracy*; Della Porta and Caiani, *Social Movements and Europeanization*.

<sup>46</sup> D. Rucht, 'Lobbying or protest? Strategies to influence EU environmental policies', in D. Imig and S. Tarrow (eds.), *Contentious Europeans: Protest and Politics in an Emerging Polity* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), pp. 125–61; Kohler-Koch and Quittkat, *De-mystification of Participatory Democracy*.

represent multinational fields of associations and groups, and they co-ordinate locally rooted solidarity activities, but their ability to mobilise transnational solidarity activities ultimately depends on the readiness of local activists to engage in these transnational campaigns. In fact, the locus of activities remains national and local, and this means that the organised field of civil societies stays segmented in regard to issue fields and countries.<sup>47</sup>

Third, the degree of institutionalisation of solidarity in terms of European treaties and public policies at the EU level is rather low.<sup>48</sup> References to the principle of solidarity are included in the TEU in regard to the general objectives of the Union (Article 3), and in regard to different policy areas, such as border checks, asylum and immigration (Article 80), economic policy and energy (Articles 122 and 194), and security and disaster relief (Article 222). But this institutionalisation has various specificities. On the one hand, the principle of solidarity is addressed as governments and calls the Member States explicitly to co-operate more closely in order to co-ordinate policy measures and secure a fair burden share of issues that require joint problem solving. The ability to pressure Member States into burden sharing is low, as evidenced by the incapacity of the EU to agree on a quota system for refugees and asylum seekers since 2015. On the other hand, the EU has only minor competencies in the field of social policies, and is thus unable to regulate the relations between states and citizens in terms of social rights and benefits. Social policies remain a matter for the Member States, and European programmes are rather geared to increase cooperation and harmonisation, for example, through the Open Method of Coordination or the European Semester.<sup>49</sup> The EU has not set up any social security schemes or programmes targeting European citizens, because nation states are exclusively in charge of this field. Additionally, the EU is unable to make use of civil society organisations as a subsidiary agent of redistribution, because the delegation of service provision to civil societies as an instrument of welfare generation remains in the hands of the nation

<sup>47</sup> H. Johansson and S. Kalm, *EU Civil Society. Patterns of Cooperation, Competition and Conflict* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Lahusen et al., 'European solidarity in times of crisis'.

<sup>48</sup> di Napoli Russo, 'Solidarity in the European Union'.

<sup>49</sup> M. Jessoula, 'Europe 2020 and the fight against poverty – beyond competence clash, towards "hybrid" governance solutions?', *Social Policy & Administration*, 49(4) (2015), 490–511; P. Copeland and M. Daly, 'The European Semester and EU social policy', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 56(5) (2018), 1001–18.

state. As a consequence, European solidarity is institutionalised only in terms of policy co-ordination, thus restating the importance of Member States and the subsequent disparities in legal frameworks and public policies.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, the EU promotes civil society organisations both financially and symbolically, but at the same time, it is unable to establish a European statute of associations, and thus to detach transnationally active initiatives and organisations from specific national legal and institutional contexts.

These observations conclude that European solidarity is subjected to a low degree of transnational organisation and institutionalisation. Against this backdrop, we expect that the public sphere, and in particular the mass media, will play a more noticeable role. They might be treated as 'functional equivalents': If the level of organisation and institutionalisation of solidarity is low at the EU level, then it might be plausible to assume that the mass media will have a much higher impact on mobilising, stabilising, questioning and discouraging European solidarity. The mass media is an important 'gatekeeper' and agenda-setter, meaning that it is important in raising awareness for issues and in shaping public opinion. Research has confirmed that the mass media plays a crucial role in public discourse about European solidarity, and that it thus influences the ideas and expectations citizens have about its meaning and meaninglessness, such as fiscal solidarity measures in support of countries affected by the financial and economic crisis.<sup>51</sup> In analytic terms, it is to be expected that the mass media will increase the volatility and fragmentation of European solidarity considerably. On the one hand, mass mediated debates about European solidarity should be exposed to cycles of attention: The more intense the focus of debates on specific grievances, target groups and solidarity activities, the more marked the decline of attention will be once other issues emerge. On the other hand, public discourse about European solidarity should follow the structure of the European public sphere: Given the existence of different language areas, mass media markets and national regulations, there might be common events, issues and claims; nevertheless, distinct national debates about them will emerge.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>50</sup> V. Federico and C. Lahusen (eds.), *Solidarity as a Public Virtue. Law and Public Policies in the European Union* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2018).

<sup>51</sup> Mylonas, 'Media and the economic crisis of the EU'; Wilde, Michailidou and Trenz, *Contesting Europe. Exploring Euro-scepticism in Online Media Coverage*; Papathanassopoulos, 'European media views of the Greek Crisis'.

<sup>52</sup> C. Bee and E. Bozzini, *Mapping the Public Sphere. Institutions, Media and Civil Society* (London: Routledge 2010).

In summary, available evidence suggests that care must be taken when drawing conclusive statements about European (civic) solidarity. What the previous observations show is that European solidarity is a widely diffused latent normative principle, activated only under specific circumstances. In this sense, European solidarity in action is expected to be fragile, contested, volatile and fragmented. It is contested because the degree of institutionalisation is low, and the number of institutional proponents defending its cause have limited powers. It is fragile because it cannot build on a well-developed organisational field that has a transnational structure and outreach, volatile because it is not a fixed point on public agendas, but rather an issue surfacing in emergency situations where immediate action is required. Lastly, it is fragmented because European solidarity is not a cross-cutting principle of action within the EU, and thus left to the discretion of citizens with their specific preferences, and to civic organisations with their issue-specific foci of attention and memberships.

## 5 Empirical Evidence: the Momentum of European Solidarity

These conceptual and analytical observations require empirical evidence in order to testify to their plausibility. For this purpose, data from TransSOL, an EU-funded research project, will be used.<sup>53</sup> Among others, this project conducted a systematic mapping of civic initiatives and associations engaged in solidarity activities in three different issue fields, namely: disabilities, unemployment and asylum/refugees. The selection of these issues fields was led by the assumption that structures and dynamics of civic engagement and organised civil societies might diverge not only between countries, but also between policy domains and social problems, given that solidarity dispositions are – according to previous research<sup>54</sup> – influenced by concepts of social proximity and deservingness (privileging people with disabilities against refugees), and neediness (favouring refugees and/or the unemployed depending on circumstances).

<sup>53</sup> The data employed in this paper were collected as part of the European Horizon 2020 Project 'European paths to transnational solidarity at times of crisis: Conditions, forms, role models and policy responses' (TransSOL) led by the University of Siegen. This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 649435.

<sup>54</sup> Van Oorschot 'Who should get what, and why?'; W. van Oorschot, 'Making the difference in social Europe: deservingness perceptions among citizens of European welfare states', *Journal of European Social Policy*, 16(1) (2006), 23–42.



Data was collected in eight countries (Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Switzerland and the UK) and extracted from 300 randomly chosen organisational websites (100 for each of the three fields), following a standardised content analysis based on a cross-nationally co-ordinated and tested codebook.<sup>55</sup> It is noteworthy that this sample does not mirror the organisational field of civil society in its fullness, because it focuses on solidarity groups and organisations that have a transnational element in at least one of eight criteria. We only selected transnational solidarity organisations (TSOs) and groups with (1) branches, (2) activities, (3) beneficiaries, (4) volunteers, (5) participants and supporters, (6) partners, (7) sponsors from another country, and (8) a transnational mission and spatial outreach. Excluded were commercial entities or public institutions.<sup>56</sup> Finally, online sources allowed for the inclusion of more recently established organisations, as well as more informal groups that are usually not part of public directories or formal lists, and are thus capable of painting a more comprehensive and diverse picture of organised solidarity.<sup>57</sup> Data retrieval was completed in mid-2016, thus allowing us to depict developments up until that point.

The data from this organisational survey are a good basis to assess the structure of European solidarity, because civic initiatives and organisations are a more demanding manifestation of solidarity, when compared to the individual dispositions and opinions respondents report during opinion polls and surveys. They give us an impression of solidarity in action. In this regard, the data unveil that solidarity initiatives are mainly active at the local level, with 72 per cent of all TSOs indicating this scope of activity. Differences are marked because French groups are less often active at this level (that is, 22 per cent), while in other countries, this is the rule (for example, 84 per cent in Greece, 95 per cent in Germany, 96 per cent in Italy and 97 per cent in the UK). The prevalence of local initiatives is not surprising, given that this survey was not only interested in large, formal organisations, but also in informal groups which are most often active in their immediate locale. In this sense, our comprehensive

<sup>55</sup> M. Kousis, M. Giugni and C. Lahusen, 'Action organization analysis: extending protest event analysis using websites', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 62(6) (2018), 739–57; Lahusen et al., 'European solidarity in times of crisis'.

<sup>56</sup> TransSOL, *Integrated Report on Reflective Forms of Transnational Solidarity*. Siegen (2016) Project deliverable 2.1, available at: <https://transsol.eu/outputs/reports/> (accessed: 29 October 2018).

<sup>57</sup> See also Kousis, Giugni and Lahusen, 'Action organization analysis'.

mapping of organised civil society allows us to paint a picture of an organisational field with a strongly decentralised grass-roots structure. This did not exclude other forms of activities, given that TSOs indicated across country activities at the national (42 per cent), European (16 per cent) and global (11 per cent) levels. Additionally, most TSOs indicated partnerships in other countries (63 per cent with one to ten, and 8 per cent with 11+) as well. Differences between countries and issue fields were small, even though in the field of disabilities, transnational co-operation was more diffused when compared to the field of migration and unemployment. Overall, we thus see that solidarity work is mainly a local and decentralised activity, embedded in transnational webs of cooperation. This picture is not unexpected, given that it conforms to findings on citizens' initiatives and social movements.<sup>58</sup>

Against this backdrop, it is advisable to look more carefully at how these fields of civic solidarity engagement developed across time. This question is pivotal to fully grasp the dynamics that European civic solidarity is exposed to, and it will allow us to check whether the analytical framework, introduced before, is empirically plausible. In this regard, the organisational data provides important insights because information on the TSOs' year of establishment was extracted from websites. This information allows for reconstructing the development of the organisational fields across countries, even though this picture excludes all those organisations that have ceased to exist and thus ignores the volatility of these fields. It needs to be highlighted that these data only provide information on the organisational entities, that is, on organised civic solidarity. The number of organisations says something about the dynamics of the organisational field itself, but it does not mirror what the individual organisations or groups do, and how many individuals they mobilise or address. We are thus unable to mirror solidarity activism in itself, but we are able to unveil the organisational manifestation of this activism.

Figure 13.1 gives some interesting insights into the history of the current fields of civic organisations. Some organisations are considerably old, as they were established before 1900. However, most other TSOs are younger, and waves of establishments diverge considerably between issue fields. TSOs in the field of disabilities started their work mostly in the

<sup>58</sup> Bandy and Smith, *Coalitions Across Borders*; Della Porta and Caiani, *Social Movements and Europeanization*, p. 15; Tarrow, 'States and opportunities: the political structuring of social movements', p. 168.

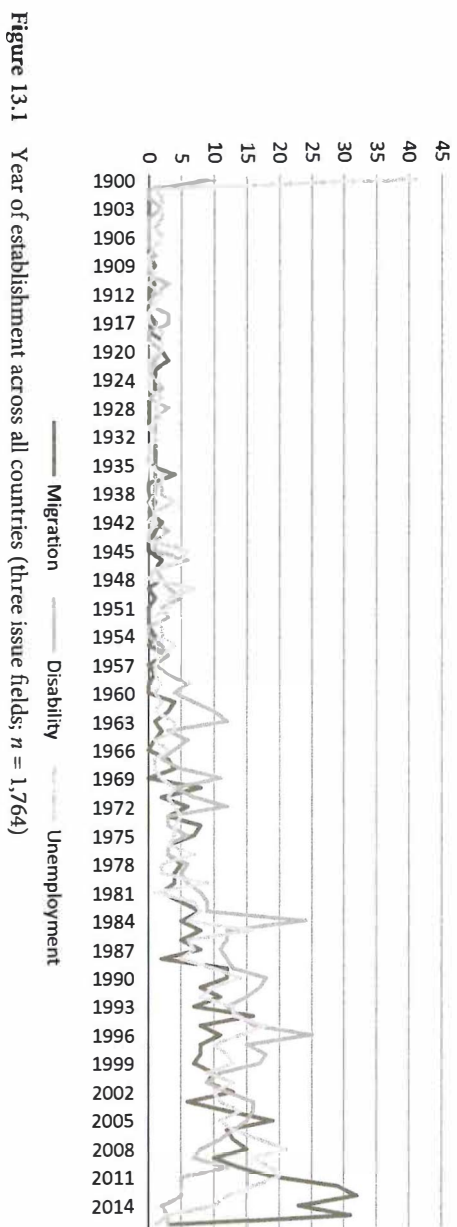


Figure 13.1 Year of establishment across all countries (three issue fields;  $n = 1,764$ )

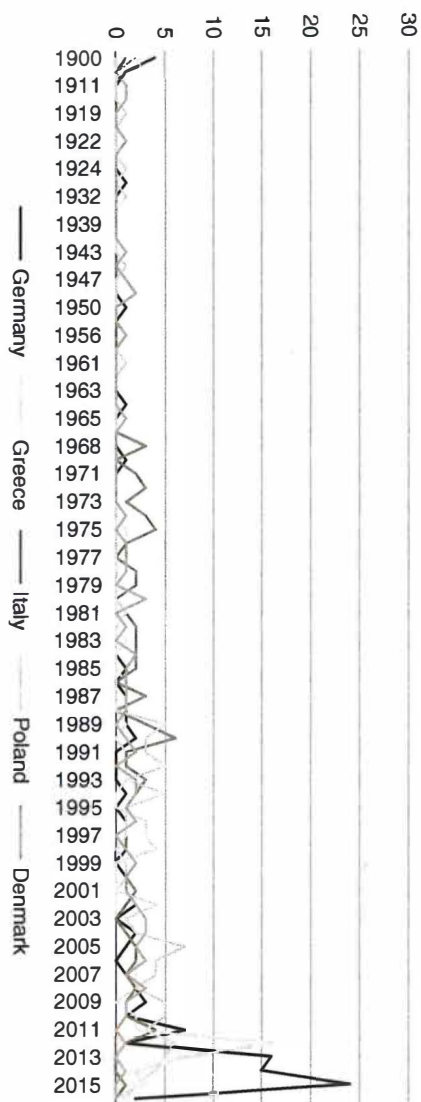
1980s and 1990s, with fewer organisations joining since then. In the field of unemployment issues, organisations and groups started to emerge during the 1980s, and further waves are perceivable for the 1990s, and since 2008, reflected in the development of mass unemployment across Europe, with average unemployment rates running at almost 10 per cent during that period. And in regard to migration and refugees, the data unmistakably testifies that the field of organised civil society reacted to the waves of forced migration, particularly since 2012.

These findings indicate that the development of the organisational field of civic solidarity greatly depends on issues, and thus also on issue-specific grievances and problems, to which citizens obviously try to find solutions by forming groups and organisations. Additionally, a closer inspection shows that this development also depends on location. Figure 13.2 disaggregates the data for the field of migration; for clarity's sake, it restricts itself to five countries. The most obvious finding is the emergence of German citizens' groups devoted to solidarity work for refugees, which reflects the 'welcoming culture' of the years 2015 and 2016. Also in Greece, the number of initiatives increased dramatically, even though this growth is not strictly related to the estimated number of incoming refugees, given that numbers were higher before 2010 and after 2014. However, these findings might indicate that citizens committed themselves to helping refugees in a context of economic crisis, austerity policies and welfare retrenchment, which caused substantial grievances for the incoming refugees. Finally, Poland has also experienced a more recent growth in the field, which reflects the accession to the EU and the strong immigration from Ukraine. The development of the Italian and Danish fields is much more even, surprising in the case of Italy given the strong exposure of this country to forced migration since the 2000s.

These findings provide only a very rough and tentatively constructed representation of the development of civic solidarity in Europe, given that they focus merely on the numbers of newly formed organisations and groups. These data provide important insights into the dynamic side of civil society, because they indicate at which times (and in which countries) citizens decided to respond to upcoming problems and crises in a collective and concerted manner. And in this regard, the data show that the organisational field of civic solidarity seems to respond to urgent needs and upcoming grievances in specific contexts and locations. While many groups persist, it is obvious that civil societies tend to stop growing once other social problems and needs emerge. This has to do with the specific orientation of civic engagement, as portrayed by our data. Most



**Figure 13.2** Year of establishment (TSOs in the field of migration,  $n = 534$ )



citizens' groups and organisations are engaged in political advocacy, but they also provide services and goods to the needy. Additionally, they operate primarily at the local level, albeit maintaining working relations with other groups in other countries. Hence, civic solidarity is transnationally organised, but its main locus of activity is the grass-roots level. This orientation seems to motivate the uneven growth of the organisational field: Citizens seem to engage in collective and organised forms of solidarity when palpable needs emerge, be they among people with disabilities, the unemployed or refugees.

## 6 Discussion and Conclusion

A closer inspection of citizens and organised civil society reveals that European solidarity is a reality. Recent studies have evidenced that the principle of European solidarity is supported by a wide strata of the population, in part also by majorities,<sup>59</sup> even though this support is conditional and contested.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, research findings show that global, European and national solidarities are not necessarily opposed to each other, given that citizens committed to one of them are also more likely to be engaged in the other expressions, while inactive citizens disengaged from distant others are also more likely to be inactive in regard to their fellow citizens.<sup>61</sup> Global and European solidarities are thus not necessarily in competition with national or local ones, even though transnational solidarity seems to require more organisational efforts in overcoming social and spatial distances.

The evidence presented in this chapter proves that citizens' initiatives and organisations across Europe are actively engaged in service provision and political advocacy in support of troubled groups. A closer inspection showed, however, that European civic solidarity is confronted with various challenges and with a less supportive (legal, political and institutional) context. In contrast to the nation state, where civic solidarity is supported, organised and institutionalised on the level of informal networks, organised civil societies and welfare systems, these elements are little developed at the EU level. This unbalanced context makes it very

<sup>59</sup> Gerhards et al., *How Strong Is European Solidarity?*.

<sup>60</sup> Baute et al., 'Welfare state attitudes and support for social Europe'; Lahusen and Grasso, *Solidarity in Europe*; Christian Lahusen, *Citizens' Solidarity in Europe. Civic Engagement and Public Discourse in Times of Crisis* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2020).

<sup>61</sup> Kiess and Trenz, 'Ties of solidarity and the political spectrum'; Lahusen and Theiss, 'European transnational solidarity'.

likely that civic solidarity will remain a very lively and dynamic, yet, local, fragmented and fragile phenomenon.

The empirical evidence presented in this chapter corroborates this picture. On the one hand, empirical data evidence that citizens are committed to solidarity work, and that an organisational field is being established that aims to respond to upcoming problems and grievances. In fact, there has been a spread of solidarity groups responding to incipient mass unemployment across Europe, particularly since 2008, and the same applies to the inflow of forced migrants since 2011, who needed urgent assistance and help. On the other hand, civic solidarity is primarily a decentralised grass-roots phenomenon, even though these groups and organisations are embedded in national and transnational structures of co-operation. This decentralised structure reproduces fragmentations while guaranteeing flexibility and fluidity, and thus assures the diffusion of issues and ideas, solidarity norms, repertoires of actions and organisational skills and tools across borders.<sup>62</sup> Ultimately, it allows civic solidarity to be highly responsive to upcoming problems, grievances and needs.

European citizens and organised civil society have thus proven to be Europe's emergency services, given that they react in times of urgent need, often providing assistance and voice where public authorities have trouble reacting with alacrity. Additionally, they have proven to advocate for those groups that have difficulties being heard, particularly in regard to the economic and financial crisis since 2008, and the crisis of the European immigration and asylum system. These findings illustrate that citizens and solidarity groups jump in when governments become entrenched in an inability to agree on policy solutions.

However, this political, legal and institutional context is not without risks for European civic solidarity. On the one hand, it is highly probable that civic solidarity will remain a local, fragmented and fragile phenomenon. Solidarity is highly organised and institutionalised within the nation state, when referring to constitutional principles, public policies, funding schemes, welfare and voluntary associations. This means that civic solidarity within the nation state is encouraged legally, financially, organisationally and symbolically, while obstacles predominate over incentives where transnational solidarity is concerned. On the other

<sup>62</sup> A. Mattoni and D. della Porta, 'Adapting theories on diffusion and transnational contention through social movements of the crisis: some concluding remarks', in Kivanç Atak et al. (eds.), *Spreading Protests. Social Movements in Times of Crisis* (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2014), pp. 277–92.

hand, it is very likely that the current level of organisation and institutionalisation might increase the volatility of European civic solidarity. The lack of political and institutional responses to upcoming crises forces citizens to act on whatever problems require urgent solutions. Citizens' engagement might be overstrained under these circumstances, leading to cycles of mobilisation and demobilisation. The mass media contribute to these developments, as evidenced by the German 'welcoming culture', which ended abruptly as a publicly visible phenomenon once criticism and populist mobilisations gained momentum. The arousal and stabilisation of European civic solidarity are thus not only dependent on the individual motivations and intentions of citizens. What is required is a concerted effort to strengthen the organisational and institutional fabric within which European solidarity can thrive and evolve.