

Political Claims and Discourse Formations: A Comparative Account on Germany and Greece in the Eurozone Crisis

CHRISTIAN LAHUSEN

University of Siegen

MARIA KOUSIS

University of Crete

JOHANNES KIESS

University of Siegen

MARIA PASCHOU

University of Crete

The economic crisis following the financial meltdown in 2007 had disparate impacts for citizens of the southern and northern Eurozone member states. In this study, we analyze public debates in Germany and Greece, two countries that have attracted global attention during the crisis, through a political claims analysis based on newspaper articles published between 2005 and 2014. The article makes use of multiple correspondence analysis to detect the patterns governing the discursive construction of the European financial and economic crisis. Our findings corroborate the expected differences between the Greek and German debates in regard to core issues and assessments. However, the de-alignment of political cleavages in both countries is notable and stresses seemingly an underlying mainstreaming process that limits the diversity of crisis-related claims.

Keywords: Claims-Making Analysis, Europe, Economic Crisis, Great Recession, Discourse Communities, Discourse Analysis, Crisis

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Interpretation, National Debates, Germany, Greece, Troika, Eurozone, European Union, Memoranda of Understanding, Political Cleavages, Public Opinion, Political Behavior, International Comparative Policy, Austerity Policies, European Integration.

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La crisis económica que siguió a la crisis financiera de 2007 ha tenido consecuencias dispares para los ciudadanos de los estados miembros al norte y sur de la Eurozona. En este artículo analizamos los debates públicos en Alemania y Grecia, dos países que han atraidó atención durante la crisis, a través de un análisis de declaraciones políticas basado en artículos de periódicos publicados entre 2005 y 2014. Este estudio hace uso de un análisis de correspondencia para detectar los patrones que rigen la construcción del discurso sobre la crisis financiera y económica en Europa. Nuestros resultados confirman las diferencias esperadas entre los debates alemanes y griegos en cuanto a los temas centrales y su evaluación. Sin embargo, la disparidad en la división política en ambos países es notable y destaca un proceso subyacente general que limita la diversidad de las declaraciones relacionadas a la crisis.

Since the financial and economic crisis, and consecutively the Eurozone crisis, public debates in European member states have become significantly more contested and the European integration process was further politicized (e.g., Statham and Trenz 2015). Thus European integration resulted eventually in politicization, once again showing that transformation processes usually come with new cleavages and produce winners and losers (Azmanova 2011; Hutter 2014; Kriesi *et al.* 2006, 2008; Lahusen 2013). Yet, more specifically, this time the economic, political, and social consequences of the crisis were dramatic: for Germany we observed a short-lasting but heavy shock in 2009 when the economy shrank by an (since World War II) unprecedented 5 percent. In Greece, the conditions were less dramatic in the first crisis phase (2007-09), but since 2010 worsened into the biggest recession a country ever went through in peace times. Memoranda of Understanding (MoU), austerity, and structural adjustment measures imposed on the Greek government by its international lenders

or the Troika—European Commission (EC), European Central Bank (ECB), and International Monetary Fund—have placed a heavy toll on Greece and its people. Even though the country lost a fifth of its gross domestic product (GDP) since 2009, during the period 2010–12 the state implemented a fiscal constriction of 20 percent of GDP (about €50bn), committed to measures cumulatively totaling €65bn by 2015, and decreased its budget deficit by a notable 9 percent (Monastiriotis 2013). Austerity measures resulted in severe recession, including rapid deterioration of job security and labor rights, impoverishment of the middle classes, increasing migration of younger, highly educated people (“brain drain”), rapid rise in homelessness and suicide rates, and deterioration of public health and its infrastructure (Markantonatou 2013, 16–7; Monastiriotis 2013). Unemployment rates more than tripled from 7.8 in 2008 to 26.5 in 2014 (Eurostat 2014). More than one-fourth of the total (229,000) of small and medium enterprises shut down by 2015, leading to the loss of 700,000 jobs (Athanasios 2015). Severe material deprivation doubled from 11.2 in 2008 to over 20 in 2013 (Eurostat 2016). The impact on the political system has also been overwhelming, as seen in the unprecedented dismissal of more than 50 members of parliament by their parties for not abiding to the party pro-austerity and pro-MoU position from 2010 to 2012 alone (Kousis and Kanellopoulos 2014). Contention arose sharply in the streets and squares as well (Diani and Kousis 2014). According to police records, more than 35,000 protests occurred in the country between 2010 and 2015.¹ Additionally, on the European level, the crisis has led to countless summits and debates on the future of the European Union (EU).

It is in this light that this article aims at investigating the national debates in Greece and in Germany with a discourse-analytic framework of reference. Considering the fast recovery in Germany and the severe and sustained crisis in Greece, it is obvious that this study deals with very different cases. This selection is justified when the aim is not only to paint a picture of possible differences that corroborate previous expectations, but when the focus is also on identifying potential similarities that might require new explanations. In our case, the research aim is to understand the discursive construction of “crisis” in the public sphere. According to scholarly writing, discourses collectively construct narratives on the meaning and significance of the crisis, its causes and potential solutions (Kiess 2015; Thompson 2009; Wodak and Angouri 2014, 418). They evolve through political claims made by various actors within the public sphere, and by the specific interests, policy ideas, and values they propagate (Münnich 2011). For this reason, it is very plausible to expect differences between the two countries. Indeed, research showed that the crisis is more controversially debated in a country hit stronger by the Great Recession. It produces a larger number of responsibility attributions and a higher

¹ Data courtesy by the Ministry of Citizen Protection (police headquarters), February 2016.

share of causal attributions (Roose and Kousis 2016) as well as large-protest-event claims related to accountability, democracy, economy, labor, and social rights as well as sovereignty (Diani and Kousis 2014; Kousis 2015). Moreover, “higher levels of legitimization pressure translate into higher levels of public sphere activity and therefore partially confirm that legitimization pressure leads to a greater relevance of positive self-presentation in the public sphere” (Sommer *et al.* 2014). Overall, these observations tend to foresee differences. In this sense, we can formulate a number of research questions to be validated in this article. Are public debates highly contentious and controversial in times of crisis, and should we expect that this holds true in particular for Greece, when compared to Germany? And assuming that this observation is correct: Are public debates in times of crisis affected by intense political cleavages (e.g., between left and right, between capital and labor), and/or by a marked diversity of (minoritarian) groups and (contentious) claims that shatter established policy coalitions?

At second glance, however, we need to enlarge the list of research questions, because we could expect similarities between the two countries as well. Are discourses about the crisis (cf., Schmidt 2011; see also Blyth 2002) dominated by a specific constellation of actors and specific narrative that leaves little room for contentions and alternatives? Are public debates exposed to a process of de-alignment or realignment in terms of political cleavages and discourse communities? Do these debates exhibit similar agendas in terms of issues, ideas, and values?

Our results promise to deliver important insights, because public debates in times of crisis help to increase our knowledge about the structures and dynamics patterning mass-mediated discourses. In particular, it is to be expected that discursive constellations unveiled by our analysis in regard to narratives and actors will remain important points of reference for the public handling of the crisis and the policy options that stakeholders might take into consideration in the future (Bohmann and Vobruba 1992; Hay 1996).

The Public Construction of Understandings and Assessments of the Crisis

In this article, we regard crisis as an interpreted fact, that is, we are looking at a certain period of economic or political struggle (only) insofar as actors speak about it (cf., Bohmann and Vobruba 1992). This is not to say that people’s hardships in Greece or the slump of German GDP in 2009 were not “real,” even though GDP is a highly abstract figure. However, “to say that a situation is real is not the same as saying that its reality is self-evident. The ways in which a situation is named, described, explained and historically positioned both shape its context and determine the plausibility of one contextual account over another” (Coleman 2013, 330). Public discourses “construct” public understandings and assessments of the crisis as “collective ventures.”

Moreover, to speak of a crisis is creating a societal decision situation, or, in Hay's (2002) words, a "moment of decisive intervention:" defining a specific situation as a crisis implies that a solution is needed to prevent the situation from escalating. Hence the public talk about a crisis is highly influential for further developments. It paves the way to discursive opportunities (Koopmans and Olzak 2004; Snow 2008) for political actors and, at least informally (see Cinalli and Giugni 2013) influences the choice of policy measures. Depending how the crisis is perceived and narrated in the public discourse it can even modify the societal cleavage structure or establish new cleavages (Rokkan 1975), as it has in the recent globalization period (Hutter 2014). "Moments of crisis open up struggles for hegemony between competing strategies" (Fairclough 2005, 55; cf., Jessop 2002). Consequently, changes in public discourses indicate and, although not solely, lead to social change (Fairclough 1993; Fairclough, Cortesse, and Ardizzone 2007).

The construction of the "European crisis" is thus to be considered as a collective venture. Actors are not relevant as isolated entities, but as part of larger formations (e.g., coalitions, networks, communities) within the public and policy domain (Klüver 2013; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993). Scholarly writing has introduced the concept of discourse communities to stress this point. They are defined as "socio-rhetorical networks that form in order to work towards sets of common goals" (Swales 1990, 9). They are constituted by a set of actors who share certain interests and ideas of how to pursue them (Kousis *et al.* 2015; Norton 2014). This shared world-views might even entail "canonical knowledge" that "regulates the world-views of group members, how they interpret experience" (Bizzell 1992, 222; cf., Swales 1990, 29). Consequently, members of discursive communities produce and reproduce shared understandings and assessments of the crisis while reading situations.

In this theoretical perspective, we can define public discourses as an assemblage of publicly stated claims addressed by various actors and discourse communities. In particular, public discourses are in most cases conflictual deliberations involving different and/or competing discourse communities. In fact, "discourse operates within conventions defined by communities, be they academic disciplines or social groups. Discourse is a means of maintaining and extending the group's knowledge and of initiating new members into the group, and that discourse is epistemic or constitutive of the group's knowledge" (Herzberg 1986, 1). Hence we can assume that policy communities strive to influence public debates to shape the public understanding of the crisis. Ultimately, public debates are a vehicle for the reproduction of power, possibly of discursive hegemony (Fairclough, Cortesse, and Ardizzone 2007, 12). At the same time, public debates are heavily patterned by existing power structures, both within the policy domain and public sphere (Schattschneider 1960). For instance, it is known that state actors constitute the majority among all actors in public debates on the recent crisis, both in Greece and Germany (Roose and Kousis 2016).

The literature points at huge imbalances in public access “apparently resulting from differential command of money and other resources” that “seem to violate norms of equal access, representativeness, balance, and diversity in the marketplace of ideas” (Danielian and Page 1994; Tresch and Fischer 2015).

The analysis of Greek and German public debates provides illuminating input to this theoretical argument. The Great Recession has been an imperative topic of public debates and has impacted on the policy priorities and orientations of their participants. However, it is not clear whether this has altered the structures of the national policy domains with their competing topics, goals, and orientations. In this sense, we can paint three different scenarios. First, we assume that both countries are still marked by those political cleavages that tend to structure politics in most advanced democracies: the one between conservative and leftist political allegiances, between market liberalism and Keynesianism, and between employers and labor organizations. These cleavages have been corroborated recurrently by previous research (e.g., Lahusen and Baumgarten 2010; Sonnett 2010; Zschache 2016), because competing discourse communities tend to keep distant within the public sphere, when promoting their policy agendas. In this sense, we should expect that public debates about the crisis and its antidotes should be patterned by these cleavages even in a much more pronounced way than during “normal times.” In fact, the economic and fiscal crisis might push contending policy coalitions and discourse communities to struggle much more forcefully for their goals to capitalize on the critical momentum generated by the crisis in regard to problem-solving policies.

This expectation is very plausible. However, cursory observations suggest that two other scenarios are very probable as well. Second, there might be a mainstreaming or streamlining impact on public debates that entail a realignment of traditional political cleavages. This scenario can be exemplified by the dictum of Margaret Thatcher that “there is no alternative” (TINA) to Thatcherism. In Germany, this doctrine was promoted by German governments also in reaction to the Great Recession and the proposed austerity measures, notably through both parties forming Angela Merkel’s cabinet (i.e., the Christian and Social Democrats). In Greece, the TINA scenario (Gerodimos and Karyotis 2015) was also promoted as “memorandum or default” (Lyrintzis 2011) by the two major parties which ruled Greece since the mid-1970s—Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) and New Democracy. But also a second cleavage seems to be attenuated, because German social partners have worked closely together since the beginning of the crisis, in what has been described as “crisis corporatism” (Lehndorff 2011; Urban 2012; see also Herzog-Stein, Horn, and Stein 2013).

Third, public debates in times of crisis might lead to a realignment of policy communities. In Greece, for instance, debates tend to cluster around the pro- and antimemorandum camps—which also gave rise to new parties, both

on the left and the right. This said, however, fluid and shifting alliances and positions have also been taking place, as reflected vividly by each consecutive government who usually had opposing views on the Troika bailout austerity policies before winning the election. An even starker example is that of the June 2015 referendum where the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) government was against the new agreements with the Troika, but did sign them afterward and is now implementing them.

These scenarios allow us to specify three research assumptions. First, we assume that the Great Recession provided a stimulus or critical juncture (Schmidt 2010) for established discourse communities to promote their interests, ideas, and policy solutions. Consequently, we expect to find competing discursive communities and advocacy coalitions (e.g., conservatives, liberals, and employers on one side, social-democrats, far left parties, and unions on the other) with clearly separated policy agendas in both countries. Second, we assume that the crisis does not only embroil the usual stakeholders, but mobilizes also further contending political groups and parties. It should also increase dissent within the political elites, and thus boost discursive opportunities within the public sphere for minority groups and claims (Koopmans and Olzak 2004). This should increase the diversity of visible actors (in particular among the marginalized ones), it should disrupt existing discourse communities and realign potential cleavage structures. Additionally, we should find public debates marked by considerable differences between the two countries. Third, we assume that core policy communities might be successful in influencing and/or monopolizing public debates, and thus shaping the public understanding of the crisis. Considering the established power structures discussed before, we expect to observe a de-alignment of political cleavages within public discourses. In this case, we should be able to spot a hegemonic discourse that leaves little room for alternatives.

Data and Methods

This study uses a dataset collected within the EU-funded project, following the research design of a claims-making analysis (Koopmans and Statham 1999). All relevant information on sampling, the dataset and the methodological approach are presented in the introduction to this special issue. For this article, we used claims publicized by five German newspapers (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, *Die Welt*, *Bild*), and four Greek print media: three pro-EU *Kathimerini*, *Ta Nea*, and *To Vima*, and the anti-EU *Rizospastis*, the Greek Communist newspaper); the fifth newspaper, *Eleftherotypia*, was not selected due to its bankruptcy and closure in December 2011. A total of 1,193 claims were extracted in the German case and 1,097 in Greece.

From this dataset, we use three variables for our analyses, namely actor, issue, and value. The actor variable indicates the protagonist of the claim

and was used to identify the discourse constellations in regard to actors, discourse communities or coalitions. Two further variables were used to identify the semantic structure of the discourses. On one hand, we used the “issue” variable, because this item retrieved the main topic of the claim made. Our dataset identifies 233 different issues, which we recoded into 20 main issue areas. On the other hand, we included the “value” variable in our analyses (28 original categories recoded into 17 main values), because this variable was used to identify the guiding normative value or idea to which the claims made reference. On this basis, we are able to spot the normative, ideational, or ideological orientation of the claim, and thus the ideational proximity between various actors. Overall, issues and values allow us to identify policy communities on a semantic level.

Our analyses will be based on two instruments. On one side, we will conduct descriptive analysis of our claims-making data in order to describe the main patterns of public debates in Greece and Germany. On this basis, we will be able to detect initial differences and similarities. On the other side, we will present findings of a multiple correspondence analysis (MCA). This statistical method has been used successfully in discourse analysis to detect underlying structures and patterns (e.g., Lahusen and Baumgarten 2010; Sonnett 2010; Zschache 2016). Very often it is also used to analyze discourse communities. In fact, the primary aim of MCA is to reduce the complexity of a dataset to a number of dimensions that estimate the position of the variables and cases, according to their mutual interrelations and associations. In our case, it allows to conceive public debates as a discursive space into which public claims are placed according to their distance or proximity to other claims, when considering actors, issues, and values.

Findings: Political Claims about the Crisis in Greece and Germany

The analysis that follows depicts the high significance of the Eurozone crisis (an aftermath of the global financial crisis) on the public debates of the two countries.² Fifteen percent of the claims in Germany (188) and one-tenth of the claims in Greece (106) were made before 2009. The larger portion of the pre-Eurozone crisis claims in Germany (147 of the 188 in 2008) are related to the first impact of the global economic crisis on the German economy. Since then, debates intensified markedly.

Our descriptive analyses unveil a number of interesting observations. Concerning actors, we see in Table 1 that state actors dominate public debates about the crisis in both countries, with more than 50% of all claims.

² The following analyses were preceded by separate calculations—that is, segregated MCAs for different time periods per country—which did not unveil significant changes over time. Therefore, there was no need to show the diachronic evolution of the debates.

Table 1. Actors per Country (No. of Cases and %)

Germany	No.	%	Greece	No.	%
Government party actors					
Gov_noparty	166	13.9	Gov_noparty	217	19.7
Gov_CDU	133	11.1	Gov_ND	5	0.5
Gov_CSU	25	2.1	Gov_PASOK	26	2.4
Gov_FDP	22	1.8	Gov_DIMAR	6	0.5
Gov_SPD	32	2.7		7	0.6
Legislative party actors					
Leg_noparty	23	1.9	Leg_noparty	16	1.4
Leg_CDU	50	4.2	Leg_ND	35	3.2
Leg_CSU	16	1.3	Leg_PASOK	47	4.3
Leg_FDP	30	2.5	Leg_DIMAR	9	0.8
Leg_green	23	1.9	Leg_SYRIZA	64	5.8
Leg_SPD	61	5.1	Leg_KKE	52	4.7
Leg_Linke	14	1.2			
State actors					
Courts	13	1.1	Courts	5	0.5
State economic agencies (e.g., Bundesbank)	120	10.1	State economic agencies (e.g., national bank)	67	6.1
Other state agencies	18	1.5	State executive agencies	39	3.5
			Other state agencies	11	1.0
Economic actors					
Market and financial actors	113	9.5	Market and financial actors	79	7.2
Companies	47	3.9	Companies	26	2.4
Employer organizations	60	5.0	Employer organizations	33	3.0
Civil society & labor					
Research institutes	65	5.4	Research institutes	43	3.9
Other professional organizations	32	2.7	Other professional organizations	71	6.4
Labor organizations	54	4.5	Labor organizations	112	10.1
Citizens groups	45	3.8	Citizens groups	31	2.8
Elites	14	1.2	Elites	8	0.7
Other (excluded from MCA)	17	1.4	Other (excluded from MCA)	95	8.6
Total	1,193	100	Total	1,104	100

Governments are more important in Germany, while political parties are more present in Greece. Economic actors have a larger share in Germany, while unions are more prominent in Greece. Given the orientation of most of the selected newspapers, the range of political parties is rather limited, and citizens groups and protests are almost absent from our dataset.

Concerning issues, we see from Table 2 that macroeconomic issues prevail in both countries, with claims addressing economic activities and domestic commerce to follow. In Germany, the debate tends to center more strongly on financial matters (e.g., the monetary policies, industrial policy, banking

Table 2. Issues per Country (No. of Claims and %)

	Germany		Greece	
	No.	%	No.	%
Macroeconomic policy fields				
Inflation, prices, and interest rates	12	1.0	22	2.0
Monetary policy, national bank/ECB	157	13.3	23	2.1
Budget and debt	139	11.8	197	18.0
Taxation, tax policy, and tax reform	70	5.9	64	5.8
Industrial policy	73	6.2	7	0.6
Other macroeconomics issues	71	6.0	139	12.7
Economic policy fields				
Banking system	108	9.1	53	4.8
Financial markets, credits, insurances	108	9.1	47	4.3
Corporate management, small business	22	1.9	22	2.0
Other economic activities, domestic commerce	82	6.9	46	4.2
Social policy & labor market				
Labor and employment	62	5.2	99	9.0
Unemployment rate	20	1.7	14	1.3
Wages	41	3.5	34	3.1
Social policy	23	2.0	44	4.0
Administration & governance				
International affairs	61	5.2	44	4.0
Government and public administration	29	2.5	60	5.5
Other policy fields				
Education, culture, and sports	17	1.4	24	2.2
Transportation	16	1.4	27	2.5
Law and order	13	1.1	6	0.5
Other fields (excluded from MCA)	57	4.8	125	11.4
Total	1,181	100	1,097	100

systems, and financial markets, but also state budget), while in Greece the problem of the state budget and debt, labor and unemployment, and issues pertaining to government, public administration, and social policy are more prominent.

Both countries diverge considerably when looking at the guiding values addressed by public claims (see Table 3). This variable looks at the “collective good” that actors defend and/or promote in their public intervention, and shows therefore which “value” a society at large, and politically responsible actors in particular have to safeguard in times of crisis according to the debates. In the German press, the most frequently cherished values are security and stability, the smooth functioning of markets, competitiveness and merit, fairness and ethics, as well as professionalism. In the Greek press, economic prosperity is by large stressed most, followed by fairness and ethics, as well as security and stability, professionalism, social justice, and accountability. Hence we see that public debates in Germany are focused much more strictly to an economic agenda that tries to defend market imperatives (stability and security, smooth functioning of markets), with a particular impetus on the need to

Table 3. Values per Country (No. of Cases and %)

	Germany No.	Germany %	Greece No.	Greece %
Humanitarian and philanthropic				
Solidarity and altruism	20	1.7	57	5.2
Truthfulness, honesty, and sincerity	35	2.9	15	1.4
Trust	55	4.6	15	1.4
Rights-based ethics				
Civil rights, political equality	6	0.5	24	2.2
Human rights	0	0.0	20	1.8
Fairness, ethics	108	9.1	119	10.8
Social justice	22	1.8	77	7.0
Empowerment and participation				
Mutual understanding	15	1.3	25	2.3
The good of democracy itself	8	0.7	10	0.9
Diversity and sustainability				
Toleration	1	0.1	13	1.2
Economic virtues				
Economic prosperity	76	6.4	226	20.6
Professionalism	82	6.9	82	7.5
Accountability	36	3.0	81	7.4
Smooth functioning of markets	124	10.4	74	6.7
Competitiveness and merit	123	10.3	61	5.6
Community and order				
Security and stability	139	11.7	86	7.8
Social cohesion	2	0.2	13	1.2
Other values (excluded from MCA)	338	28.4	99	9.0
Total	1,181	100	1,097	100

increase competitiveness and merit while combating the crisis. In Greece, the alleviation of crisis-related harms is much more prominent (economic prosperity and social justice), but also the management of the crisis seems to be an important focus (professionalism and accountability).

These descriptive findings provide already important evidence for our research aims. On one hand, we see that the discourse arena is limited to the usual stakeholders, with a strong emphasis on state actors. The discursive opportunities do not seem to be very open during times of crisis, particularly for citizens groups. On the other hand, national debates tend to put different emphases: in comparative terms, we see that Germany stresses more often economic issues and virtues (e.g., the smooth functioning of markets, competitiveness, and merit), while social justice, economic prosperity, and civil and human rights are more prominent in Greece. This certainly reflects the draconian measures of the Greek government affecting the national economy and most, if not all, policy sectors. It might also be due to the stronger presence of leftist political parties and labor unions in the Greek dataset, thus indicating that public debates might be patterned by discursive communities differently.

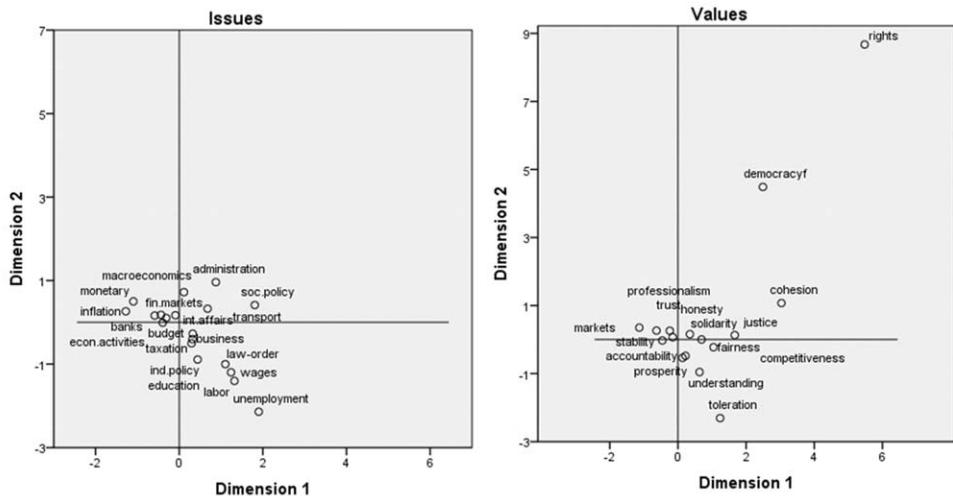
A MCA will help to better understand the inherent structure of national debates about the crisis, because it is geared to identify the main dimensions along which public claims making is structured. We ran MCA for each country separately, because we assumed that public debates will be patterned differently in Greece and Germany. Accordingly, we expect that the relations of proximity and distance between issues, values, and actors will be different in the two countries, and thus also the dimensions or patterns structuring the discourse at large. For both countries, we conducted MCA with a principal component analysis that was directed at optimizing the distances between variables, because we wish to determine the position of the various claims (issues, values, actors) in the discursive space. The MCA calculated for both countries is based on a two-dimensional model; a third dimension did not generate intelligible solutions and did not increase the variance explained by the overall model. The calculations unveil interesting similarities and differences.

The first finding that strikes our attention is the similarity in the dimensions along which MCA places the claims within the discursive space in both countries. In Germany and Greece, the model with two dimensions explains a considerable degree of the variance, and it is notable that both dimensions have a similar contribution: in Germany, the first dimension explains 66.9 percent of the variance, the second one 64 percent; in Greece, the explained variance is 71 percent and 60.7 percent, respectively. Moreover, the dimensions organize the categorical variables in a similar way. On the vertical dimension, the debates are divided into claims that address either legal/political elements (on the top) or economic aspects of the crisis (on the lower end); on the horizontal dimension, the discourse structures along the division between financial aspects (the left side) and labor-related ones (the right side). Figure 1 exhibits this semantic structure by visualizing the centroid positions of the various issues and values addressed in the public claims for both countries. Later on, we will see that these different debates tend to be propagated by different actors.

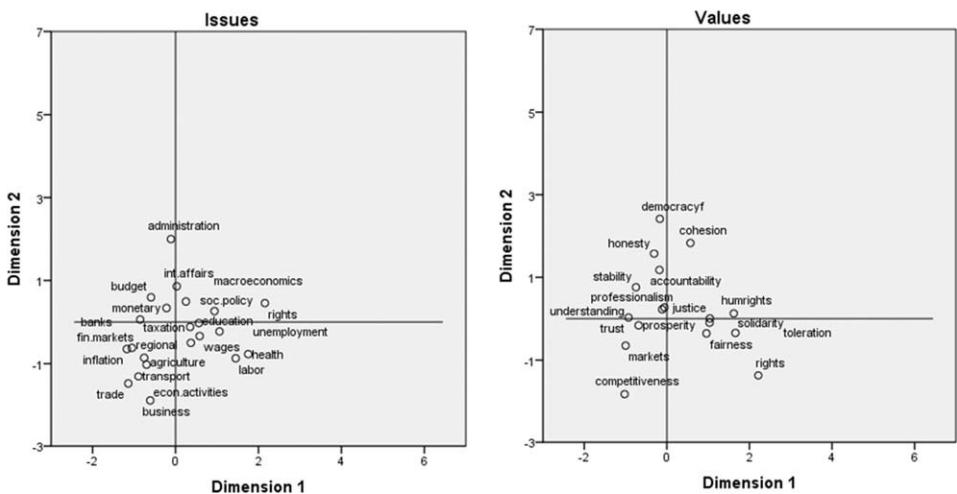
MCA constructs a discursive space that is structured, in broader terms, into four semantic “quadrants:” claims positioned in the top left address the institutional and political architecture of markets (e.g., monetary policies, budgets) and related economic virtues (e.g., professionalism and trust); in the bottom left the focus is on market-internal dynamics (e.g., trade and inflation); on the top right side the topics focus on the institutional and political architecture of labor markets (e.g., civil rights and social policies); and in the bottom right quadrant claims address labor market-internal issues (e.g., wages and unemployment), and work-related values (e.g., fairness and toleration). Even though a number of individual issues and values are placed in different quadrants for Germany and Greece (e.g., competitiveness, business, inflation), it is remarkable that the overall semantic structure of the discourse is very similar between the two countries.

Figure 1.
Issues and Values

Germany

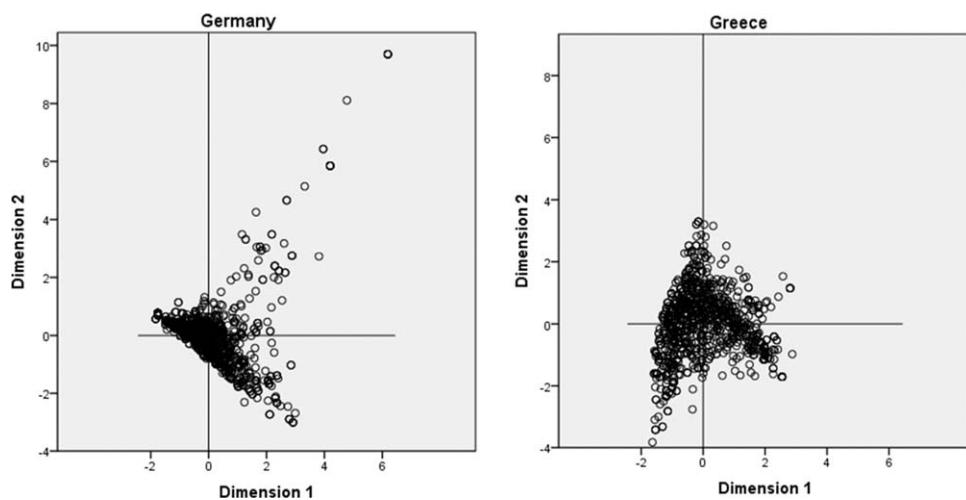


Greece



Differences are linked to two aspects. On one hand, the extreme position of two political values (“civil rights and liberties” and “the good of democracy”) is very notable in the German case. These claims clearly dissociate semantically from the dominant discourse that clusters the various issues and values to a rather dense “cloud.” In Greece, issues and values are more evenly distributed. This points already to a very specific discursive contraposition in the German case. On the other hand, German and Greek discourses differ in the semantic

Figure 2.
Distribution of Claims



accent they put on the common contrapositions. In Germany, labor-related claims in the bottom right quadrant are pivotal, with issues such as “unemployment,” “social policy,” “labor issues,” “wages,” and social values such as “toleration” and “understanding.” They are not only at a maximum distance from financial matters on the top left side (e.g., “inflation” and “monetary policies,” the “smooth functioning of markets,” “trust,” and “stability”), but also most distant from political and institutional matters in the top right quadrant (“government and public administration” and “macroeconomic issues,” “civil rights,” “social cohesion,” “the good of democracy,” and “social justice”). In Greece, labor-related debates in the bottom right (“labor” and “unemployment”) address also “health issues.” Moreover, the position of various issues in the bottom left quadrant (e.g., “trade,” “transport,” “agriculture”) shows that debates are not only concerned about the institutional architecture of markets, but also about the internal structure and dynamism of the Greek economy. Finally, the Greek debates discuss political and institutional matters in a different way. Claims about the political and institutional architecture of markets and labor embrace more clearly than in German debates “the good of democracy,” “social cohesion,” “honesty,” and “accountability.”

The semantic structure of these debates needs to be contextualized with reference to “numbers,” because we have seen in Tables 2 and 3 that German debates tend to privilege economic issues and values, while the Greek discourse addresses more often crisis-related harms and remedial measures. MCA allows us to dig deeper into this observation by exhibiting the distribution of claims within the discursive space. Figure 2 gives an insight into this aspect for both countries. On one hand, it is remarkable that the discourses tend to be highly

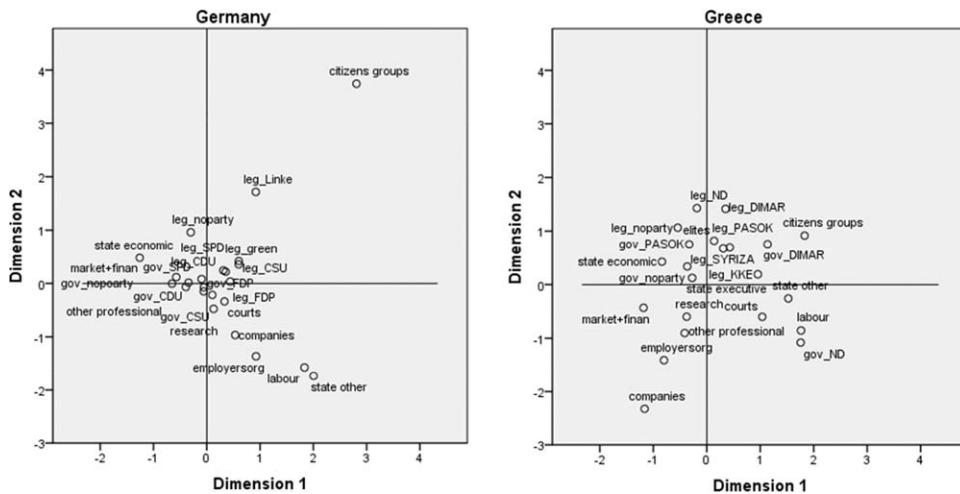
integrated. On the other hand, we see considerable differences between the two countries in the patterns of integration and dispersion. In Germany, the distances between the points are low, and the concentration of claims intense, particularly at the center position of both axes. The debates addressing the institutional architecture of markets (top left) and labor-related issues (bottom right) are close by, even though the cloud tends to thin out while extending into the latter quadrant. The disaggregation of the discourse is much more pronounced when moving from the economic to the political corner point of the debate, where debates center on the political system, democracy, and civil rights. The more we move to this end, the less we find public claims confronting the majoritarian discourse, and the bigger the distances between the claims.

In Greece, the dispersion is less pronounced, and claims tend to group around the central position, even though in a less dense manner. Hence there is a less marked distinction between majoritarian and minoritarian discourses. At the same time, the triangular shape of the discursive “cloud” shows that Greek claims stress more clearly the distances between three more outspoken debates. First, we have a number of claims within the left bottom quadrant that conduct a more opinionated debate about economic issues (i.e., business, trade, and competitiveness). Second, public claims tend to set themselves off in the bottom right quadrant, by addressing social problems (labor, unemployment, health) and values (toleration, civil rights, and solidarity). And third, debates emphasize clearly political and institutional concerns (government and public administration, international affairs, democracy, cohesion, honesty, and accountability).

A final piece needs to be added to this picture: namely the actors involved in claims making. Figure 3 shows that the discourses are clearly patterned by the types of organizations involved. However, in this respect the picture visibly diverges from what we would have assumed. In general terms, we would have expected to find the standard cleavage structure between political orientations and advocacy coalitions: conservatives, liberals, and economic actors on the one side, and social democrats, leftist parties, and labor organizations on the other side. In both countries, the cleavages are different, even though to a varying degree.

In Germany, the discourse seems to be patterned less by ideological cleavages than by actor types and political functions. The first dimension, namely the one contraposing economic and political claims, mirrors a cleavage between a highly formalized and institutionalized policy domain, consisting of the executive, interest groups, and think tanks, and the sphere of critical citizens, particularly leftist elites and anti-austerity oriented protest groups. This dimension is mediated by political parties, be they members of parliament, individual politicians, or representatives of the political parties. Apart from the “Linke,” which is closest to the leftist groups and anti-austerity activists, the discourse of these parties is less political in terms of rights, liberties, and democracy, but closer to political virtues such as “truthfulness,” “honesty,” and “sincerity.”

Figure 3.
Actors



Clearly, public debates are dominated by an economic orthodoxy, which is evident in the strong concentration of public claims around a policy domain that includes state institutions, interest groups, and think tanks. The only differentiation within this prevailing policy domain is the one between state executive actors in the upper left quadrant (governments, state agencies dealing with economic issues), which center on monetary and financial issues, and the interest groups of labor and capital in the bottom right quadrant, which deal with labor market- and work-related issues. This pattern is very surprising, as it gives an interesting twist to German neo-corporatism. In public debates about the crisis, labor-related issues are dealt with by employers and unions as part of “social partnership” and “crisis corporatism” (Urban 2012), while economic and financial policies are being discussed by the state executive, parties in government, and state agencies. The one-sidedness of this political mandate is quite striking: the German administration (and within it, a closed circle; see Hegelich 2010) centers on financial and monetary issues, and it is unconditionally devoted to further the smooth functioning of the markets.

In the Greek case, the agency within public debates about the crisis exhibits interesting similarities and dissimilarities. Compared to the German case, in Greece there are more ideological cleavages. Market-related organizations (companies, employers, research institutions, market, and finance actors) are clearly specialized on the market-related debate about the crisis (bottom left quadrant), while labor organizations devote themselves to the work-related debates (bottom right side), with the assistance of courts and, even by right wing (New Democracy) led administrations possibly influenced by voters’

demands. The debates about the institutional and political architecture of (financial and labor) markets dissociate more strongly between state economic agencies, center governments (PASOK), government and parliamentary actors without party affiliation, the right wing New Democracy on the side of market-driven debates, and citizens groups, leftist parties, and governments (Democratic Left [DIMAR], SYRIZA, Communist Party of Greece (KKE)) on the labor-driven side of the debates. The discourse of these parties is clearly more political compared to the German one, in terms of rights, liberties, and democracy, similarly close to political virtues such as “truthfulness, honesty, and sincerity,” but also centered on accountability, justice, and human rights values.

In contrast to the German case, in Greece citizens’ groups are closer to the core debate and are, therefore, less marginalized. The proximity to various political parties is remarkable. More interestingly, the Greek debates seem to be dividing along a diagonal line that runs from top left to bottom right: political parties are located almost exclusively in the bottom right quadrant, while executive and market actors are addressing more clearly economic and financial issues. Political actors, among them political parties and party-led governments, speak out mostly related to economic and social policies, but they also make claims relating to citizens’ rights, education, and health. This is a new turn to the Greek “state- or disjoint-corporatism” (Aranitou 2012; Lavdas 2005; Zambarloukos 1993), with labor attempting to be independent from the state, while at the same time governmental actors also voicing labor-related claims. Compared to the German case, there is a more balanced spread of public claims, with Greek Coalition Governments (DIMAR, New Democracy, PASOK) not only concentrating on economic and financial issues but also addressing political and social policy ones.

Discussion

Our analyses allow making a number of observations that were in part expected, but in part also surprising. On one side, we detected a number of differences between Greek and German debates that conformed to our expectations. While in Germany public claims were more concerned about monetary issues and economic stability, the emphasis of Greek claims was more often on crisis-related harms and remedial actions. German debates centered more clearly on the institutional and political architecture of markets, while the Greek discourses were more concerned about market-internal issues and problems. And while German debates were concerned more often about competitiveness, the smooth functioning of markets and security and stability, the Greek discourse emphasized more often prosperity, accountability, solidarity, and social justice. These differences will probably be a reflection of the economic and financial crisis, because the Great Recession affected Greece in a much more fundamental way and endangered the domestic economy, labor

market, and welfare state in a more sustained manner than in Germany. In Germany, debates were limited to a discussion about the necessary political and institutional measures to preserve economic stability and competitiveness (cf., Herzog-Stein, Horn, and Stein 2013). Following our assumption, however, the crisis has no direct effects on public discourses. These effects are mediated by policy actors and discourse communities, which promote specific readings, interpretations, and conclusions. In this regard, our data suggests that the differences can be explained by agency. On one side, we have seen that Greek debates are more strongly imprinted by unions and political parties (especially when in view of the frequent elections of this period), which raised their voice more often and thus promoted their agenda more effectively—as seen in the two older, pro-European and centrist major parties, those of the anti-austerity forces on the left, as well as the xenophobic anti-bailout forces on the right (Teperoglou and Tsatsanis 2014). In Germany, it is to be noted that labor-related debates are also strongly shaped by the employers' organizations, and thus tightly linked to an economic agenda. On the other hand, political and ideological cleavages are more present in the Greek debates, when looking at the contraposition of capital and labor, and the divisions between political actors from the right and left. This has implications on public discourses, because these actors promote either a market- or a labor-driven policy agenda. In Germany, these cleavages are supplanted by a “functional” division of labor between social partners addressing labor-related issues and values, and state actors concerned about (financial) markets and related economic virtues.

On the other side, our findings unveil a number of noticeable similarities. In both countries, debates do not only focus on market-internal issues and concerns, but also stress the political and institutional implications of the crisis (“public administration,” “accountability,” “the good of democracy itself,” “civil rights,” “cohesion”). According to these claims, the crisis is more than an economic disturbance requiring field-specific answers. However, these voices are secondary, because national discourses are dominated by an economic and fiscal agenda that marginalizes social issues and political problems. At the same time, state and market actors are prevalent, when compared to civil society organizations and nonorganized citizens. This finding speaks against the assumption of a realignment of political cleavages proposed in our theoretical discussion. The crisis could have politicized and split political elites, it could have mobilized contending groups and claims, and it could have disrupted established discourse communities. Even though the Greek data gives some instances for this trend (e.g., reflected in the position of left or right-wing parties linked to the Coalition Governments from 2011 to 2014), the overall picture of our findings does not corroborate this scenario.

A second set of remarkable similarities resides in the fact that public discourses about the crisis do not disaggregate into disjointed and separate discourse communities. In other analyses of public discourses, MCA has tended to detect separate groups of actors within the discursive space, and these

discourse alliances have no overlaps or associations with regard to their claims (Lahusen and Baumgarten 2010; Sonnett 2010; Zschache 2016). In our case, the analysis has shown that debates about the crisis are marked by a rather pronounced proximity of the various actors and the underlying discourse communities. Consequently, our data seems to support the assumption of a marked de-alignment of public discourses in times of crisis. In Greece, traditional policy communities or advocacy coalitions tend to overlap (e.g., four Coalition Governments), because they address similar issues and values with firm concerns over the economic aspects of the crisis. We see such overlaps particularly when looking at the remarkable proximity between the parliamentary representatives from PASOK, SYRIZA, and KKE. In Germany, the antagonism of discourse communities with their ideological cleavages disappears completely, which is in line with the idea of “crisis corporatism” (Lehndorff 2011; Urban 2012); it is supplanted by a functional division of discursive labor between debates centered on economic governance and a social dialogue. German policy actors do not give up their programmatic preferences, as evidenced by the importance this social dialogue confers to “competitiveness” as a value to be preserved when dealing about labor markets. But it is remarkable that companies and employers join into a debate that puts labor and labor-related policy priorities and virtues at center stage, following an “all-in-one-boat” logic of crisis behavior (Vobruba 1983).

This similarity is remarkable, and requires some explanations, even if they need to be provisional. We propose two readings. On one side, we argue that ideological cleavages do not simply disappear in times of crisis, but are rather attenuated, or tempered within the public domain. Our data suggest that right-wing governments and parties as well as economic actors see the need to address the social implications of the crisis and develop a more “social” agenda (with issues such as unemployment, poverty, solidarity), while leftist groups and unions are forced to address economic issues and market-driven values, because the “economy” is at stake and unavoidably on the agenda. On the other side, we might consider that the public de-alignment of political cleavages is also a reaction to the common European discourse arena. In fact, national debates about the crisis are interrelated, given the fact that German and Greek claims make reference to events and decisions in other countries and at the level of the EU institutions. The similarities could thus be a reflection of inter-related and/or joint agendas and discourses.

Conclusions

Public debates are an important object of analysis when dealing with the economic and financial crisis affecting the EU, especially the Eurozone, since 2008. This crisis has brought considerable hardships and turbulences, but it is agreed in scholarly writing that crises provide also critical junctures or windows of opportunities for the reform or redefinition of public policies (e.g.,

Bermeo and Pontusson 2012; Schmidt 2010). In this regard, it is crucial to understand how a given crisis is addressed and processed within public debates (Coleman 2013; Kiess 2015; Schmidt 2011). Claims made by the various policy actors—such as public administrations, political parties, interest groups, or think tanks—have an influence on the way the crisis, its causes and problem-solving measures, are defined, negotiated, and selected (Fairclough, Cortesse, and Ardizzone 2007).

Our own analysis made use of a dataset of public claims extracted from a sample of German and Greek newspaper articles for the years between 2005 and 2014. It allowed us to deal with public debates about the economic and financial crisis in these two countries; we note nevertheless that the majority of our selected newspapers have a pro-government and pro-Eurozone orientation and, therefore, tend to report on mainstream claims. The analysis of these very dissimilar cases allowed us to unveil differences and similarities that required theoretical interpretation and explanation. In particular, we were interested in showing whether and how public debates are imprinted by the crisis and the pressures it exhibits on the domestic policy domains. According to theoretical considerations, we proposed various scenarios: a widening of country-specific cleavages between competing discourse and policy communities; a realignment of these cleavage structures in the sense of a disruption and reorganization of existing discourse communities; and a mainstreaming or de-alignment of discourse communities and a convergence of debates into a hegemonic discourse.

Our findings do not paint a monochrome picture, and they do not allow refuting fully one scenario while validating another one. However, they provide important indications about the patterns and implications of “crisis discourses.” In the first instance, the crisis did not erode the political cleavages and actor constellations within the domestic policy domains. Greek debates about the crisis still mirror the ideological divisions between left and right political parties, employers, and unions. German debates still reflect the prominent role of the social partners in dealing jointly with labor market issues. Hence our findings do not disprove the reproduction of country-specific cleavage structures, even though it discourages the assumed realignment of policy coalitions or communities. Discourses are dominated also in times of crisis by key policy actors (the state executive, political parties in parliament, employers and unions), and they marginalize civil society organizations and citizens’ groups. Hence the crisis is not at all a window of opportunity that expands the range of groups and claims and disrupts established discourse communities.

Additionally, our data shows that the crisis does not reinforce or enlarge the antagonism of contending policy communities, when speaking about policy issues and ideas. On the contrary, our findings tend to unveil a mainstreaming process that narrows down the range of issues and ideas being discussed, and moves actors and discourse communities closer to each other, even to the extent of provoking overlaps, and a merging discourse domain. While this scenario is far from being imperative, it does leave its prints on the Greek and

German debates. Following Fairclough, Cortesse, and Ardizzone (2007), this would be a sign of increasingly hegemonic structures.

An explanation of this streamlining process would require more analysis. Our findings provide at least some clues for a plausible explanation. On the one hand, we argue that the crisis seems to force competing discourse communities to temper their agendas, either by addressing more proactively social concerns and antidotes (e.g., among right-wing parties and employers) or by engaging more strongly in market-driven debates (e.g., unions, leftist parties). On the other hand, we assume that this finding is also a reflection of joint developments within the EU. The Great Recession has called the Greek and German governments into action, because each one had to find solutions to the economic downturn, the budgetary and fiscal turmoil, and the increase in unemployment rates. However, very soon the recession was defined as a common European crisis that called for joint efforts and policies. The reform of the European Stability Pact with its new instruments (e.g., the European Financial Stability Facility, and the European Stability Mechanism) is to be seen as an attempt to discursively define and master the economic crisis. In this regard, an economic orthodoxy has been propagated by EU institutions and core member states, among them in particular Germany, which puts an emphasis on market integration, competitiveness, and austerity. This orthodoxy has limited the discursive space by privileging specific issues and ideas, and by discouraging others. The fact that German debates are more narrowly patterned along this orthodoxy, thus marginalizing a discursive minority, and the fact that Greek debates exhibit a broader range of claims, might just be a reflection of this European discourse arrangement. In this sense, we suggest that the European-wide debates might have had a significant impact on both countries by mainstreaming public debates, attenuating political cleavages, and limiting the political pluralism of policy issues and ideas.

About the Authors

Christian Lahusen is professor of sociology at Siegen University in Germany. His research interests are: political sociology, contentious politics, social movements, social problems, and the sociology of Europe and European integration. He is currently involved in the EU-funded LIVEWHAT project and coordinator of the TransSOL research project (Horizon2020).

Maria Kousis is professor of sociology and Director of the Center for Research and Studies at the University of Crete. Her work focuses on political, economic, and environmental contention, social change, and the impacts of the recent crisis. She is currently involved as partner in the European Commission projects LIVEWHAT and TransSOL where she is leader of work packages on alternative forms of resilience and innovative paths to transnational solidarity, respectively. With Jochen Roose she has co-ordinated GGCRISI, a project on public sphere attributions of responsibility

in Germany and Greece (2009-13) funded by Greek and German Ministries. See <http://www.ggcrisi.info/>

Johannes KIess is researcher at University of Siegen and currently works in the EU funded project LIVEWHAT—Living with Hard Times. He is also finishing his PhD on the framing of the crisis by German trade unions and employer's organizations. He studied political sciences, sociology, and philosophy at University of Leipzig and Middle East studies at Ben Gurion University and his research interests include the sociology of industrial relations, framing processes, right-wing extremism, and European sociology.

Maria Paschou is a research fellow at the University of Crete. She holds a PhD in Sociology from the Department of Political Science and Public Administration, University of Athens in 2014 and holds MSc degrees from London School of Economics. She has worked as researcher for the Institute for the Study of Migration and Diaspora of the University of Athens, the University of Vienna, and the National Centre for Social Research in Athens. Since 2014 she has been engaged in EC FP7 LIVEWHAT project and contributed in the GGCRISI German-Greek binational project, while her recent research interests concern solidarity in times of crisis.

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