Transnational Solidarity within the European Union: Towards a Framework of Analysis

Christian Lahusen (University of Siegen)


Abstract:

This paper reviews the ongoing research on European solidarity. On the basis of existing knowledge, it aims at developing a conceptual and analytic framework of analysis that is adapted to the social and political reality of the European Union. The paper argues that solidarity is a widely researched topic, but that the available evidence does not necessarily apply to the European Union in its internal structure. It discusses structural and cultural approaches to the study of solidarity, and calls for an analytic framework that considers various levels of analysis (micro-, meso- and macro-level). In particular, it claims that solidarity is an eminently collective phenomenon, and that the analysis of social solidarity at the individual level thus requires a careful consideration of meso- and macro-level contexts.

Word-count: 8994

1. Introduction

Solidarity has become a strongly debated issue within the European Union. Ongoing conflicts among member states about financial solidarity with weak states and a fair burden-sharing in regard to the high numbers of refugees show the difficulties of living up to the standard of solidarity, which the EU lists in its treaties as one of its
core principles. At the same time, the debates unveil that solidarity is highly contested. The reluctance of EU member states to help countries most severely affected by the economic crisis and migration inflows is quickly criticized as a lack of interstate solidarity and prioritization of national interests, but is not unrelated to fundamental conflicts about the adequate problem-solving strategies and policies. Moreover, governments are sensitive to nationalist and populist mobilizations and parties, whose electoral successes seem to limit the readiness of member states to engage semantically and politically beyond what might be conceived of as an instrumental and utilitarian solidarity of ‘quid pro quo’.

Controversies about interstate solidarity thus tend to address implicitly a topic that is much less discussed and researched: solidarity across borders among European people. In fact, even though we might expect that both dimensions are interrelated, it is necessary to differentiate between the solidarity amongst states from the solidarity among European people, between the ‘vertical’ or ‘intergovernmental’ and the ‘horizontal’ or ‘transnational’ dimensions of solidarity (Apostoli, 2012: 4). Very little is known about the amount of transnational solidarity and the effects of the current crises on it. It is important to remember that 60 years of European integration have gradually established feelings of belongingness to the European community, enabled shared identification with European institutions, as well as European and cosmopolitan identities (Delanty and Rumford 2005; Beck and Grande 2007; Fligstein 2008). Moreover, European integration has furthered cross-national experiences and contacts amongst citizens, as well as transnational trust among European people (Delhey 2007). Finally, public opinion polls show that in the midst of the European crisis a majority of respondents still agree that it is desirable to give financial help to other countries in times of crisis, albeit by a slim majority (56,5% in the EU 15 and 46,8% in the accession countries, 2011). Approval rates have increased from 2010 to 2011 by 3.5 for the enlargement countries, and shrunk by only 1.1% in the EU15. Fiscal solidarity is endorsed by a majority of respondents in 17 of the 27 member states (Lengfeld et al. 2015). Still, it is not clear whether the intensity and number of crises within the EU might have a long-term impact on rates of
horizontal solidarity across the people. Moreover, scholarly writing provides enough
evidence to assume that European solidarity is patterned by cleavages along the
North-South and West-East-divide, between the ‘Europeans’ and ‘not-yet Europeans’
(Eder 2005), between countries with higher degrees of mutual trust (Northern and
Western Europe) and the rest (Delhey 2007). Finally, we need to take into
consideration that horizontal solidarity might be differentiated along socio-
demographic traits, such as gender, ethnic background and social class (Kriesi et al.
2006).

Before this backdrop, this paper aims to describe and synthesize the existing research
on European solidarity in order to develop a comprehensive framework of analysis
that allows to identify core research questions and dimensions. These tasks are
required because of the fragmented state of the art. In fact, while it is unquestionable
that solidarity is one of the topics that have received much attention in the long
history of social sciences (Bayertz 1999; Deken et al. 2006; Stjernø 2012; Smith and
Sorrell 2014), the study of European solidarity is dominated by a number of selective
and disjointed inquiries. Moreover, we lack a discussion about whether existing
knowledge about solidarity is a fruitful reference point for the analysis of solidarity
within the EU. Our attempt is to overcome this fragmented situation by the following
means. First, we wish to assemble available evidence and systematize empirical
insights. Moreover, we propose to integrate the conceptual and explanatory issues
into a consistent framework of analysis that is well adapted to the study of European
solidarity. And finally, the aim is to provide insights in the empirical strategies to
describe and explain European solidarity effectively.

2. European solidarity as a research field: state of the art

Solidarity is a topic that has always played an important role in social sciences
because it is identified as a core element for the constitution of social order and
societal cohesion (Durkheim 1997; Alexander 1980). As a consequence, social theory
and empirical research have tended to developed very different insights into the core
dimensions, causes and consequences of solidarity (Bayertz 1999; Maull 2009). The field of research is marked by divergent concepts and understandings (cf. Featherstone 2012; Giugni and Passy 2001). This brief overview points already to an interesting paradox of previous research: there is an overabundance of concepts and assumptions, but little empirical evidence and empirically grounded theoretical reasoning about transnational solidarity in the EU.

Before engaging into the development of a conceptual and theoretical framework of analysis, it thus seems necessary to map the immediately relevant fields of research. The latter can be grouped as follows: the study of European integration; the analysis of the public’s support for re-distributional policies and institutions; studies on transnational (solidarity) movements; and research about interpersonal or inter-organizational help among citizens. As we will explain later on, these areas conform to the three levels of aggregation of solidarity; macro-, meso- and micro-levels.

The first and largest strand of research focuses on societies and, thus, on large-scale ‘communities of solidarity’. One basic line of reasoning is devoted to a sociological analysis of modern societies, whose internal complexity leads to civic, voluntarist and/or universalistic forms of solidarity (e.g., Durkheim 1997; Parsons 1951; Alexander 1980). The construction of the European Communities fits into this argument, because European integration is conceived as a process that deepens the division of labour and the interconnectedness of peoples and corporate actors across borders (Münch 2012). Increasing interdependencies and shared identities become an important precondition for a more stable European Union, growing solidarity among member states and citizens, and for reciprocal obligations between them (Mau 2006; Börner 2013; Gerhards and Lengfeld 2015). Recent debates tend to be more sceptical about the possibility to develop stable forms of transnational solidarity within the EU (e.g. Schäfer and Streeck 2013), particularly because the crisis seems to undermine the societal and institutional foundations of European solidarity (e.g. Galpin 2012; della Porta and Mattoni 2014). However, the normative strand of this debate still insists on the need to cultivate transnational and/or postnational forms of solidarity.
that are able to absorb the disintegrative effects of globalization and Europeanization. Most often, they point to the political and constitutional preconditions for the development of a transnational or universalistic solidarity (Brunkhorst 1997, 2005; Habermas 2013). In this regard, a democratically grounded, and transnationally knitted European citizenship is highlighted as an important building block for solidarity that transcends the national divisions and discriminations (e.g., Balibar, 2004: 44; 2014: 162-163; Jacobs 2007; Dobson 2012; Guild et al. 2013; Isin and Saward 2013).

Next to these theoretical debates, empirical research in social sciences has been guided by the attempt to identify measurable indicators of solidarity. In this area, we can identify the second field of research that is made up of empirical studies that inquire into re-distributional preferences, most often with a focus on social policies. These studies are relevant for our purposes, because they argue that welfare states and social policies are institutionalized forms of wealth redistribution and collective solidarity (Svallfors 1997; Fong 2001; Amat and Wibbels 2009; Alesina and Giuliano 2011; Rehm et al. 2012). In this sense, studying public support of redistributive policies is taken as a measure for ‘vertical solidarity’ and, thus, for the readiness of people to finance and endorse public programs of sharing wealth with the needy. This empirical focus has the advantage of integrating findings from the analysis of welfare states and social policies into the study of ‘institutionalized’ solidarity. Many of these studies are comparative (e.g., Blekesaune and Quadagno 2003; Scheepers and Grotenhuis 2005; Banting and Kymlicka 2006; Brooks and Manza 2007), and allow to explain ‘vertical solidarity’ with reference to individual factors (micro) and country-level determinants (macro). As we will see, these studies allow to identify a series of explanatory factors impinging on re-distributional preferences.

The third research strand is located at the meso-level of analysis and deals with civil societies and social movements. The basic line of reasoning is that civil societies and social movements are organizational fields that mobilize, organize and stabilize solidarity within and across countries. Social movements and civic groups do not
only rally for solidarity with specific target groups, but also require internal solidarity amongst their constituencies and members in order to arouse and sustain collective action. As we will see, these studies point out the importance of resources and collective identities (Hirsch 1986; Hunt and Benford 2004; Polletta and Jasper 2001). This insight applies to the transnational level as well, because scholars have argued that the mobilization of collective actions and social movements across borders depends on the ability to arouse the feeling of identification and solidarity (e.g., Bandy and Smith 2005; della Porta and Caiani 2011). Finally, studies in this field of research make aware that solidarity is a contested issue. Social movements that rally for solidarity with certain constituencies or target groups are often confronted with counter-mobilizations and/or competing issues and missions. ‘Organized solidarity’, thus, necessarily builds on group identities that erect distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’, and often provoke antagonisms between both. In-group solidarity might thus imply out-group enmity.

Finally, the analysis of horizontal solidarity can also benefit from the extensive field of studies on social capital at the micro-level. Many of these studies are interested in forms of interpersonal help and support; they highlight the importance of (interpersonal and institutional) trust; and they emphasize the importance of membership and active participation in voluntary groups and civic associations (Putnam et al. 2003; Bourdieu 1986; Oorschot et al. 2006). The studies tend to converge in the conviction that social capital is a necessary ‘glue’ of social cohesion (Chan and Chan 2006; Jeannotte 2000) and, thus, also essential for understanding the conditions, structures and dynamics of solidarity. In explanatory terms, scholars have tended to confirm the importance of socio-demographic factors (e.g., social class, age, and gender), attitudes (post-materialist values and religious beliefs) and societal context factors (e.g., social cleavages, political conflicts, welfare state institutions) (Kumlin and Rothstein 2005; Oorschot and Arts 2005; Gelissen et al. 2012). Also in this field of analysis, however, scholars have insisted on the fact that solidarity might involve group closure, and, thus, a bifurcation of solidarity relations. The notion of ‘bonding capital’ has been coined in particular to point out the fact that individuals do
tend to limit their relations of trust, reciprocity and solidarity to a reduced number of strong ties and intimate relations, thus fencing themselves off from their wider social environment, civil networks of engagement and other constituencies and targets (Putnam 2000; Patulny and Svendsen 2007). All in all, the study of solidarity has thus to consider the ‘dark side’ of social closure.

As we can see, empirical research has provided a variety of insights, even though it is marked by a number of limitations. First, empirical research has privileged the attitudinal dimension of solidarity, describing and explaining the disposition to help. Less attention has been paid to the question of what kind of behaviour constitutes solidarity. Second, much research has been undertaken with regard to public support of redistributive policies, but less knowledge is available on the level of interpersonal forms of solidarity. This is particularly true with respect to the international level, because there is almost no evidence about the European dimension of social solidarity. No doubt that there is abundant evidence in regard to the acceptance of the EU by its citizens, e.g., when referring to the debate about Euro-scepticism (Hooghe et al. 2007; Weßels 2007; Lubbers and Scheepers 2010). However, most research is unrelated to European solidarity in a stricter sense. Third, research lacks a consideration of the various levels (micro-, meso- and macro-) solidarity is structured and organized in in modern societies. As we will argue in this paper, European solidarity can only be properly understood and analysed when considered from the perspective of this multilevel structure.

3. European solidarity: a conceptual and empirical approach

In the following we wish to develop an integrated framework of analysis that is able to benefit from the disjointed evidence presented before and deliver a comprehensive approach that is well equipped for an empirical study of European solidarity. This objective requires two preliminary clarifications. On the one hand, we propose to restrict our ‘territorial’ frame of reference to the European Union, not to Europe in a more diffuse manner, because the EU is an institutionalized ‘community’ that
demands some sort of solidarity amongst its members (countries and citizens). The Lisbon Treaty, for instance, stipulates that the EU “shall promote economic, social and territorial cohesion, and solidarity among Member States” (TEU, Art. 3), a call that is restated in specific domains, such as asylum or security policies (TIFEU, Art. 222). Even though these treaties target primarily the member states, they do provide also a legal and institutional frame of reference for voicing and mobilizing transnational solidarity below the state. On the other hand, we need to stress that the study of solidarity within the EU is not synonymous with the study of public acceptance or support of the EU, its institutions, discourses and policies. Solidarity might be ‘institutionalized’, but it refers to the reciprocal relations among citizens across countries, hence, it has a strong horizontal and/or transnational component to it. In this regard, we need to consider various specificities of the EU that affect the way we can study solidarity. First, solidarity within the EU has to struggle with the (factual and perceived) size of the ‘community’. The opportunity to root solidarity in individual, face-to-face relations is growing, when considering that mobility creates informal networks based on ethnic background, culture or common interest (Glick Schiller et al. 1995; Morokvasic 1999; Recchi and Favell 2009). However, beyond these transnational networks or groups, it is to be expected that intermediate, mediated and institutionalized forms of solidarity are more important to stabilize transnational solidarity. Second, the EU is a political entity marked by a variety of cultures and living conditions. This might engender limits to the formation of European solidarity among established (national, regional) communities. However, we have to take into consideration that additional and/or new forms of solidarity might emerge within the multinational fabric of the EU. Finally, solidarity within the EU is a multilevel phenomenon, meaning that the study of European solidarity should not be dissociated from the study of (complementary or antagonistic) claims for solidarity towards the regions, the nation-state, other member-states and/or the global community. Solidarity is thus not necessarily guided by zero-sum games.
3.1. **Conceptual matters: the multidimensionality of ‘solidarity’**

A conceptual and theoretical framework requires, in the first instance, a clear definition of solidarity that is also able to highlight the specificity of this concept as compared to other notions like altruism, compassion or help. Following the conceptualization of others (Bayertz 1999; Deken et al. 2006; Stjernø 2012; Smith and Sorrell 2014), we assume that it is not enough to delineate solidarity as “the preparedness to share resources with others” (Stjernø 2012: 88). Solidarity is not only a matter of philanthropic help between individuals, of empathy or altruism, but of reciprocal expectations and actions among people expressing sameness, togetherness and inclusiveness (Stjernø 2012). Solidarity, thus, assumes the existence of (imagined) communities with some sort of ‘membership’ implying responsibilities for the others. Consequently, we propose the following definition: ‘Solidarity’ is understood here as dispositions and practices of help or support towards others in struggle or in need, be that by personal contributions or by active support of activities of others, within informal and/or institutionalized communities. ‘European’ solidarity is consequently any attitude and behaviour striving to help Europeans (be that residents or citizens) in struggle or in need, regardless of their national origin.

This definition requires clarifications. First, it stresses the need to consider attitudes and behaviours. So far, scholarly writing has tended to privilege attitudinal dispositions, in particular by focusing on the preparedness of citizens to share some of their resources with others (e.g., Stjernø 2012: 2). Moreover, survey based studies measure solidarity by the citizens’ approval of re-distributional policies and, thus, by the readiness to devote some of their contributions or taxes to the needy (Svallfors 1997; Fong 2001; Amat and Wibbels 2009; Rehm et al. 2012). This option has been used to measure European solidarity, e.g., in terms of fiscal help (Lengfeld et al. 2012). However, this focus is not without problems. Taxes and contributions to social security programs are compulsory and, hence, it is not completely clear what surveys measure when they ask respondents about their approval of re-distributional policies – their general support of welfare states or solidarity relations with specific groups of needy people. In other words: approval of social policies might not predetermine the
readiness to commit individually in support for others. At the same time, social psychology has demonstrated that attitudes do not necessarily transform in action, particularly if complex value and belief systems, structural impediments or individual costs are involved (Blumer 1955; Festinger 1964; Ajzen and Fishbein 2005).

Second, standard measures of solidarity tend to privilege philanthropy or altruism (Skitka and Tetlock 1993; Schroeder et al. 1995; Oorschot 2000). However, solidarity also has a political dimension. People demonstrate solidarity with other people in struggle or in need when participating in collective actions (e.g., public claims-making, political protests, communication campaigns) that strive to improve the situation of these groups by mobilizing public support, committing stakeholders and/or changing public policies on their behalf (Balme and Chabanet 2008; Baglioni and Giugni 2014; Giugni and Grasso forthcoming). In this sense, solidarity is a way of combatting injustices and oppressions suffered by specific groups or communities, on whose behalf individuals or organizations speak up (Scholz 2008; Bayertz, 1999: 16). Solidarity is, thus, a means to enact (imagined) political communities with shared missions, ideas and beliefs. This highlights the contentious aspects of solidarity, because claims of solidarity might entail exclusive identities and obligations, and they might challenge the status quo on behalf of specific groups against others (Arendt 1983, 1972; Reshaur 1992; Balibar 2004). For a systematic analysis of European solidarity, this political dimension seems crucial. Populist groups and parties speak out on behalf of exclusive, national communities, often claiming that solidarity with weak compatriots comes first to solidarity with others, thus downplaying the legal, political or moral obligations nation-states have as members of the European Union; pro- or pan-European groups instead will speak out on behalf of social groups and member countries most affected by the crises, possibly as part of a struggle to improve the situation of weak compatriots, too. In these cases, European solidarity is already present when people are aware about and support public claims by other citizens, their organizational representatives or government officials, and when they actively help them to promulgate their views and claims.
Third, the analysis of European solidarity has to do justice to the empirical complexity of solidarity relations. Two main issues need to be taken into consideration. On the one hand, research has revealed that solidarity can take different forms, depending on the specific ideas and norms associated with it. Mau (2006) and Lengfeld et al. (2015), for instance, propose to distinguish between a civic understanding of (fiscal) solidarity in Europe as an expression of common duties and obligations, and/or as reciprocal relations (or utilitarian investment) to the benefit of its members. In this sense, solidarity can be patterned along different levels of compassion and abnegation, reciprocity, cooperation and interdependency (Malamoud 2015). On the other hand, we have to consider that solidarity is a relative phenomenon, i.e., conditional on specific communities and groups. Undoubtedly, solidarity can be a value tied to abstract communities (i.e., humankind) and, thus, associated with a universalist notion of generalized support (Brunkhorst 1997; Balibar 2004). In survey based research, this solidarity is measured as a generalized, civic disposition of help not tied back to any specific group or conditionality (Amat and Wibbels 2009; Fong 2001; Rehm et al. 2012; Svallfors 1997). However, empirically speaking particularism is tightly associated with solidarity, too. As shown by empirical analyses, solidarity seems to be patterned by the assumed ‘deservingness’ of various social groups, thus favouring elderly and disabled people in comparison with the unemployed, the poor, and immigrants (Oorschot 2006: 23). Conditionality is not necessarily restricted to social groups, but can apply to countries, as well. A survey conducted in Portugal and Germany shows, for instance, that German respondents regard Greece as a less deserving recipient of European solidarity, when compared with Ireland, Italy and Spain - a difference that is less marked amongst Portuguese respondents (Lengfeld et al. 2012). Finally, we have to take into consideration that feelings and acts of solidarity might have a multilevel structure, in the sense that people might tend to privilege either local, national, European or global level, or consider solidarity at any level of aggregation as the realization of cosmopolitan or universal solidarity (Abela 2004; Delhey et al. 2014).
3.2. Analytical and explanatory matters: multi-layered solidarity

Scholarly writing offers a variety of theoretical approaches that help to identify and explain types, processes and structure of solidarity (Doreian and Fararo 1998). We propose to classify them by differentiating core explanatory strategies along two axis. On the one hand, we have approaches privileging either individual or collective dimensions of solidarity. As we will show, it is advisable to distinguish three analytic and explanatory levels; micro-, meso- and macro-levels. On the other hand, the analysis of European solidarity has made use of theories either highlighting objective structures and mechanisms or privileging ideational factors and communicative processes. In the following, we see the merit of considering the added-value of each of them, following the argument introduced before, namely, that European solidarity requires a multidimensional and multifaceted analytical framework of analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>socio-structural factors</th>
<th>cultural/ideational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>micro-level:</td>
<td>socio-demographic determinants and ‘rational choices’</td>
<td>preferences, identifications, values and ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>individual solidarity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meso-level:</td>
<td>organizational ‘sectors’ and ‘industries’: resources, networks and cleavages</td>
<td>organizational spheres: frames, ideologies, and identities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organized solidarity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>macro-level:</td>
<td>societal structures: forms and levels of modernization and integration</td>
<td>cultural structures: belief systems, institutions, discourses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>societal integration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and solidarity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first focus of explanatory strategies has been the micro-level of individual solidarity. Previous research has tended to privilege this level, insofar as it was interested in measuring and deciphering attitudes and practices of compassion, help
and altruism (Schroeder et al. 1995; Skitka and Tetlock 1993; Scheepers and Grotenhuis 2005), and in understanding citizens’ support of welfare states and their redistributive policies (Blekesaune and Quadagno 2003; Brooks and Manza 2007). In regard to explanatory strategies, the analysis has mainly revolved around two approaches. On the one side, we can find authors who explain levels and forms of solidarity with reference to the socio-structural position of individuals (e.g., vulnerability or invulnerability), their objective interests and rational choices (Hechter 1988). Solidarity is a choice reflecting the individual’s socio-demographic situation and the related cost-benefit calculations. For instance, we should expect that solidarity is more diffused amongst the most vulnerable and invulnerable social strata of the population, as it implies more gains than losses for both sides: financial help with some stigmatization risks, on the one hand, social recognition with relatively small financial burdens, on the other. However, we expect that solidarity dispositions of individuals are much more conditional and complex at the European level, and possibly pre-structured by interlocking group memberships: vulnerable social groups in affluent societies, for instance, might oppose the sharing of public funds with poorer countries, while privileged groups might expect less social recognition from inner-European redistribution of wealth.

On the other side, these observations lead us to underline the importance of subjective perceptions, values and belief-systems, emphasized in the second strand of micro-level analyses. Research on solidarity has identified a number of these factors: political allegiances (Skitka and Tetlock 1993), religion (Abela 2004; Stegmueller et al. 2012), postmaterialism (Inglehart and Rabier 1978), loyalties to ethnic groups (Alesina and Glaeser 2004; Luttmer 2001), beliefs about the causes of income (Fong 2001), or perceptions of deservingness (Oorschot 2006). These factors will most probably shape levels of individual solidarity at the local and national levels. However, this does not fully open the door to an understanding of the subjective and ideational determinants of European solidarity as such, given the fact that the EU is a much more multicultural entity than most member states are. Consequently, we must assume that individual solidarity within the EU is shaped also by the following two
factors. On the one hand, we might expect that European solidarity is conditional on the development of identifications with the European Union, as unique identifications and/or as elements of multiple (local, national, transnational) identities. On the other hand, we might assume that solidarity within the EU is conditional on spatial and/or cultural distance, i.e., limiting individual solidarity towards countries that are perceived to be (spatially, socially, culturally, historically) farther apart.

Overall, we argue that an individual-centred research strategy might be an adequate way of operationalizing solidarity empirically, but not a correct way of explaining solidarity theoretically. In fact, findings about individual dispositions or acts of solidarity tend to argue that solidarity transcends the individual, namely by referring implicitly to group norms and beliefs, joint expectations and responsibilities amongst group members. In this sense, solidarity is a collective phenomenon, before it becomes an individual one. This is the reason why the study of individual solidarity needs to be embedded into an inquiry of meso- and macro-structures.

Accordingly, we propose to move to the meso-level, following the assumption that solidarity very often requires some sort of organization. No doubt, solidarity, inter alia, is a matter of individual and spontaneous acts of help within face-to-face situations. However, as soon as we transcend this level of single activities, informal networks and interactions within every-day life, we move into what research about civil societies and social movements has identified as the determinants and properties of collective action (Hunt and Bendorf 2004). Solidarity requires, on the one side, pooling of resources, coordination of individual activities, provision of incentives and sanctions (Hirsch 1986), and, on the other side, it builds on promotion of shared behavioural norms, ideas and identities (Minkoff 1997). Individual solidarity in its attitudinal and behavioural aspects is, thus, very often part and parcel of an organizational field of solidarity groups and networks. Individual acts of solidarity will very often be motivated, directed and spurred by affiliation, membership or adherence to specific organizations and movements. The latter provide incentives to participate, role models for acting, and norms and identities to motivate and/or justify
solidarity, e.g., when referring to membership fees and charitable donations, joint political protests, events of claims-making.

These observations are particularly relevant for European solidarity, given the fact that we are analysing rather complex and territorially extended forms of collective actions (Smith 2002). European solidarity will most probably be more dependent on organization as process and on organizations as entrepreneurial entities. In this regard, it seems indispensable to link the study of European solidarity to the analysis of transnational solidarity organizations and organizational fields (Bandy and Smith 2005; Balme and Chabanet 2008; della Porta and Caiani 2011; Baglioni and Giugni 2014). On the one hand, we hypothesize that European solidarity is clearly dependent on the development of transnational fields or networks of civil society and social movement organizations, which increase connectivity and diffusion processes, mobilize and organize constituencies, define and circulate common discourses and identities. Consequently, we assume that most probably European solidarity will be structured differently in various issue fields and policy domains, mirroring the diverse organizational strength and mobilization power of the various organizational fields. On the other hand, we have to take into account that organizational fields are also patterned along cleavages, conflicts and oppositions, which are of particular importance to better understand the contentiousness of European solidarity. In fact, in many issue fields and policy domains at national and EU level, we see the emergence of populist, nationalist and xenophobic groups, political parties and movements (Kriesi 2012; Wodak et al. 2013; Gómez-Reino and Llamazares 2013), which in many instances oppose attempts to mobilize and institutionalize measures of European solidarity. Here, we refer back to our argument that solidarity is highly political in the sense of implying (competing) notions of (imagined) communities (e.g., regional, national, European) with opposing memberships, missions and ideas. In organizational terms, we hypothesize that the development of European solidarity at the individual and collective levels is therefore strongly dependent on organizational fields, their internal cleavages and contentions.
Thirdly, the analysis of solidarity recurrently heads towards the macro-level, and here, social theories tend to privilege structural and/or cultural dimensions. On the one side, we have a number of authors who have linked the development of modern societies to changing patterns of social solidarity. According to them, solidarity and its changing modes changing across time are strongly determined by the socio-structural realities of modernizing societies (Durkheim 1997; Parsons 1951). This general argument holds true also for many more recent theories of modernity. We would assume, for instance, that economically more affluent societies develop more postmaterialist values and, thus, more favourable conditions for European solidarity (Inglehart and Rabier 1978), while theories of reflexive modernity stress the increased importance of postnationalist and cosmopolitan orientations (Beck et al. 1994). These propositions have not been validated in regard to European solidarity yet. Moreover, it is highly improbable that these processes work in a unidirectional and linear manner. Eurobarometer data, for instance, show that citizens tend to approve the idea of fiscal solidarity, and that this civic disposition is more diffused amongst weaker economies and needier societies, as well as stronger economies and solicitous societies, than in countries with intermediate conditions (Lengfeld et al. 2015). Moreover, we need to disaggregate member states, if we wish to understand the relation between social structures and European solidarity. Spatial inequalities, for instance, need to be addressed, because it is very probable that solidarity will exhibit centre-periphery structures. Northern and western European states possess higher levels of internal social capital, stronger mutual relations of intercultural trust, and stronger feeling of belongingness to Europe, while southern and eastern European countries exhibit lower levels of generalized social capital, are trusted less in transnational relations, and considered to be not yet fully Europeans (Eder 2005; Delhey 2007; Lahusen 2013). Following these indications, we hypothesize that the correct understanding of individual and organized solidarity is only possible when measuring the effects of regional and national contexts (e.g., economic performance indicators, political systems, welfare regimes).
These observations and assumptions emphasize that structural features of European societies will not impact directly on transnational solidarity, due to the intervening effect of institutional and constitutional factors. Indeed, we need to remember that solidarities are associated with society’s culture and, thus, with their guiding ideas, values and beliefs established and institutionalized within European societies. Solidarities are, therefore, constantly constructed and reproduced through public narratives, ideologies and discourses (Brown and Gilman 1960; Calhoun 2002; Mylonas 2012). Here, the studies of constitutions, institutions and legislations are to be mentioned because law can be seen as a transmission belt that translates solidarity within everyday life to the macro-level of functionally differentiated societies (Habermas, 1996: 76; 2013). The principle of solidarity is, thus, incrusted into constitutions (Brunkhorst 2005; Ross and Borgmann-Prebil 2010; Bellamy et al. 2006; Dalessio 2013), but also in policy fields and/or specific policies, as research on welfare regimes and social policies argue (Esping-Anderson 2002; de Bürca 2005; Morel et al. 2012). A legal and institutional analysis of European solidarity, thus, seems promising, because it is unclear so far whether solidarity can be effectively institutionalized at the supranational level or whether it is relegated to a secondary position of merely coordinating constitutional and/or institutional principles of solidarity at the member state level. In particular, it is unclear whether European solidarity can become a reference point for individual and organized solidarity across borders.

Our references to the macro-level would be incomplete if ignoring the decisive role of the mass media as an arena for the formation of collective opinions and ideas about legitimate solidarity (Mylonas 2012; Papathanassopoulos 2015). This role has been evident in previous episodes of the European integration process (e.g., Statham and Trenz 2013), but is particularly important when considering the impact of the European crises on public debates at the European and national levels. The first studies that have dealt with the Great Recession since 2008 showed that the crisis increased the intensity of conflicts between different governments about the necessary measures to combat the (budgetary, economic, and social) consequences of
the crisis (Wilde, Michailidou and Trenz 2013). Given the fact that the mass media are still strongly attached to different language areas, political systems and specific national audiences (Boomgaarden et al. 2013), it is very probable that the propagated notions of European solidarity will structurally mirror the antagonistic positions of member states within the European crisis.

Overall, we, thus, propose a conceptual and theoretical framework that includes various dimensions and factors of solidarity. At the same time, we have stressed the need to analyse the embeddedness of individual and organized forms of solidarity within the meso- and macro-level of collective constraints and opportunities, cultural meanings and discourses. In fact, we assume that the degree and the forms of European solidarity amongst citizens will be shaped by their socio-demographic traits and immediate social environment (e.g., gender, social class, political and religious allegiances etc.), but also by the availability of organizations (e.g., self-help groups, welfare associations, social movement organizations), and the transnational structures of organizational fields. Finally individual solidarity will also be influenced by constitutional and institutional opportunities and constraints on social solidarity, and will be impacted by public discourses on legitimate and accepted forms of (European) solidarity (Lindenberg 1998). In fact, individual citizens might withdraw solidarity in reaction to proliferating public mistrust towards the addressees of help, they might be less inclined to it due to flourishing reservations against civic organizations or public authorities channelling (financial) contributions, or they might disregard it because of mushrooming scepticism about the value of helping others in general in times of crisis. Charitable or political organizations might find it harder to mobilize individual, corporate or state support for their work in times of shrinking institutional and/or interpersonal trust and eroding public commitment to (transnational) solidarity.
4. Discussion and conclusions

The review of scholarly writing in the area of European solidarity can be synthesized in a concise manner: while the study of solidarity is as old as social sciences, we have a very limited picture of European solidarity, particularly because we cannot apply standard wisdom about solidarity to the European level, given the complexity of what the European Union is. In this paper, we proposed a conceptual, analytical and explanatory frame of reference that combines social and political dimensions of solidarity and takes the intricate relations between solidaristic attitudes and behaviours into consideration. Moreover, we see the merits of differentiating between various levels of solidaristic relations, responsibilities and obligations within the EU, namely the micro-level (individual solidarity and its determinants), the meso-level (organizational fields and dynamics), and the macro-level (the social structures of European societies, and the constitutional, institutional and discursive construction of solidarity).
This framework of analysis promises to advance our knowledge on the levels, causes and implications of European solidarity. In its multidimensionality it delimits a broad field and agenda of study that requires further research in many different areas. As a truly collective venture it calls for inquiries in the field of sociology, law, political science, social psychology, and media studies. Moreover, it also implies methodological challenges. On the one hand, research will need to benefit from various tools of social inquiry (standardized survey, qualitative interviews, ethnographic fieldwork, case-study analyses etc.). On the other hand, the analytic framework developed in this paper requires also the combination of two theoretical and methodological approaches: a comparative and a transnational one. In the first instance, analyses must be comparative, because evidence suggests that levels and forms of solidarity are very different among countries, regions, and groups. This variance allows capitalizing on comparative approaches that will help to trace back patterns and causal interrelations. In fact, we assume that levels of solidarity at individual and country level vary according to vulnerability, political or religious orientations, norms and values, spatial and social proximity, economic, institutional or cultural contexts among the groups or countries compared.

However, a purely comparative perspective would miss important aspects of the transnational dimension of European solidarity. Indeed, solidarity within the EU risks being distorted if disaggregated into its various national (or local) components. European solidarity also implies transnationally patterned mutual relations, responsibilities and obligations not only among member states and governments (interstate solidarity), but more importantly between European people (social solidarity). Indeed, there are indications that European solidarity is not only an additive, secondary phenomenon being tied back to regional or national communities. Citizens from different countries or regions are also involved in common transnational spaces of mutual information, claims-making and help; international and/or supranational organizations are involved in organizing cross-national campaigns; and discourses and deliberations about European identities and solidarities do transcend nationally structured mass-media systems, thus permeating
various member-states’ public spheres. One obvious and well researched example is provided by migration and mobility processes within the EU (e.g., the formation of various ethnic diasporas or transnational mobility networks). A consistent and systematic analysis of European solidarity, thus, requires a methodologically complex and differentiated research strategy that is open for the combination of various perspectives and tools of inquiry. It is to be expected that future studies will bring about the necessary knowledge needed to answer the various questions outlined by the overall framework of analysis presented here.

5. References


