

Newsletter

TransSOL is a project that studies **European paths to transnational solidarity in times of crisis**. It aims to identify the forms and conditions of solidarity and to develop role models and policy responses.

The second **TransSOL** newsletter gives an overview of our conceptual approach, presents first findings about the contextual factors of solidarity and informs about current project activities. <http://transsol.eu>

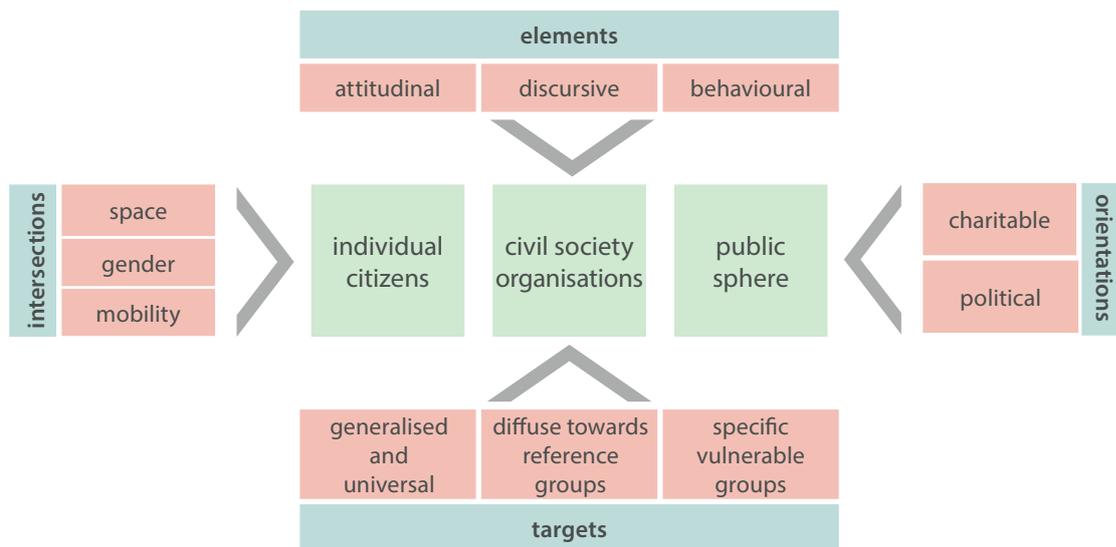
European Solidarity: Unravelling a Complex Phenomenon

Solidarity ranks high in public debates about the future of the European Union. This applies, in particular, to the last two years; the disputes about financial solidarity with weak states had just come to an end after agreements between the European institutions and the Greek government in mid-2015 when the unprecedented inflow of refugees imposed a new discussion about the fair burden sharing between member states. These debates show that European solidarity is highly contested and quite sensitive to upcoming events (e.g., populist mobilisations, changes in national elections, terrorist attacks and security measures).

However, while these public debates show that interstate solidarity is quite fragile, this observation might not necessarily apply to the general population as such. Empirical studies have corroborated that European integration has promoted shared identification and identities, furthered cross-national experiences and contacts amongst citizens, and established norms of mutual responsibilities. More effort has to be invested into the analysis of 'civic' solidarity within the EU. This is the mission of the TransSOL project. It is devoted to the following core questions: what is the level of cross-national solidarity between citizens and civil society organisations, and what are the main conditions and paths of European solidarity? One of its first tasks was the development of a conceptual and theoretical framework that would allow identification of the core dimensions of European solidarity and its forms, conditions and challenges. Even though this task demands continuous reflection and discussion, TransSOL has identified the following analytic framework of analysis.

First, European solidarity needs to be conceptually disentangled. According to our project's understanding, solidarity is a disposition and practice of help or support towards others in struggle or in need, be that by personal contributions or by active support of activities of others; 'European' solidarity is consequently any attitude and behaviour striving to help Europeans (be they residents or citizens) in struggle or in need across borders. This definition stresses the need to consider both attitudes and practices because we know from scholarly writing that attitudes do not necessarily transform into action. In fact, this process is shaped by various intervening factors, such as conflicting values, structural impediments or individual costs. At the same time, we stress that solidarity does not involve only philanthropy or altruism but has a truly political dimension when people participate in protest actions in order to improve the situation of a certain group. This political dimension makes us aware that solidarity is a highly contested phenomenon because solidarity is always linked to certain target groups or communities; some might rally for cross-national solidarity within the EU, while others speak out on behalf of local or national communities, claiming that solidarity with weak compatriots comes before solidarity with others. This shows that solidarity knits a web of reciprocal help within groups and communities but often imposes a group closure towards others. Hence, in analytic terms, we expect that the readiness to support others will be conditional on which group or community is at stake. TransSOL is committed to measure and theorise on this contentiousness, exclusiveness and conditionality of solidarity by comparing 'civic' solidarity towards different groups: towards various European countries on the one side and towards different target groups and issues (disabilities, unemployment and migration) on the other.

Transnational solidarity as a multidimensional phenomenon



Secondly, *TransSOL* has learned from previous research that ‘civic’ solidarity is a social reality formed and developed on various levels of aggregation: at the level of individual citizens, organisational fields and the public sphere. On each level, cross-national solidarity is conditioned by specific factors; moreover, we expect that the micro-, meso- and macro-levels are strongly interrelated. Scholarly writing has illustrated, for instance, that solidarity involves reciprocal structures of interpersonal help and support within local communities, issue-specific groups and/or transnational networks (e.g., ethnic diasporas). On this level, solidarity is conditioned by the individual’s sociodemographic situation and by attitudinal factors such as political allegiances, religion or post-materialist values. However, it is to be expected that individual solidarity will often be embedded in organisational fields of civic engagement. Indeed, solidarity very often requires some sort of organisation, as evidenced by research about civil societies and social movements. European solidarity is thus dependent on the development of transnational networks, which increase connectivity and diffusion processes, mobilise and organise constituencies, and define and circulate common discourses and identities.

To complete this picture, we need to consider that ‘civic’ solidarity is embedded into the public sphere as an arena where European solidarity is communicated, reproduced or eroded. In particular, we have to be aware about the role of the mass media and the related discourses, which have accompanied the process of European integration, particularly at moments of crisis. A thorough understanding of ‘civic’ solidarity needs to consider these effects as well because it is very likely that mass-mediated discourses about the current crises alter individual and/or organized solidarity, e.g., by combatting or promoting public mistrust towards the addressees of help or by encouraging proactive engagement or disseminating reservations against civic organisations or public authorities.

This conceptual and theoretical framework shows that the analysis of European solidarity is a complex and demanding venture that requires researchers to consider various dimensions (social and political), dynamics (integration and closure, inclusiveness and exclusiveness) and levels (individual, organisational and public). Only such an approach promises to deliver reliable findings that prevent us from simplifying the phenomenon of European solidarity, its conditions and its consequences. The *TransSOL* consortium is thus committed to follow these theoretical considerations in two ways. On the one hand, it will present and publicise these theoretical arguments in order to contribute to the scholarly debate about European solidarity. And, on the other hand, it will anchor its empirical research agenda on these theoretical reflections in order to provide nuanced and reliable data on cross-national solidarity within the EU.

Transnational Solidarity in Context: The Legal and Socio-political Background

Since the project commenced in June 2015, the eight national teams of TransSol have been working extensively to gather and analyse information related to the socio-economic, political, legal and institutional context of transnational solidarity in Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Switzerland and the UK. The aim is to gather information on whether, and to what extent, various contextual factors, especially national and European legal frameworks, have a beneficial or inhibiting impact on solidarity at various levels, including individual citizens, organisations and organisational fields, and public perceptions and opinions. The analysis allows a cross-national, comparative identification of the factors at the macro-level (constitutional structure, legal provisions, economic welfare, labour markets, public policies, horizontal and vertical subsidiarity etc.) that are likely to be decisive in explaining different degrees of European solidarity. Moreover, the research has opened the way for a critical assessment of the performance of EU and national (and for several countries even sub-national) legislation, case law and policies in reaction to the crisis. In particular, the researchers' attention has been focused on the three TransSol main target groups, namely unemployed people, immigrants/asylum seekers and people with disabilities, in order to pinpoint potential policy responses in these fields that may help influence attitudes and practices of transnational solidarity.

Data for this research have been collected through a combination of desk research from various sources (e.g. policy and legal documents, national, sub-national and EU case law), information requests to relevant institutions and semi-structured interviews with national legal and policy experts and academics held between June and October 2015 by the different national research teams.

Solidarity as a legal concept has a long history, dating at least back to Roman times. However, it is just in the last two centuries that it has become a relevant value in public and constitutional law. The national communities created in the 18th and 19th centuries recognised the revolutionary principle of *fraternité* as the socio-legal marker of nation states' citizenship, so that solidarity was considered to be a building block of modern political communities and states, and was transformed from a philosophical concept into a binding legal standard. But it was only at the end of the Second world war that solidarity came to be fully entrenched into some constitutional texts, when a new model of constitutions grounded in the value of the person, human dignity and on fundamental rights bloomed.

In these constitutions, rights and liberties are conceived within a "solidary" frame; the respect and guarantee of rights and liberties is supposed to be intrinsically combined with the meta-principle of social solidarity. For our perspective, this is a very relevant legal innovation. For instance, the interweaving between rights and solidarity becomes clear in Art. 2 of the Italian Constitution: "The Republic recognises and guarantees the inviolable human rights, be it as an individual or in social groups expressing their personality, and it ensures the performance of the unalterable duty to political, economic, and social solidarity". While recognising inviolable human rights, the Constitution also prescribes the "unalterable duty to [...] social solidarity." Also the Preamble of the Swiss Constitution states that "We, the Swiss People and the Cantons, being mindful of our responsibility towards creation, in renewing our alliance to strengthen liberty and democracy, independence and peace in solidarity and openness towards the world, ..."; while Art. 25(4) of the Greek constitution establishes that "The State has the right to claim of all citizens to fulfil the duty of social and national solidarity"; and the preamble of the French Constitution affirms that "The Nation proclaims the solidarity and equality of all French people in bearing the burden resulting from national calamities".

While not being explicitly mentioned, solidarity can be derived by other constitutional principles and rights in Germany, Poland, the UK, and Denmark, so that it can be stated that solidarity is a shared constitutional paradigm in all TransSol countries, even if it assumes specific characters in each of them. In both cases (explicitly or implicitly recognised), solidarity permeates several relations included in the constitution: from ethical and social aspects (family, health, and education) to economic ones (labour, union rights, private property and enterprise), from political aspects (franchise and political parties) to the constitutional duties (loyalty to the constitution, taxation, national defence, parental duties).

In legal systems based on solidarity, citizenship means that the legal bond between the individual and the state creates a relationship of mutual responsibility that is not simply in a bidirectional vertical dimension, but also in a bidirectional horizontal dimension; that is to say among fellow citizens. Every citizen is responsible for the promotion and guarantee of fellow citizens' rights and needs. Thus, solidarity exceeds its compassionate and benevolent significance to become a constitutional, binding duty.

In this frame, during the 2007-2014 crisis, solidarity has been mainly used as an antidote against the worst effects of the crisis-driven measures, especially in the fields of unemployment, disability, and immigration and asylum. This is why the 'special work' of solidarity as a transformative legal concept emerges more clearly in the case law than in contemporary legislation. In fact, solidarity is often used by the courts of the eight countries as a form of 'constitutional paradigm', a constitutional principle (or value) to refer to in order to mitigate against austerity-oriented or crisis-driven legislation, but more rarely by the legislators and policy-makers as the grounding principle for new legislation. For instance, by referring to the constitutional right to human dignity and the welfare state principle, the Federal Constitutional Court of Germany obliged the national legislator to increase "Hartz IV" unemployment and asylum seekers benefits in order to guarantee a social welfare minimum and, hence, entitle each citizen to the provision of a material minimum needed to cover daily subsistence.

This legal, institutional and political overview provides both the background and a pertinent set of explaining factors for the analysis of the next set of TransSol WPs' findings. At the constitutional (in relation to both Member State and EU), legal, and institutional levels, solidarity is somehow "imposed" or "forced" onto the citizenry; so what TransSol shall investigate in the subsequent WPs are the "spontaneous" practices of solidarity within and among national communities. In such a time of crisis, the reduction of public and private wealth forces national communities to cope with increased vulnerabilities of larger groups within populations, in direct correlation with a decrease of public resources available for redistribution. In such a context, does (and to which extent) the legal and institutional framework entrenching the principle of solidarity favour individual and collective forms of solidarity? Is there any interconnection between specific forms of legal and institutional solidarity and the innovativeness of specific practices of transnational solidarity? The triangulation of WP1 findings with the outputs of WPs 2, 3, 4 and 5 will contribute to shedding more light on this phenomenon, and will provide crucial information for the elaboration of coherent policy guidelines at both national and European Union levels.

Second Project Meeting in Paris

On 18th -19th November, 2015, the TransSOL consortium had its second project meeting at the Centre for Political Research at Sciences Po Paris (CEVIPOF). At the meeting, the teams discussed the first findings about the political, legal and socioeconomic context of solidarity in times of economic crisis in all participant countries. Besides basic domestic characteristics, special emphasis was put on the legal and political framework and crisis-driven reforms in the fields of unemployment, disabilities and asylum. The aim of this first study is to unveil whether and to what extent the national context in its various traits has a beneficial or inhibiting impact on solidarity. This will enable us to understand better the cross-national variations in the extent and form of European solidarity at the levels of individual citizens, organisations and public discourses.



In addition, the teams discussed and planned the research steps of the next work packages. First of all, particular attention was dedicated to the second work package. Here, we will map, analyse and assess existing practices of solidarity in response to crisis, such as citizens' initiatives and networks of cooperation amongst civil society actors. Moreover, we aim to engage with the individual and collective actors involved in these initiatives in order to promote knowledge exchange and deliberation about the crisis's implications for European solidarity, on the one hand, and innovative responses, best practice models and policy implications, on the other hand. Secondly, the meeting in Paris was dedicated to the planning of the online population survey of the third work package. With this survey, we aim to measure the extent and forms of individual European solidarity, with regard to both attitudes and reported actions. At the same time, we will identify the sociodemographic factors influencing or mediating dispositions and acts of solidarity. This will allow us to assess if and how transnational solidarity is conditioned by individuals' socioeconomic and professional statuses, political attitudes and behaviours, social relations and networks, lifestyle patterns, and feelings of wellbeing and belonging.

Changing Europe Conference and Joint Horizon 2020, EURO-2014 Kick-off Meeting in Brussels

On 19th and 20th November, *TransSOL* representatives followed the invitation of the European Commission to a joint conference and kick-off meeting of all parallel projects funded under the Horizon 2020, EURO-2014 calls. Under the theme 'Changing Europe – What the research in social sciences and humanities tells us about changing Europe', consortium leaders presented their research projects and had a fruitful exchange with the invited scientific community, policy makers and other stakeholders. Moreover, the two-day meeting offered a unique opportunity for network building and the planning of future cooperation between the different projects. In particular, project representatives of *TransSOL*, *SOLIDUS*, *RE-InVEST*, *InnoSi* and *SPRINT* agreed to cooperate on a regular basis. In addition, *SOLIDUS* and *TransSOL* exchanged ideas about the organisation of joint events for stakeholders and larger audiences.

Partner projects:

SOLIDUS: Solidarity in European societies: empowerment, social justice and citizenship

RE-InVEST: Rebuilding an inclusive, value-based Europe of solidarity and trust through social investments

InnoSi: Innovative Social Investment: Strengthening communities in Europe

SPRINT: Social Protection Innovative Investment in Long-Term Care

Find out more:

TransSOL website: www.transsol.eu

TransSOL on Twitter: [@TransSOLproject](https://twitter.com/TransSOLproject)

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Project Information

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