

Newsletter

TransSOL researches European paths to transnational solidarity in times of crisis. The fourth TransSOL newsletter discusses transnational solidarity by examining the work of civil society organisations (CSOs).

Solidarity and Civil Society Organisations

How much solidarity is there across European countries? What forms does it take? The TransSOL team investigated the work of civil society organisations (CSOs) to find out.

Solidarity means that people believe in helping each other and are willing to act on this conviction. Acts of solidarity are not taken because people are told to do so by a higher authority, nor are they undertaken because people expect to profit financially. Rather, solidarity is a feeling of mutual support and is particularly important in times of crisis.

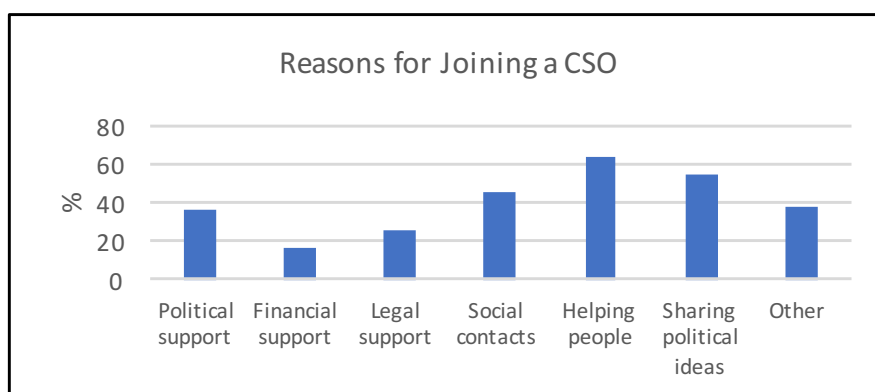
The TransSOL team wanted to find out how much of this mutual support can be found not only within nations but also across European countries. They looked into the operation of civil society organisations (CSOs) across eight European countries and conducted a total of 245 interviews in order to find out what prevents transnational solidarity as well as what allows it to work. In this research, events and campaigns, formal structures and social networks were examined. In particular, TransSOL focused on three areas of vulnerability: migration / asylum, unemployment and disability.

CSOs researched in the following countries:

- Denmark
- France
- Germany
- Italy
- Greece
- Poland
- Switzerland
- The United Kingdom

Why do people join CSOs?

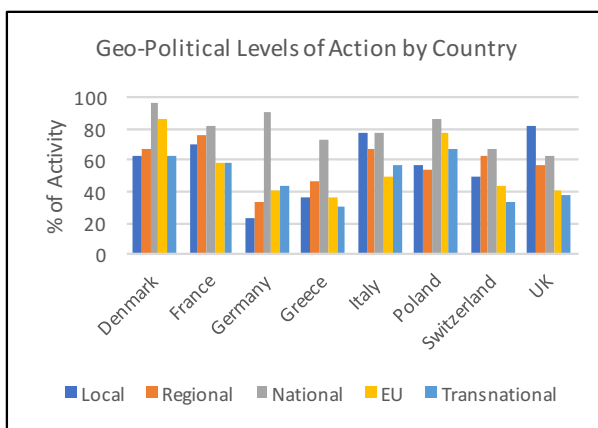
When it comes to why people join CSOs, TransSOL received a variety of answers, all of which confirm the notion that there is in fact solidarity across Europe. Although the most important reason across the countries is an altruistic willingness to help other people (63%), the second most relevant reason to join such an organisation is for sharing political ideas and values (55%). More than than one third of the respondents in the sample (36%) also chose an explicitly political response: “for political support”. This means that these types of organisations have two functions: one is to provide services for people in need and the other is for joining people together through political ideals and to advocate for people’s rights. While there is potential for transnational solidarity in terms of reasons for joining CSOs, TransSOL has found that the structures in place – in terms of policy-making, fundraising and intended beneficiaries – encourage national, rather than transnational, action.



How transnational are CSOs in Europe?

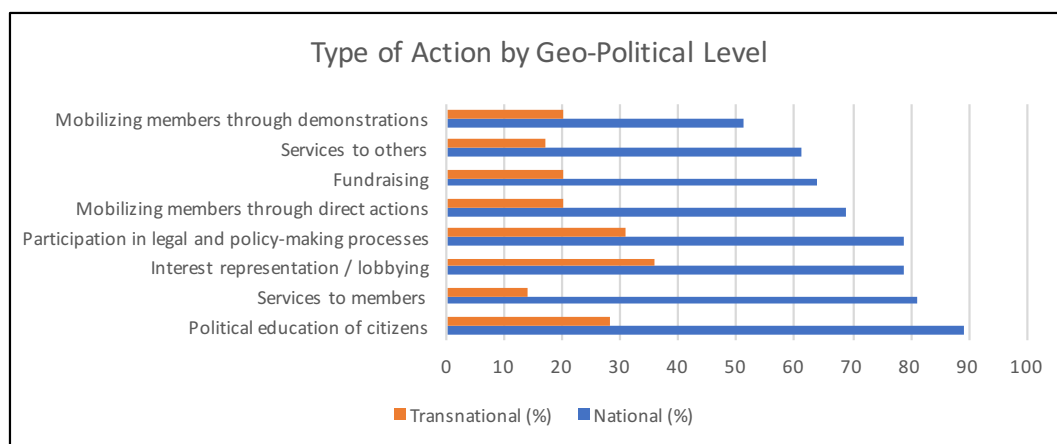
The TransSOL team investigated CSO activity at the edges of national and cross-national boundaries to find out the degree of involvement at the transnational level as well as the different shapes such involvement might have. This research suggests that transnational solidarity remains limited.

As we see here, in every surveyed country, CSOs work primarily at the local, regional and national levels. One half of all CSOs are active at the transnational level (53.9% at the EU level and 48.6% at the transnational level). For CSOs, the national level thus remains the most salient geo-political level at which to act. CSOs also tend to act locally: Slightly more than one in every two organisations is also active at sub-state levels, both local and regional.



The level of transnational engagement is more nuanced when we consider cross-country differences: Danish and Polish CSOs lead the group on European and transnational level activities, while Greek, German, British and Swiss organisations appear to be less inclined to engage across their country borders. French and Italian CSOs occupy an intermediary position.

Furthermore, this local, regional and national orientation applies to all of the functions of the CSO, whether it be service- or politically oriented. This suggests that, while motivations for organising may be transnationally oriented, structures and institutions in place do not easily facilitate transnational activity. While solidarity as expressed by CSOs is fundamentally political, and even though members may join for reasons that are inherently politically motivated, therefore, it is also activated primarily at the national level.

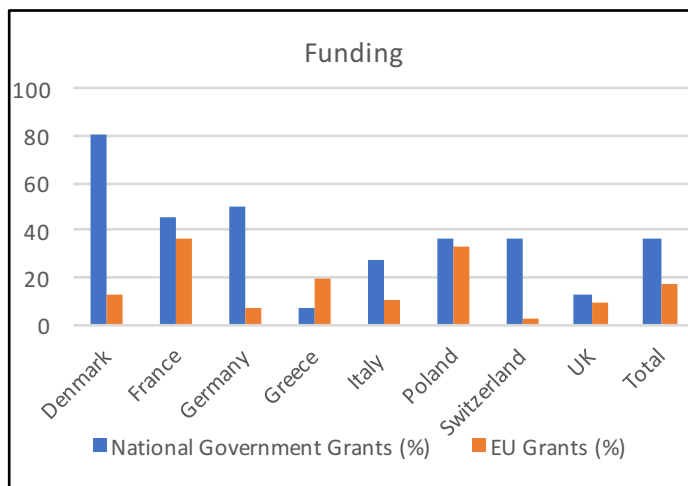


Why do CSOs act nationally rather than transnationally?

A key finding is that only a very small number of organisations look to the transnational and European levels for fundraising: Only one in every five organisations declare that they undertake fundraising activities at the transnational level while two thirds carry out fundraising at the national level.

Another reason is that CSOs are often service-oriented, and services are often locally, regionally or nationally organised. One of the key functions of the CSO is to help people access public services. Two thirds of CSOs provide assistance with accessing the welfare state on a regular basis and another 10% does so from time to time. Mechanisms in place exist at the national, and not the transnational, level.

These tendencies are key obstacles to transnational solidarity, as the services provided keep the focus of CSOs national rather than transnational. CSOs act at the national and the local levels more than at the transnational level because their impact groups – in terms of access to policy-making, funding mechanisms and intended beneficiaries – are nationally and locally oriented.



What can be done?

In summary, CSOs act at the national level more than at the transnational level because their audience and target interests are, in many senses, nationally oriented. This tendency is both felt, as it is reported by interviewees, and empirically verifiable, as evidenced by the budgetary and political infrastructures that be. Constraints to transnational solidarity can therefore be related to policy-making, funding apparatuses and intended beneficiaries. Public policy that seeks to promote transnational European solidarity should therefore target these areas. More transnational and even EU-level platforms, for advocacy and policy-awareness but also for more service-oriented projects such as support in accessing the welfare state and in-kind services, would encourage political solidarity beyond the boundaries of nation and would further promote and foster a political dynamic of mutual support across Europe.

The full report and policy brief can be found at: www.transsol.eu

Recent Events

Transeuropa Festival in Madrid

On 26-27 October 2018, TransSOL researchers took part in the Transeuropa Festival in Madrid, sponsored by European Alternatives. The festival is a combination of art, culture and politics.

Through a workshop format, a TransSOL team, led by Simone Baglioni (Glasgow Caledonian University), had the chance to engage with 25 participants, mostly on the findings of WP3. The TransSOL workshop provided the opportunity to present important research on the way individuals engage in solidarity activities, and the way solidarity has recently come under attack throughout Europe. The discussion was a lively one, the team reports.

WP5 Coders Training Workshop in Paris

From 17-20 October 2017, members of the TransSOL team gathered in Paris at the Sciences Po Centre in order to participate in a workshop on coding. Team members learned to code and coordinate results from newspaper articles across different countries as part of the data-collection process for WP5. In this meeting, the team discussed coding decisions in order to standardise research practices.

Workshop participants were trained in both claims-coding and online comments, and this entailed working on two codebooks for two analyses in WP5.



The team engaged in some intense discussions and tested codings on English material, in which participants had the chance to discuss coding decisions one-by-one. In addition, the group talked about technical details such as SPSS data sheets, how to document data and whom to contact with various types of questions. In the end, the group also decided to have regular meetings.

This event was coordinated by Manlio Cinalli (Sciences Po) and Hans-Jörg Trenz (Uni Copenhagen), the leaders of the work package.

Mid-Term Event in Brussels

On Tuesday, 10 October 2017, from 13:00 to 18:00, representatives from TransSOL's Siegen team, led by Christian Lahusen, took part in the European Week of Regions and Cities. In a policy dialogue titled "Futures of European Solidarity," the team presented findings from WPs 1, 2 and 3 at a venue called Social Platform. The following day, members of the team attended an event at the European Commission, "Cities, Regions and Mobile EU citizens: getting involved in getting involved."

Fifth Project Meeting in Crete

The TransSOL consortium held its fifth project meeting on 21-22 September at the University of Crete, Rethimno. Topics for discussion included WP5, WP6 and WP8, and the meeting also featured plans for publishing a synthesis of project findings.



This meeting also featured a discussion with the entire consortium on codebook structure, individual variables and decisions on key issues such as sampling as well as tasks to be fulfilled by a task force before the coder training in Paris (which was held in October). Furthermore, the group discussed final conference planning, the mid-term event and plans for publications in the shorter term. Maria Kousis (University of Crete) and her team were the hosts, and participants found the venue and surroundings quite pleasant.



About TransSOL

TransSOL is an EU-funded research project dedicated to describing and analysing solidarity initiatives and practices at a time in which Europe's existence is challenged by the consequences of the 2008 economic and financial crisis, by the problematic management of large fluxes of refugees and by the outcome of the 2017 Brexit referendum. In particular, TransSOL focuses on three areas of vulnerability: migration / asylum, unemployment and disability.

Consortium

European Alternatives

Glasgow Caledonian University
Yunus Centre for Social Business and Health

University of Copenhagen
Department of Media,
Cognition and Communication

University of Crete
Department of Sociology

University of Florence
Department of Legal Sciences

University of Geneva
Institute of Citizenship Studies

University of Sheffield
Department of Politics

University of Siegen
Centre for Research in the Social Sciences

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Project Information

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Call: H2020 EURO-3-2014: European societies after the crisis

Start date: June 2015

Duration: 36 months

Coordinator: Prof. Dr. Christian Lahusen, University of Siegen

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