



EUROPEAN Civil Society POLICYBRIEF

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



The innovative character of this project is that it explores conceptually and empirically current and future expressions of European solidarity from an inter-disciplinary approach that integrates views from Sociology, Psychology, Economic Geography, Economy, Philosophy and Public Management. The project makes use of such outputs to integrate them with empirical evidences found in a range of social innovation, third sector's and public management's practices from a comparative perspective, in which different state and policy sector traditions are considered in reaching an understanding of these drivers and barriers.

May 2018

INTRODUCTION

The economic crisis of 2008 indirectly contributed to questioning the efficiency of financial markets and democratic institutions at European and national levels. Citizens from the European Union have decreased their trust on national governments and parliament. This situation jeopardizes the European project, while at the same time a lively public debate about the meaning of European identity is taking place across Europe. Several social scientists have argued that the social and economic inequalities in the new global order are contributing to civil social reactions, based on solidarity, aiming to achieve a better society for all.

The aim of SOLIDUS was to provide a better understanding of the dynamics and factors related to solidarity in all of its dimensions, looking for ways to enhance European society's resilience by identifying common ground which may serve as a facilitator for a renewed resolve to foster European integration.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

In broad terms, the SOLIDUS project found that solidarity actions achieving the most impact over time were those that were generally characterised by six key features. Given this, it is recommended that civil society solidarity organisations work towards the following principles:

- Democracy in decision-making, involving end-users in policy planning, design and monitoring (although the form of this may change depending on the history and size of the organisation);

- Transparency and accountability in its internal and external relations (including financial transparency);
- Plurality among staff and/or volunteers;
- Recognition, that is having institutional credibility, through having a public profile, through getting awards and/or by getting positive media or public attention for their work;
- Performance legitimacy through demonstrating their social and political impact visibly over time;
- Managing their scale successfully, whether it is small or large.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based upon the findings from the diverse case studies across the different work packages (especially, WP2, 3, 4, 5, and 6).

1. **Civil society organisations should pay attention to the balance between being *organisations of*, rather than simply *organisations for***, whomever their activity is intended to help within society. Throughout many of the case studies, members of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and solidarity actors identified this distinction as having a significant impact on their capacity for successful action. Grassroots solidarity groups tended to have a higher level of legitimacy when they involved beneficiaries of their work in decision-making and activism.

While more established NGOs tended to have more stable organisational structures than those that were new and purely grassroots-led, many NGO workers pointed out that the civil society sector had become extremely ‘professionalised’ and that this was also a threat to the core value of solidarity as professional interests do not always align with the interests of the community being served. They believed that many solidarity groups had become disengaged from grassroots struggles and their beneficiaries, and that they had become too embedded in static political paradigms and partnerships. Civil society organisations need to reflect systematically and continuously on the costs and benefits of professionalisation, and the related ‘*organisations-of Vs organisations-for*’ tension. This type of reflection needs to be built into the planning and review of the organisation on an on-going basis.

2. **Internal and external power struggles were found to be a source of weakness for solidarity actions** and these power struggles need to be named in a safe way and managed. Internally, hierarchies and unequal power relations can become established quickly, especially within small scale movements at the local level. While this is to be expected, it has led to conflict within the organisations and has had an impact on both the success and longevity of the solidarity action (through, for example, the loss of members, the inability to attract diverse segments of society, etc.).

Similarly, in terms of external issues, it there were frequently a number of small civil society organisations working on the same issue that were not co-ordinating with one another. At times activists were unaware of other similar organisations working on the same social problem, while at other times, individuals did know about comparable organisations but did not collaborate with them. One of the major reasons that organisations sharing common goals did not collaborate was the fear that they would lose power, status, and, most importantly, income, if they did. This relatively fragmented civil society landscape can mean missed opportunities for effective alliances and/or unhelpful

conflict between groups with similar goals. As the fear of losing autonomy (being taken over) and losing funding were major barriers to co-operation, these issues need to be addressed in any EU-wide framework supporting solidarity organisations working the same field. Legal and financial arrangements need to be put in place enhancing, where relevant, federal-style collaborative arrangements to overcome barriers to cooperation and innovation.

3. **Social media is a vital tool for solidarity organisations and, as such, civil society groups working for solidarity need to maximise the benefits** of these new technologies. Within the case studies, it was shown that social media helped organisations to increase their visibility and recognition and it was also correlated with success; when used strategically, it enabled solidarity groups to circumvent mainstream media outlets that were often antagonistic to civil society aims and objectives.

Social media was identified as providing new spaces of social interaction and information sharing that was highly valued by activists. Given these benefits, it is recommended that civil society organisations recruit people who are well-skilled in social media management. This can be a relatively low-cost intervention, as younger individuals tend to have these skills in abundance. Moreover, IT professionals are often willing to volunteer their services to social justice organisations. Solidarity groups also need to train and update their members in social media promotional work over time.

4. **Professionalism in communication and outreach was deemed to be very important to the success of solidarity organisations.** In particular, case studies found that the implementation of new and creative ways to reach one's audience worked to promote their activity.

The use of personal stories (e.g. via short video messages) and gaining the support of public figures/celebrities to promote the cause of the organisation were highly efficient strategies for encouraging 'active citizenship'.

5. **Collaboration with academia is potentially a useful tool for civil society organisations to enhance their expertise, visibility, and staying power.** Case studies showed that a variety of solidarity actions were enhanced by the involvement of academics who contributed to "dialogical learning" within the organisation and professional research expertise. Furthermore, this collaboration also provided networking avenues for the solidarity group to expand their reach. Nevertheless, many solidarity actions under investigation did not align themselves with members of the academy and this was potentially a missed opportunity. There needs to be incentives for solidarity organisations and academic institutions to engage in this kind of fruitful collaboration. Collaboration is not cost-free, it takes time and resources: both academic and the civil society organisations need to be resourced and rewarded for collaborations to succeed.
6. **As noted in the EU-level recommendations, professional volunteering was a prominent factor in the success of many solidarity actions.** In this regard, civil society organisations should set up structures that systematically target the recruitment of professionals who can assist them in a voluntary capacity in their field of expertise. This might include media campaigns and efforts to establish connections with local companies and other agencies.
7. **Collaboration with other public-sector bodies (including Third Sector public-private collaborations)** provided mixed results and should be considered very carefully in advance. On the one hand, this can lead to success and is especially helpful in terms of

funding support, enhancing visibility, and leveraging public sector technical expertise. Nevertheless, there are also threats that public-sector partnerships carry for solidarity organisations, especially through the watering-down of their political advocacy, being pressurised into hitting arbitrary ‘quantitative’ goals, increasing their bureaucratic workload, and distancing them from grassroots activism. In light of the above, the following specific recommendations are made in relation to third sector organisations and their engagement with public sector institutions:

- a. **Given the high level of variability in third-sector regulation and policy across countries**, combined with the fact that third sector regulation is currently underdeveloped and in flux, civil society organisations should use this moment of ‘nascent policy creation’ to advocate for rules that will be to their advantage in future partnerships. Governments are more likely to be responsive to these requests as third sector partnerships align well with the prominent ideology of ‘liberalising’ welfare provision and low cost public service delivery.
 - b. **Civil society organisations should insist on their right for advocacy and political speech**, regardless of their engagement with public service delivery and collaboration. To the extent that service delivery contracts neutralise the political speech of solidarity actions, this should be avoided at all costs.
 - c. **Third sector organisations should push for advocacy budgets to be established, ring-fenced**, and protected by law from political interference.
 - d. **Established measurements and indicators of solidarity ‘successes should not be constructed without the consent of civil society organisations**. Civil society groups should work in consultation with the public sector to develop other *qualitative* (and not solely quantitative) indicators of success that are often more appropriate to solidarity actions (e.g. beneficiary testimonies; evidence of democratic functioning).
8. **As there is consistent evidence that women (as well as migrant groups) are disproportionately represented** in low-paying sectors of the economy, civil society organisations that focus specifically on women’s issues should align themselves, and offer strong support for solidarity actions that push for a universal minimum or living wage. These kinds of joint solidarity campaigns were prominent and successful across a range of countries investigated in SOLIDUS (e.g. Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, and UK).
 9. **Solidarity actions that increase remuneration across low-paid jobs are recommended as they will improve the conditions of working women** and combat the social exclusion of migrants more generally.
 10. **Conversely, solidarity groups working on wage campaigns should appeal to more established women’s rights’ organisations**, and migrant non-governmental organisations (NGOs), for their explicit support. These organisations might also consider the potential for alliances with trade unions that are working to fight against exploitative work practises; there is a need foster collaboration among an increasingly diverse workforce within the EU.
 11. **One of the key barriers that prevents women from engaging in solidarity activity is their disproportionate responsibility for care work**. Civil society organisations and solidarity actions that wish to promote greater involvement by women in decision-making need to

be highly cognisant of this reality and, ideally, should work to develop structures that can overcome such barriers. This might include in-house childcare supports, ‘best practise’ flexible working arrangements, and family-friendly workspaces.

12. **To combat gender-based violence, women’s (and other solidarity) organisations that want to address it and prevent it** need to include the voices of those who are vulnerable and those who have experienced gender-based violence in both research design and policy-making.
13. **There needs to be full recognition of LGBTI issues**, and those of men as well as women, within all organisations working in the solidarity sectors.
14. **Mental health services should be improved and extended by solidarity organisations**; access to these services for the LGBTI community and other vulnerable groups, such as migrants, including those from non-EU countries, is crucial
15. **There is a need to promote relationships, gender and sexuality education in schools and colleges to ensure that barriers faced by Transgendered people**, women, and those in the LGBTI community in participating in solidarity activism, are addressed through greater awareness and understanding.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME	Solidarity in European societies: empowerment, social justice and citizenship (SOLIDUS)
COORDINATOR	Prof. Marta Soler, Universitat de Barcelona, CREA. E-mail: marta.soler@ub.edu
CONSORTIUM	Community of Researchers on Excellence for All –University of Barcelona (CREA-UB), Spain; University of Deusto (DEUSTO), Spain; Central European University (CEU), Hungary; Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (HIOA-NOVA), Norway; National School of Public Health (ENSP), Portugal; University College Dublin (UCD), Ireland; Roskilde University (RU), Denmark; University of Cyprus (UC), Cyprus; University of Edinburgh (UEDIN), United Kingdom; UMB: University Matej Bel, Slovakia; LEIP: University of Leipzig, Germany; University of Oxford (OXFORD), United Kingdom; University of Peloponnese (UPE), Greece; University of Utrecht (UU), Netherlands.
FUNDING SCHEME	Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2014-2020), Societal Challenge 6 – Europe in a changing world: inclusive, innovative and reflective societies", call EURO-3-2014, topic "European societies after the crisis". Grant agreement number 649489.

DURATION	1 June 2015 – 31 May 2018 (36 months).
BUDGET	EU contribution: 2,495 608 €.
WEBSITE	https://solidush2020.eu/
FOR MORE INFORMATION	Kathleen Lynch. kathleen.lynch@ucd.ie
FURTHER READING	Lynch, Kathleen and Kalaitzake, Manolis (2018). Affective and Calculative Solidarity: the impact of individualism and neoliberal capitalism. <i>European Journal of Social Theory</i> (in press).