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Claiming solidarity: A multilevel discursive reconstruction of solidarity

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Abstract
Solidarity is one of the central concepts in social theory and has gained much attention due to the multiple challenges that the EU has been facing the last decade and due to the most recent COVID-19 pandemic. Although the debate on the nature and conditions of solidarity has been revitalized, there remains a large variety in how to conceptualize solidarity. In contrast to other approaches, we do not conceive solidarity as normative concept, but as descriptive–analytical one. Therefore, we provide a theory-based definition that is prone to capture the empirical dimensions of solidarity. Accounting for the dynamic and interactive character of solidarity as subject to permanent societal and political renegotiation, we conceptualize solidarity from a discourse perspective and follow a multilevel design breaking down the understandings of solidarity on different

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levels. This approach contributes to the research of solidarity that is interested to capturing the 'real world' dimensions of solidarity.

Keywords
Discourse analysis, multilevel framework, political solidarity, social solidarity, solidarity

Introduction

Solidarity is one of the core concepts in social and political theory and has received much scholarly attention in recent years (Ciornei & Ross, 2021; Gerhards et al., 2020; Koos, 2019; Lahusen, 2020a). The multiple challenges and crises in the last decade have revitalized the debate on the nature and conditions of solidarity. While times of crisis regularly evoke the claim for solidarity, making it a 'booking' reference, solidarity can also be a kind of 'soft power' recipe for crisis management, flanked by the hard, coping measures that political decision makers have to take. In the wake of multiple crisis phenomena, starting with the financial and debt crisis and continuing with the 'migration crisis' and the 'Brexit crisis' and culminating in the current COVID-19 pandemic, solidarity as a core political and social category has come under increasing pressure. What can be observed is that in such contexts, various actors regularly claim solidarity whereas these claims can be used in quite different ways and have different underlying understandings. This is why Agustín and Jørgensen speak of a continuous 'battlefield' regarding the meaning of solidarity (2019, p. 28; see also Wallaschek, 2020a). Despite these observations, to date, analytical approaches that help to understand the multifaceted concept of these solidarity claims are still missing. A better understanding of existing or eroding solidarity, however, is relevant as it has an impact on the management of solidarity for social cohesion and for policy solutions in future crisis phenomena.

The research on solidarity is confronted with central challenges. First of all, solidarity is not a new concept at all; thus research on solidarity reflects highly multidimensional approaches from different disciplines (sociology, philosophy, theology, political science) and sub-disciplines (political theory, catholic social thought) which result in a variety of understandings, of theorizing and/or conceptualizing, leading to difficulties in defining solidarity and differentiating it from other core concepts of social sciences such as justice or charity).

Secondly, solidarity is a cross-cutting social science issue. While sociology and sociological theory has shaped to a great extent the relevant debate since Durkheim, for a long time in political science there was a lack of a broader and systematic work on solidarity (Bayertz, 1998a; Große Kracht, 2015, p. 43; Klindworth & Schröder, 2010; Kneuer & Masala, 2015, pp. 9–10; Prisching, 2003; Tranow, 2012, pp. 11–20; Wildt, 1998). Problems of the research on solidarity can consequently be traced back to heterogeneous, partially contradictory definitions of solidarity and the lack of clear analytical concepts (Tranow, 2012, p. 14).

Thirdly, an important part of the literature is based on a normative understanding of solidarity as an a priori principle illuminating who *should* be an agent and who *should* be the object of solidarity, which type of actions *should* be taken, and on which grounds

actors *should* enter solidarity. Such normative theories mainly ask for the moral requirement of solidarity (Kolers, 2019). In contrast, the recent crises, also labelled as solidarity crises, inspired studies drawing more on theories that pave the path for explaining 'under what conditions solidarity is supposed to arise and why' (Lindenberg, 1998, p. 103). Hence, describing these conditions of solidarity is the prerequisite for analysing and providing an explanation for the occurrence of solidarity, an explanation of increase or decrease, of waves or of different manifestations, of solidarity. Such theories, however, still have some lacunae; thus, there is a lack of concepts that allow for an empirical examination of solidarity.

Fourth and finally, solidarity entails several intersections with other concepts such as justice, cooperation, charity and so on. Hence, overlaps between these concepts or their poor delineation can contribute to diffuse root concepts that are not suitable for the production of rigorous frameworks.

Therefore, this article provides a theory-based conceptualization of solidarity that aims to generate a well-delineated definition of solidarity. It combines an actor-centred approach to solidarity, in particular as brought forward by Andrea Sangiovanni (2015), with a discourse perspective following Michel Foucault (1971, 1982) and his adaption by Reiner Keller (2018). In this manner, it contributes to the research of solidarity that is interested in capturing the 'real world' dimensions of solidarity. The conceptualization builds on several fundamental premises. In contrast to other studies (inter alia Kolers, 2019; Scholz, 2008), we do not conceive solidarity as a normative or an ethical–political or ethical–social concept but as a descriptive-analytical one. We do not disregard that solidarity, as an idea or action, may be based on norms, and we equally do not challenge that social as well as political orders need a certain amount of solidarity. We hold, however, that a descriptive–analytical concept of solidarity implies eschewing moral or normative judgements about which type of solidarity is 'suitable' for a society, which type of solidarity is 'better' or what amount of solidarity a society would need. Here we follow Sangiovanni (2019), who advocates for a value-free approach to solidarity, or Tranow (2017), who considers the primary task of scholars to be the illumination of the functions of solidarity in social and political orders.

The main research interest of this article entails two central arguments. Firstly, our concept focuses on an understanding of solidarity reflected in the *communication on solidarity* rather than in the manifestation of a potential solidarity action. Thus, we understand communication on solidarity as a form of action that reflects a specific understanding of solidarity. This results in various understandings of solidarity that coexist and potentially interact.

There is a broad literature on social movements, which addresses collective action issues in relation to solidarity (Della Porta, 2018; Della Porta & Mattoni, 2014), and on social actors such as unions and their solidary policies and actions. This research, however, is limited to specific actors and thus can only give a partial picture of their specific approach to solidarity.

For a broader understanding, our idea is based on the argument that vital elements of political and social orders (and ideas about them) are generated in a communicative process and that the understanding of solidarity is reflected in the communication on

solidarity – similar to other basic principles such as common good or justice (Brändle et al., 2019; Münkler & Bluhm, 2001; Münkler & Fischer, 2002; Wallaschek, 2020a). Moreover, political notions are not only defined in a communicative process; any transformation of their content or interpretation is equally and always realized in a process of communication. The discursive dimension embodies high relevance for social sciences when confronted with notions as central as solidarity. Thus, we strive to examine the disposition of solidary actions and their motivation on the basis of the analytical reconstruction of discourses that we consider precedent to possible actions of solidarity but definitely highly linked to the underlying understanding of solidarity.

Secondly, and closely related to the argument above, the discourse on solidarity in a given society may be further differentiated on the basis of the place where a solidarity statement is made. The 'place of enunciation' (Newman, 2004, p. 151) impacts on how a statement on solidarity relates to the 'regime of truth' (Foucault, 1980, p. 131). Accordingly, not the speaker themselves, but the place where and the conditions under which the statement occurs have an impact on the meaning and the significance of the statement. For this reason, we use a *multilevel design* to break down the discourse on solidarity into three levels (Kneuer & Masala, 2015, pp. 11–12): the micro level (individual citizens), the meso level (social actors and organizations), and the macro level (political actors and institutions) differ from one another in the way the speaker position may be affected by the institutional setting they may be in (e.g. as a member of an organization or a member of a parliament), earlier processes of consensus building, as well as specific power relations.

Such a multidimensional design of discursive reconstruction constitutes an added value for the research on solidarity. Conceptualizing solidarity from a discourse perspective means to account for the dynamic and interactive character of a concept that is subject to permanent societal and political renegotiation. At the same time, solidarity includes an actor-oriented perspective in two regards: on the one hand, those actors who are involved in the solidary action as givers and takers are considered; on the other hand, there can also be a person speaking about a determined solidary action as a speaker without being involved into it.

For this purpose, the article will first discuss how to theorize solidarity. On the basis of the literature review, the subsequent section will present our definition of solidarity. Next, we present our conceptualization of solidarity from a discourse perspective; we also offer the multilevel model of solidarity. The conclusion outlines the contribution of our approach to further conceptual and empirical work.

Theorizing solidarity: Solidarity as a cross-cutting research topic

On the basis of an extensive literature review, this section lays the ground for a conceptualization of solidarity. We identify major research strands as well as their benefits and pitfalls for this endeavour. If we deal with relevant concepts of solidarity in this section, it is precisely because these concepts belong to semantics, and thus to communication about solidarity. This means that we find aspects that have been considered essential characteristics of solidarity in history and in the current scholarly

discussion. So, when we conceptualize solidarity, we are always aware that such a proposal can only be a preliminary search grid at a time, formulating the historical state of the semantic development of this concept.

Most scholars refer to the semantic origins of the concept of solidarity in ancient Rome as a legal relation among a group of debtors ('obligatio in solidum'). Yet, the relevant literature refers to solidarity as a modern concern, given the fact that the modern meaning of solidarity was established after the European enlightenment and the French Revolution starting in 1789. In the nineteenth century, solidarity finally entered the broader societal and political debate with three important strands: socialism, Christian ethics (Christian social thought) and liberal nationalism (Sangiovanni, 2015). The French solidarism tried to reconcile a socialist agenda with liberalism and was quite prominent in the political and scientific debate at the end of the nineteenth century. Moreover, it influenced the school of Catholic social thought and underlined the need for a Christian understanding of solidarity (Große Kracht, 2015; Hayward, 1959).

Solidarity already embodied a cross-cutting notion then as many disciplines considered it a vital element. The first steps of sociology and political science – the disciplines we focus on here – were guided by the question of what a good society is and how it can be established. Until today, the reference points for the modern concept of solidarity as a social relation are French thinkers, first of all Comte and Durkheim, but also Fourier and Leroux. Albeit with differences in the details, their approaches to solidarity were strongly driven by the question of what binds (or draws apart) society (Berger, 2005; Dallinger, 2009; Herzog, 2018; Honneth, 1992).

It is argued that the 'grounds of solidarity' (Kapeller & Wolkenstein, 2013) in contemporary societies are manifold and do not rest anymore solely on the ideas of the workers' movement or Christian social thought. Instead, processes of individualization and social stratification influence the state of solidarity and make the question of how to establish solidary relations pivotal (Hondrich & Koch-Arzberger, 1992; Prisching, 2003). Honneth (1992) argues that solidarity is the social bond created by a dual process: recognition of group members and appreciation of the norms and values of the group. Hence, solidary actions are often related to struggles for a collective goal, affective mobilization and the creation of a shared value-horizon (Bayertz, 1998a; Della Porta, 2018; Honneth, 1992, p. 208; Lynch & Kalaitzake, 2020).

So far, political theory and political philosophy as well as social theory have mainly approached solidarity from a normative perspective. Thus, scholars often argue for an understanding of solidarity situated in moral assumptions about the emancipatory potential of solidarity, or present thoughts on the right or wrong idea of solidarity (hooks, 1986; Kapeller & Wolkenstein, 2013; Scholz, 2008; Thijssen, 2012), or set out to identify moral grounds for solidarity. As Scholz writes, political solidarity is 'political activism aimed at social change' (Scholz, 2008, p. 5) and situated in a moral relation 'that marks a social movement wherein individuals have committed to positive duties in response to a perceived injustice' (Scholz, 2008, p. 6). In this sense, solidarity is conceived as a 'principle of how one ought to treat people rather than what goals one should pursue' (Kolers, 2019, p. 119). Accordingly, normative approaches are interested in the grounds for entering solidarity: Who should be the agent and who should be the object of solidarity? What forms should the solidary action take and how should it be organized?

Our point of departure is different insofar as we follow an analytical approach that disregards recommending a form of solidarity as the right one or prescribing how actors or institutions should behave to be considered solidary. This allows us to conceive of solidarity as it is uttered by the respective speaker not as it should be from a normative perspective. Therefore, we find Andrea Sangiovanni's theoretical proposal very suitable. Firstly, his definition formulates a value-free concept of solidarity, and, secondly, it allows the integration of actor-, communication- and discourse–theoretical approaches to the concept of solidarity. We will demonstrate this by briefly discussing the four conditions Sangiovanni advances in his definition:

'I act in solidarity with you when:

1. You and I each (a) share a goal (b) to overcome some significant adversity;
2. You and I each individually intend to do our part in achieving the shared goal in ways that mesh;
3. You and I are each individually committed
   a. to the realization of the shared goal and
   b. to not bypassing each other's will in the achievement of the goal;
4. You and I are disposed (a) to incur significant costs to realize our goal; and (b) to share one another's fates in ways relevant to the shared goal'. (Sangiovanni, 2015, p. 343)

In this definitory work, we find several pertinent links to base our conceptualization: Sangiovanni offers an analytical approach as it concentrates on a certain kind of practical implication. In doing A (sharing a goal), the appearance of condition B (adversity) commits us to contribute C (do one's part in overcoming B). Moreover, he focuses on the actors' roles – the 'you' and 'I'—and thus establishes an actor-oriented understanding of solidarity. Finally, Sangiovanni ties the shared goals that actors pursue to perceptions of adversity that are seen as significant.

It is this attribution of significance where we detect the connection to our discourse–theoretical approach as we suggest that such a significance is marked through communication or discursive practice. The second aspect of the definition that distinguishes Sangiovanni's approach from others' is that individuals are committed 'to do[ing] [their] part in achieving the shared goal in ways that mesh' (Sangiovanni, 2015, p. 343). Overcoming shared adversities and sharing intentions follow different kinds of practical contributions. But then the different contributions to overcome an adversity can only be observed and judged by the actors at the level of communication and discourse. So, there is always a need for utterances and speakers that state the interlocking of contributions.

Likewise, the third and fourth conditions identified by Sangiovanni remain dependent on descriptions within the framework of communication. Commitments must be shown through actions that appear credible to the other participants. Actors must signal that their will has not been ignored in the joint action. And the costs, in turn, should also be considered significant. Consequently, such identification as significant requires discursive confirmation by speakers. This discourse–theoretical perspective expands the actor dimension presented by Sangiovanni. While he identifies individuals involved in

solidary action (the you and I), there also appears the role of the speaker as a person describing or reflecting solidary action as an observed phenomenon becoming a discursive statement.

Sangiovanni's approach serves as a point of departure from the descriptive theoretical approach we will undertake in the following section. For this purpose, we present an operational definition of solidarity, and, on this basis, we suggest research criteria to detect general elements of solidarity that relate to concrete features of what solidarity is and what it is not.

Towards a definition of solidarity

As mentioned, this article aims to suggest an approach to theorizing solidarity on an analytical basis. For this kind of theory, we depart from the assumption that solidarity is a form of action (Lindenberg, 1998; Sangiovanni, 2015, 2019). At the same time, it relates to a desideratum as 'it is not clear at all under what conditions solidarity is supposed to arise and why' (Lindenberg, 1998, p. 103). Conceiving solidarity as a descriptive–analytical subject implies (a) a dynamic dimension of manifestation of solidarity and (b) an interactive and/or interdependent dimension of solidarity between different levels of solidarity, viz.: the individual or micro level, the level of socially organized actors or meso-level and the political–institutional or macro level.

According to our analytical and descriptive approach, we take a first step in distinguishing primary and secondary features. Our theory-based definition of solidarity crystallizes four primary features: the *actorness* that is implicated in solidarity acts, the *adversity* that actuates a solidarity act and the *contribution* as potential cost linked to the solidary act based on *shared goals*. The secondary features refer to the relations between the identified roles of actors to which we refer as takers and givers of solidarity and specify the aspect of *reciprocity* and *equality*. We follow Sangiovanni (2015) in his definition of solidarity as a joint action and some of the identified features (adversity, contribution). We differ, however, in an important conceptual step, insofar as we categorize primary and secondary features in our definition as reflecting a hierarchy of conditions. Thus, we argue that the necessary conditions of solidarity are (1) the existence of an adversity; (2) actors who aim to overcome this adversity in two main roles, namely as givers and as takers; and (3) that both givers and takers are disposed to contribute to overcoming this adversity, based (4) on shared goals. Different to Sangiovanni, we conceive those features that specify the relation between giver and taker – reciprocity and equality – as secondary, that is as a sufficient, but not a necessary, condition.

Actorness

The first primary feature constitutes the element of the actor. A solidarity relationship usually involves an actor from whom solidarity emanates (the giver or subject of solidarity) and an actor to whom solidarity is directed (the taker or addressee). With this feature, we focus on an actor-centred theoretical perspective. In doing so, we deliberately refrain from a structural perspective of solidarity. The latter is inherent in concepts of

solidarity that arise as a result of institutionalization or legal regulation of support. Prominent examples of this notion of solidarity manifest in the justification of insurance schemes and the welfare state as a whole (Baldwin, 1990; Bayertz, 1998b). 'Communities of solidarity' or 'systems of solidarity' pay attention to anonymous bureaucratic apparatuses, acting in accordance with the relevant laws, rather than the individual actor or entity.

In contrast to structural perspectives, the great majority of the literature conceptualizes solidarity with an emphasis on the actors involved. The prominent role of the actor seems to be rather evident in the context of social movements or protests, as the actor represents a defining figure for the mobilization of solidarity (Della Porta, 2018; Lahusen, 2020b; Monforte & Dufour, 2013). Protest events in themselves may contribute to development of solidarity in two ways, as Monforte and Dufour highlight in the context of migrant protests: on the one hand, protests contribute to building solidarity between migrants and other activists; on the other, they constitute an instance of solidarity deepening among migrants.

Moreover, solidary actors are not limited to individual human beings: actors may just as well be groups and other entities, including, among others, local institutions, states (such as solidarity among member states of the European Union) and other public or private actors in the area of international relations such as governmental or non-governmental organizations or firms, to mention but a few examples (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019; Fernández et al., 2020).

The literature on solidarity does not present itself as homogenous in the way it foresees the nature and direction of relationships between the actors involved in solidarity relations. As Ashley Taylor rightly outlines, there are accounts of solidarity that arise from relationships that generate obligations, often among members of a single group, and other accounts that are based on allegedly more loose relationships between multiple groups or between actors united by a specific cause or project that generate motivations (Taylor, 2015). While Scholz's (2008) political solidarity or Shelby's (2002) black solidarity stipulate obligations and therefore belong to the former account, it is motivation for support that is stipulated by Rippe's (1998) 'project-related solidarity' or Gould's (2007) 'transnational solidarity' with people at a distance. Similarly, pursuant to bell hooks, it is 'sustained, ongoing commitment' for shared interests and beliefs that distinguishes solidarity from occasional support in the context of the feminist movement, leaving aside any requirement of shared experience, culture or ideas (hooks, 1986, p. 138).

Trying to capture the difference between accounts of solidarity that arise from relationships that generate obligations and those that are based on more loose relationships, the literature on solidarity frequently addresses the question of reciprocity (Bayertz, 1998a; Miller, 2017; Stjernø, 2005; Taylor, 2015). A common differentiation made is the one between 'solidarity among' and 'solidarity with', famously introduced by O'Neill (2002, p. 201), that distinguishes between solidarity relationships based on reciprocity and those that are unilateral. While the former is targeted at the in-group and the members of a group, the latter crosses the group boundaries and expresses its support to others. Moreover, Stjernø (2005) has pointed out that one crucial question in the study of solidarity is 'who is included and who is excluded' (Stjernø, 2005, p. 16) by

any solidarity action. Subsequently, Miller (2017) specifies the meaning of 'solidarity among' by naming four core features. Individuals should cognitively identify as a collective 'we' as being a member of the group. Moreover, 'solidarity among'-relations imply a form of support and responsibility that should exist within the group as well as the willingness to redistribute resources within the group (Miller, 2017, pp. 62–64). Thus, the dimension of inclusion and exclusion can be 'translated' into the spatial dimension of solidarity by asking who is addressed and affected as well as where is solidarity located.

Adversity

The second primary feature constitutes the adversity dimension. The notion of adversity involves a reference to challenging conditions experienced by one or several parties in the solidarity relationship through no fault of their own. Furthermore, all parties assume that those affected by the adversity cannot manage to overcome it individually.

Solidarity is claimed and appealed to because a certain threat or danger is perceived or experienced. Due to this 'crisis situation', solidarity is articulated (Hondrich & Koch-Arzberger, 1992). From a conceptual perspective, Michels (1913) claims that solidarity is only active in a negative sense. Solidarity mobilizations are against something and therefore appeal to the collective actor. This 'something' is then a specific adversity that threatens the social cohesion or even the future of the social group. Therefore, solidarity is demanded to overcome this threat. Highlighting this aspect, Sangiovanni establishes as one crucial element of his understanding of solidarity the need for a 'shared goal to overcome some significant adversity' (Sangiovanni, 2015, p. 343).

This kind of adversity is most prominently investigated in research on trade unions and social movements. The threat mobilizes people to act together and support those in need or who face this threat. Thus, scholars show how trade unionists work together and go on industrial actions to overcome the closing of a factory, job losses or pay cuts (Fantasia, 1989; Gajewska, 2013; Pernicka & Hofmann, 2015). It does not matter whether actors actually overcome the threat. The question of success or not does not play a decisive role in the analysis of solidarity actions. The two crucial aspects are the actual existence of a conflict between different actor groups and the thereby created (perceived) injustice between those. Beyond the research on trade unions, similar mobilization patterns occur with regard to social movements and activists. People join and form social movements because they want to highlight certain adversities that should be dealt with and addressed publicly. Protesters and activists might use different strategies to mobilize others, including fact-giving and informing people about the existing adversity but also appealing to their emotions and empathy so that they can relate to the 'crisis situation' of others (Della Porta, 2018; Kneuer & Richter, 2015). Hence, while trade unions predominantly mobilize because their members are directly influenced by the adversity, some social movements mobilize for others to overcome the threat.

If a crisis is understood as an 'unstable situation of extreme danger or difficulty' (Lake & Kahler, 2013, p. 10), then it is a specific type of adversity that should be dealt with. With regard to recent crises experienced in the EU (debt crisis, migration crisis,

Brexit, COVID-19 pandemic) and the effects of globalization on social policies and welfare states, the current state of affairs is threatened by external events or internal turmoil. As a response, the call to solidarity has gained attention and resonated with the nation states and the multilevel system of the EU (Wallaschek, 2020b). While these appeals to solidarity in times of crisis also try to mobilize other actors – mainly nation states/member states in the EU – the solidarity actions mainly refer to institutional reforms that should be implemented to deal with the crisis situation. Accordingly, the actions as well as the involved actors strongly differ from those of the previous research on trade unions and social movements.

All in all, it is crucial for the definition that all individuals or entities involved in a solidarity relationship recognize a given adversity as shared. However, shared recognition does not mean that all parties in a solidarity relationship inevitably need to be affected by the given adversity. Parties may be affected in different ways, to a different extent, or even not at all. As bell hooks highlights in the context of the feminist movement, given the multifold experiences, culture and ideas, there is '[no] need to share common oppression to fight equally to end oppression' (hooks, 1986, p. 138).

Contribution and shared goals

Regarding the third and fourth primary elements, in line with Andrea Sangiovanni (2015), we conceptualize 'contribution' as a party's disposition to incur significant costs to realize a shared goal. The contribution may be met by incurring personal, temporal or financial resources. It may not necessarily constitute an action but may present itself as an attitude. Yet contributions can vary according to the conditions actors attach to them: contributions may be rendered unconditionally or may be subjected to certain requirements.

Beyond actors and adversity, the element of contribution stands out as the third decisive aspect in research on solidarity. Moreover, it strengthens our argument to separate solidarity from related concepts such as compassion. In the literature, actions may create solidary relationships between the one who acted and the one who is affected by it, because the first is supporting the latter by their action. This action creates a bond between them. An attitude towards solidarity creates the ideational ground on which an individual might act. Shared attitudes are therefore an important basis on which solidary relationships can be enacted (Gerhards et al., 2020; Lahusen & Grasso, 2018).

The shared goal shapes the solidary relationship between the involved actors. According to Sangiovanni (2015), the shared goal is critical for a solidary action. Thus, addressing an adversity (North African migrants in the Mediterranean Sea risking their lives) is linked to or driven by a shared goal (good living conditions for all persons). In contrast to the element of shared interest or goals, a solidarity relationship may arise despite a lack of shared identity or even precisely on the basis of the recognition of diversity (hooks, 1986).

Summarizing the four primary features of solidarity, we attribute agency to any kind of solidary behaviour a crucial role. Secondly, to act in solidarity means to overcome a perceived threat or difficulty. Therefore, adversity is critical for the notion of solidarity because it links the solidary act to a certain process of overcoming a problem or critical

situation. Thirdly, we claim that solidarity is an intentional act done for someone else (an individual or collective actor) and that actors create solidarity by 'investing'/ contributing to something.

Composing the definition

In addition to the outlined primary elements, we have identified two secondary elements for defining solidarity. These secondary elements refer to the kind and direction of relationships between solidary parties and are generally broken down to the question of reciprocity and equality or symmetry. Reciprocity, as Gouldner (1960) points out, implies a return of something from A to B and the other way around. It has a temporal dimension, meaning that the reverse solidary act does not have to be directly given back but is time-delayed. Our definition acknowledges the distinction between 'solidarity with' and 'solidarity among', capturing, on the one hand, unilateral relations of support with no expectation that solidarity will be returned and, on the other, reciprocal relationships involving mutual obligations. The existence of reciprocal relations between two or more actors is pivotal to Taylor's (2015) differentiation between 'robust solidarity' – which generates an obligation to act – and 'expressional solidarity' – which generates a motivation or commitment to act, yet no obligation. Taylor enumerates four conditions for robust solidarity: joint interest, identification with the group, disposition to empathy and mutual trust. Only when all four conditions are mutual or bidirectional in nature can robust solidarity occur, as the 'reciprocal nature of the characteristics [. . .] generate[s] reliance upon other members of the group' (Taylor, 2015, p. 139). In contrast, 'expressional solidarity' occurs when at least one of the factors is unidirectional in nature (Taylor, 2015, p. 139). Besides reciprocity, solidary action or attitude rather implies an asymmetrical relationship and (situational) inequality between the actors (Hondrich & Koch-Arzberger, 1992). Therefore, as Hechter (1988, p. 40) puts it: 'An adequate theory of group solidarity must be able to explain variation in the extensiveness of corporate obligations and in a group's capacity to induce its members to honor these obligations'. In this vein, we assume that the reciprocity and inequality between the actors may vary.

On the basis of these features, we suggest a definition of solidarity that includes the four aspects (actors, adversity, contribution and shared goals) as primary features and the two aspects as secondary features (reciprocity and equality). Hence, we define solidarity as follows:

> *Solidarity entails actors motivated to contribute to overcoming an adversity and, therefore, to accomplishing a goal that is perceived as shared by both the giver and the taker of solidarity. The relationship between the giver and the taker of solidarity may rest on, yet does not require, equality and reciprocity*.

Summarizing the above, the primary and secondary elements of our definition of solidarity incorporate the elements of actor, contribution and rationale (adversity and goal). As to actors, the existence of both the subject and the object/addressee of solidarity constitutes the primary elements, while the relationship between the parties in a

solidarity relationship is secondary; this relationship may be unilateral (solidarity with) or reciprocal (solidarity among). Moreover, solidarity requires the element of contribution, that is, the parties' disposition to incur significant costs. The contribution requirement may be met in the form of an act or an attitude. Finally, with respect to the 'element of rationale', that is, the basis on which actors show solidarity, the definition constitutes the recognition of shared adverse conditions and a shared goal to overcome this adversity. In regard to the relationship of the involved actors, solidary actions may be guided by reciprocity between the giver and the taker, but it does not have to occur necessarily. The same applies to another relational aspect between the two actors: regarding the contribution to overcome the adversity, it appears that solidarity is principally based on an asymmetric relationship. However, this is not a necessary condition; we could also think of solidary actions as a symmetric constellation.

Conceptualizing solidarity and analysing statements of solidarity in a multilevel framework

On the basis of this definition, we now set out to elaborate on the discourse–theoretical understanding we propose for the research of solidarity. Again, our aim is to examine and capture solidarity by reconstructing the discourses and communication on it. Hence, we are interested in the ways in which the different contributions to overcome an adversity are observed and judged by the actors at the level of communication and discourse.

Based on Foucault but broadening his concept of discourse, Keller suggests that agency be taken into account when dealing with the discursive construction of realities (Keller, 2018). He defines discourse as '*a regulated practice of statement formulation responding to some problems, urgency or need for action*' (Keller, 2018, p. 20 – italics in original). Thus, public discourses involve heterogeneous actors and their statements, which are basically related to each other by the performance in the face of a specific situation (Keller, 2018, p. 23). Moreover, agency is relevant for considering shifts or transformations in discursive meaning-making. This resonates with our aim of tracing discourses of solidarity in a situation where actors engage in overcoming adversities and are disposed of contributing to this on the basis of shared goals.

Keller rightly indicates that 'actors/speakers perform a particular discursive structuration in order to respond to some urgent need for action' (Keller, 2018, p. 21). Applying this to the solidarity discourse, especially when it comes to (public) communication and, particularly, statements on or claims for solidarity, we distinguish between the actors and, additionally, the role of the speaker. The speaker might serve as a taker or a giver though not necessarily. They might also describe an/a (desired or factual) act of solidarity that involves different actors. For instance, a school teacher in the United States might refer to the lack of solidarity among the EU member states regarding the relocation of refugees. The teacher is neither the giver nor the taker but expresses a notion of solidarity that is characterized by a specific adversity, specific actors, and a specific contribution.

Including the speaker in the analysis of solidarity leads to the question of how to conceptualize not only solidarity itself but also statements on solidarity. To begin with, we assume that a statement on solidarity expresses a certain configuration of the core

elements of the above definition of solidarity and of the relationships between these elements. Thus, in a solidarity statement, a speaker sketches a perceived or desired relationship between specific actors. The speaker also makes an assumption about a (potentially) shared adversity and about common goals. Following Foucault (1982, p. 128), we assume that a solidarity statement is by no means accidental or at the discretion of the speaker but structured by a 'historical a priori'. This implies that statements on solidarity represent, reproduce or challenge a 'regime of truth [. . .]: that is, the types of discourse which [a society] accepts and makes function as true' (Foucault, 1980, p. 131). As a 'thing of this world' (Foucault, 1980, p. 131), the grade of the socially accepted truth of a solidarity statement is shaped within 'powerful 'games of truth' by actors who are co-constituted by these games of truth' (Bosančić, 2019: 89). Thus, in the 'real world' of discourse, a speaker cannot only be conceptualized as an actor participating in the social construction of reality. Yet, the speaker's 'place of enunciation' (Newman, 2004, p. 151), that is, the speaker's position in space, time and regarding power relations, becomes relevant. This place of enunciation is defined by the discourse and, in turn, defines the acceptance of the statement by the discourse.

If we now relate this discourse perspective gained from Foucault, Newman and Keller to our action-theoretically formulated approach, then we have to integrate the aspect that solidarity is not only practiced but is also publicly brought to bear in joint action in a way that, from the point of view of those involved, is 'true or at least valid' for the purpose of overcoming an adversity. And it is precisely for this reason that the elements of solidarity that we operationally propose can be used as search criteria to observe that:

(1a) an adversity is identified in a society that leads to the pursuit of the (1b) common goal of overcoming the grievance through contributions of various kinds at different levels, the interlocking of which (2) is discursively perceived. To this end, (3) givers are invited to contribute and takers are identified as recipients of solidarity.

Assessing the question of how statements on solidarity relate to the regime of truth on the matter, therefore, requires carefully selecting a diverse range of places of enunciation. Kneuer and Masala distinguish (Kneuer & Masala, 2015, pp. 11–12) three levels of solidarity are distinguished, which can also be understood as three places of enunciation, viz.: the individual or micro level, where individual citizens express their views on solidarity – most probably on occasion of a certain event or crisis that might invite to deliberate or take a position on solidarity; the meso level, where socially organized actors inform and come to an understanding of solidarity; the macro level of political actors and institutions discussing solidarity in the context of opinion building or decision-making processes.

The three levels thus describe three different sets of conditions when it comes to articulating an idea of solidarity or putting it into action. Thus, at the macro level, policymakers in executive and legislative institutions act under particular conditions, which presumably influence their position and communication on solidarity. In certain situations of crisis, policymakers are forced to react, taking a stance regarding solidarity, and to legitimize their actions towards the public, the citizens and probably also towards foreign governments. At the meso level, socially organized actors with specific interests such as unions, employer organizations, religious communities, media, civil society and NGOs in all their diversity are more focused on aggregating their members' interests and

advocate a common position on goals on solidarity linked to particular fields of action. Finally, the micro level of the 'ordinary' citizens reflects the most diverse field of individual opinions and attitudes towards solidarity that may materialize in actions and communication about solidarity. Presumably, citizens communicate with each other, but they also may direct their opinions to policymakers or to social actors at the meso level. We assume that speaker positions at the three levels are constructed differently and thus speakers act and communicate under different conditions at these levels; hence, we expect that examining these levels separately will show if there are different understandings of solidarity or not, in which aspects these understandings differ and in which ones they concur.

This multilevel framework enables us to trace interactive dynamics between the levels. Is the discourse on the macro level also in place at the meso and micro level? Can strongly articulated positions from the meso or micro level be found in statements of the policy makers? Moreover, it is possible to trace genealogical shifts in the understanding of solidarity at the different levels over time? In the light of the fact that solidarity discourses are stirred by crises or problems that make solidarity 'an issue' for the public, such discourses will surge and after some time might flatten. This kind of waves of solidarity engagement can be carved out on the basis of our framework, for each level. If solidarity is conceived as a collective response to perceived adversity, then the multidimensionality of the contributions generated by solidarity arises simply from the fact that discourses of solidarity can operate at all levels of society.

These assumptions can be illustrated by the solidarity debates in the context of forced migration. Solidarity can be evoked at the macro level by decision makers to, for instance, demand burden sharing of refugee reception between political entities. At the meso level, social associations and their regional dependencies, which aggregate determined interests, can present solidarity claims that may offer different interpretations of solidarity. And last but not least, at the micro level, individual actors (citizens) are affected by the solidarity claims made at the macro and meso level, but at the same time they have their own perspectives, given their lifeworld networks and experiences.

Our concern is to show that solidarity can mean something different at each of these levels and thus can be reflected differently in the discourses. Our model is sensible to the different perspectives, and this implies to specific problems that can emerge at each level. However, we are not only interested in identifying these differences but also possible interactions between the levels. This is especially important if communicative manifestations of solidarity at different levels refer to the same points of reference, for example, the European Union. Hence, this multidimensional approach reconstructs the coordination efforts that have to be made in the interaction of solidarity contributions at different levels.

At this point, we can move on to translating our conceptual goal of a multidimensional approach into a heuristic model. To do this, we choose a path that Bernardi et al. (2019) have introduced in life course research with the so-called CUBE model and transfer it to our problem, that is, the interrelationships within discourses of solidarity. From our previous definition of solidarity, three dimensions of specific importance emerge:

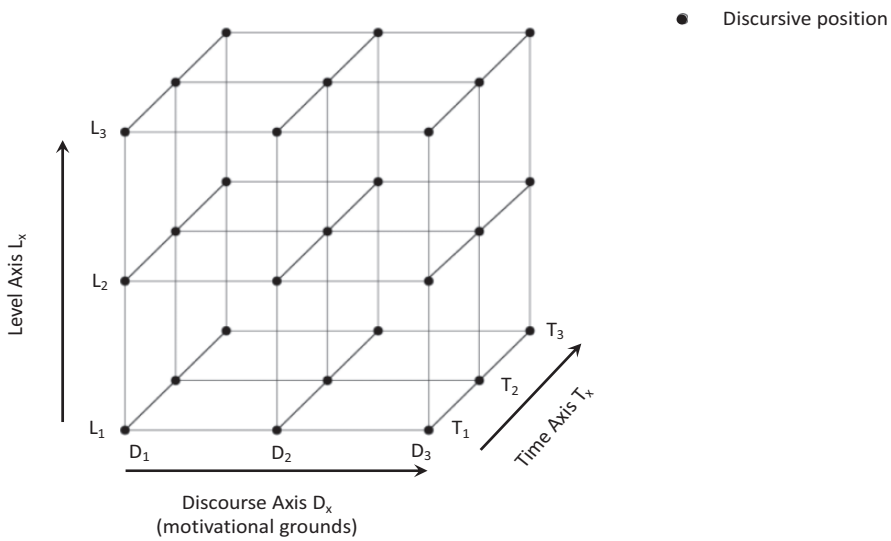

Figure 1. Solidarity cube.

- the micro, meso, and macro levels (L) of social action;
- the motivational grounds for solidarity articulated in a discourse (D);
- and the different points in time (T) at which the discursive statements were made.

We call it briefly: the axis L of levels, the axis D of different motivational grounds stated in discourse and the axis T of time.

Now, in the cube, different variations that cause the occurrence of certain discourse events (statements) can be distinguished. Firstly, it is possible to track the effects produced by the mere variation of a single dimension (L, D, T). Secondly, we can examine the interaction of two dimensions (L*D, L*T, D*T) in more detail. And thirdly, the interdependencies of all three levels (L*D*T) with each other can be considered in an overarching perspective.

Within this third, three-dimensional order of interdependencies, the distances between the statements can be observed in the discursive space. For example, the intersection of L_1-D_1-T_1 in Figure 1 would be closer to the intersection L_1-D_1-T_2 than to L_2-D_3-T_3. Nevertheless, it remains an empirical question whether solidarity statements actually change at these discursive intersections. The non-change of statements between very distant discourse points would indicate high stability, whereas a change between points close to each other would mark an abrupt change. Therefore, we expect a more detailed analysis of the dynamics of solidarity discourse through the application of the CUBE model.

Conclusion

The approach presented here contributes to the recently growing interest in the empirical dimension of solidarity and proposes a conceptualization for capturing

(a) understandings of solidarity at different levels in a given society, (b) the stability (or instability) of these understandings and (c) possible overlapping, convergence or reciprocal influence of discourses of solidarity between the different places of enunciation. Research on the foundations of solidarity has recently started to focus on discursive reconstruction of solidarity. This being a meaningful approach, studies mainly concentrate on the methodological dimension – in terms of well-developed discursive analysis methods. What we present is a conceptualization to apply this innovative path of research on conceptual grounds that expand one-dimensional approaches – in terms of time and level of research. Thus, our concept opens up avenues for capturing the interaction and possible mutual influence between the micro, meso and macro levels. It contributes also to future research that might set out to explain if how and why decision makers' claim for solidarity in a determined situation – like the migration crisis or the COVID-19 crisis – might influence the public debate. Or if, how and why the bottom-up pressure by citizens or organized interests might influence decision-makers' position on solidarity.

Moreover, our concept offers a more differentiated perspective on the actors involved. Future studies may test the empirical and practical implications that the person who speaks about solidarity and the person involved in a solidary action (as a giver or a taker) may not necessarily be congruent. We deem that this conceptual distinctness of these roles indeed has implications insofar as utterances about solidarity can be attributed in a more fine-grained way.

A further added value of our approach refers to the possibility of identifying possible reference points of the understandings of solidarity with the help of the multilevel framework we introduce. As solidarity can have different scales, it is relevant to get a better understanding of the reference and the scope of solidarity, namely if it is local, national, European or global. This can inform about how solidarity claims are allocated as well as how they are ascribed. Thus, if solidarity is claimed not for the local and national, but for the European or global level, then the question is which motives account for referring or transferring solidarity to a higher level. From the operationalization of our concept, we expect to capture in a more fine-grained way how citizens perceive solidarity in their direct environment, relative to decisions of their national government, to the responsibilities of the EU or EU members.

Finally, in the face of the COVID-19 crisis, but also in the context of the climate crisis, we assume that studies on solidarity will be an increasingly relevant subject of research. Regarding both crises, claims of solidarity are not only highly present in the public discourse; solidarity is also a subject of negotiation processes between different actors and groups in society. The outcome of these negotiations can be as relevant to the tailoring of mitigating measures by the government as it is to stakeholder compliance with those measures. Therefore, we consider the discursive reconstruction of dispositions of solidarity and their motivational background as an approach that will likely advance the research in this field.

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