

Panel Proposal for the ICCONSS 2018 Conference

Action Organizations responding to the retrenchment of Social Policies

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This panel focuses on collective responses organized to address social, economic and political concerns and hardships due to the retrenchment of social policies in European countries, during the periods of the global financial crisis and the refugee crisis of 2015. Its four papers offer fresh systematic, empirical data and findings on Alternative Action Organizations and Transnational Solidarity Organizations, based on research carried out in the context of the EU-funded projects LIVEWHAT (www.livewhat.unige.ch/) and TransSOL, (www.transsol.eu/).

Abstract 1

Anti-refugee and Anti-immigrant Attitudes in Greece: Findings and Policy Implications

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Since 2015 Greece was marked by a fast-paced transit of high numbers of refugees and asylum seekers, primarily originated from Syria, entering its territory en route to wealthier European countries. The unprecedented refugee influx has triggered, among others, negative stances towards newcomers. The present study inspired from the most recent elaborations of ethnic competition and intergroup contact theoretical frameworks explores Greek citizens' attitudes towards immigrants and Syrian refugees who fled from their country in search for safety. Moreover, it investigates individual-level characteristics of citizens' portrayals prone to unfavorable attitudes towards immigrants and Syrian refugees. The analysis uses data derived from an original online survey conducted during November and December 2016 within the context of the EU-funded project "European Paths to Transnational Solidarity at Times of Crisis: Conditions, Forms, Role Models and Policy Responses" (TransSOL). The findings underpin that Greeks' opposition towards these two distinctive types of migrants is not shaped by newcomers' different migrating motives but primarily by Greeks' perceived threats to their cultural homogeneity and national identity. Moreover, the paper portrays Greeks' profiles prone to anti-refugee and anti-immigrant attitudes shedding light to some common traits as well as to important divergences. It is underlined that understanding public attitudes towards newcomers and particularly towards refugees becomes of critical importance for the protection of their well-being and their effective integration into new host countries, specifically in times of refugee crisis. The urgent call to inverse the anti-immigrant and anti-refugee climate in Greece inevitably leads to the design of policies that curtail the main sources of such negative sentiments. These policy initiatives may involve cultural diversity programs targeting to counter the stereotypes and perceptions that immigrants and refugees threaten the Greek national identity and cultural homogeneity.

Abstract 2

Political Consumerism in Greece at Times of Economic Crisis: Environmental Awareness or a Way to Deal with the Effects of the Crisis?

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The current economic crisis was a turning, for the worse, point in the everyday reality of a great part of the Greek people. Austerity-stricken Greece is characterized by the collapse of the welfare state and by increasingly uncovered basic human needs. An answer to this humanitarian problem was given by thousands formal and informal initiatives and organizations who organized solidarity actions, such as barter networks, food banks, consumer – producer networks, soup kitchens, new cooperatives, social economy enterprises, free legal advice etc. Despite those organizations' role in covering needs there are also signs that they make claims for social or political change. Under this light, these actions might also be seen as political consumerism.

According to the recent literature, the emergence of political consumerism (e.g. Fair trade, community supported agriculture, zero miles etc.) is connected to a concern about environmental and social Justice. This paper aims to unravel whether and to what extent there are environmental and political consumerism initiatives in Alternative action organizations in Greece under the crisis using data from the EU-funded project LIVEWHAT. It will investigate their socio-political profile, their actions and practices, their beneficiaries, the type of rights and needs they address, and the values under which they act. More than that, this paper tries to answer whether such initiatives make claims for social change, and if they do, to what extent can those actions be classified as a social movement.

Abstract 3

Informal, transnational solidarity organization in crises-ridden Greece: Stronger, divided and politicized

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In the 2008-2018 period and due to the economic crisis, Greek economy lost more than 25% of its GDP, unemployment rose to 25% and over 60% for the younger generations. At almost the same time, from 2012 and on, migrant and refugee inflows towards Greece have been dramatically increased. More specifically, according to the UNHCR, 851,319 migrants arrived to Greece during 2015. Greek society had faced situations as those mentioned above only during or after wars. In this paper we will explore the impacts the dual economic and refugee crises had on Greek civil society. Our focus is on Transnational Solidarity Organizations (TSOs) that are involved in transnational solidarity actions and are active in the migration, disabilities, and unemployment fields. First, we will provide a panorama of the TSOs in each field, then we will make comparisons between the three fields and finally we will counter pose the findings of our research with the findings of previous research on Greek civil society and its alternative forms of resilience. Our sample includes 30 semi-structured interviews. Our interviewees: a) evaluate policy making in their respective field, b) share their views on solidarity and especially on transnational solidarity, c) evaluate the transnational inter-linkages of the TSOs they represent, d) evaluate the impact of both crises on their field and their work. These carefully selected, designed and conducted interviews provide interesting findings on the debate regarding the main features of the contemporary Greek civil society and its relations with public policies. We find that Greek civil society has grown strong but it is divided between a formal and an informal sector. These two sectors share different political beliefs and prioritize their activities in a different manner. Sharp differences also exist between the action fields. Some disability TSOs complain because their funding has decreased and most available funds are directed towards the migration field whereas some migration TSOs are accusing the big transnational NGOs and the UNHCR for having colonized the field in Greece and operate as corporate managers. Unemployment TSOs are in practice trade unions or left-wing political groups that are trying to politicize the issues of unemployment and worsening labor conditions in crisis-ridden Greece. Finally, the dual crises contrary to what is widely believed has not created too many new TSOs. It was mainly the existing TSOs that were mobilized in all three fields.

Abstract 4

Innovative practices of solidarity: the European frame

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Collective, innovative solidarity practices have been society's survival response during hard economic times (Moulaert et al 2013). Recent studies point out the re-surfacing of innovative collective practices and initiatives of solidarity (Castells et al 2012, Bosi and Zamponi 2014) in times of crisis, austerity and the retrenchment of social policies. These are seen as alternative forms of resilience (Kousis and Paschou 2017). Our paper aims to offer a comparative account of innovative practices of 2,408 transnational solidarity organizations (TSOs) across eight European countries in the disability, unemployment and migration fields, through the systematic analysis of their websites. Following Action Organization Analysis (Kousis, Giugni and Lahusen, 2016) 300 TSOs (100 per field) were randomly selected and coded for each country from our pool of 29,277 hubs-retrieved third sector websites, with criteria of inclusion related to their transnational, solidarity and innovative features, if they were active at any time between 2007 and 2016.

The findings on France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland and UK reveal different profiles of innovative solidarity practices across each policy field, depending on the ways in which they propose to solve the challenges they face, the type of organisations they form, the nature of their activities, and the type of supplementary nonconventional actions they adopt. With respect to the organizational type of solidarity providers, NGOs maintain the leading position in disability and migration TSOs, while social economy enterprises and unions are prominent among unemployment TSOs. Informal citizens and protest groups are very important solidarity providers in the migration field as they comprise almost one third of the migration TSOs, whereas charities and churches appear to be very active in the fields of migration and disability, but much less visible in the unemployment field.