

The idea of solidarity under pressure: challenges and prospects for public policy in Southern Europe

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Solidarity is a fundamental concept of the welfare state. This concept has been studied from the point of view of various dimensions and one of them highlights the existence of the factor of responsibility towards fellow human beings, a concept that is the quintessence of the welfare state, in the sense that it has been created to be the institution which protects its citizens from social hazards. Therefore, in essence, it is the institution that has the responsibility of delivering-distributing solidarity. It should be noted, however, that the assumption of this obligation by the welfare state does not mean that the citizens renounce their individual obligations to the system and, as such, to society. The payment of social security contributions fulfills the obligation to maintain the retired population from the active (intergenerational solidarity). Therefore, this obligation refers to the pooling of resources in order to create conditions of security-assurance for the whole population and to address or “manage” the resultant risks. The achievement of these objectives requires the implementation of public policies by the welfare state. These public policies have undergone tremendous reductions, especially in the Southern-European countries, in which will focus, thus undermining the realization of the concept of solidarity. It is therefore a fact that the research for alternatives to address the challenges of the crisis and the structural changes that take a rapid rate, comprise a key priority for the re-establishment of the role of solidarity as a key strategy for achieving social cohesion. This is precisely the main objective of this study.