**The Potentials of Civil Society: Solidarity and Crisis Management (SolZiv/ SolCiv)**

**Objective**

The corona pandemic has turned communal life upside down: daily life is characterised by containment measures, including contact bans and compulsory masks, closed shops and educational institutions. These measures are based on the notion of solidarity: we protect each other from infection and our health system from overburdening. But solidarity can only be politically managed to a certain extent; it is manifested in citizens' experiences. As in previous crises, civil society plays a central role: it connects citizens, strengthens solidarity, supports those in need of help in coping with the crisis, articulates criticism, and draws attention to grievances.

The applied-for project is intended to investigate the extent and conditions of solidarity-based behaviour in different forms of civil society engagement. On the one hand, who is involved in civil society? In what form? And how is this commitment implemented in practice despite far-reaching contact bans? On the other hand: Who benefits from the commitment? Who feels overlooked? And which offers are accepted by those in need? These are crucial questions for understanding the social consequences of the pandemic and deriving measures that civil society can use to specifically support crisis management.

We are experiencing an exceptional moment in civil society not only as a result of the Corona pandemic, but also in the wake of the last major crises in Europe - the euro and refugee crisis. During this time, commitment and solidarity-based action increased, as did political protest (including BMFSFJ 2018; della Porta 2018; Hutter & Kriesi 2019; Schiffauer et al. 2017). Especially in autumn 2015, countless aid initiatives for refugees were founded in Germany and established welfare organisations, associations and initiatives also became involved. At the same time a spiral of mobilisation took place on the streets, with alliances such as 'Unteilbar' and 'Pulse of Europe' on the one hand and 'Pegida' on the other.

In a way, the current situation is similar to previous crises: The corona pandemic also challenges the welfare state and increases inequalities. Neither the health risks nor the consequences of the measures taken to contain the pandemic are equally distributed among citizens (Heisig & König 2020). As before, we see various forms of solidarity in the sense of informal and voluntary aid. Society is committed!

However, the situation is not comparable in many respects: Restrictions on the freedom of movement and assembly bring the life of associations and societies to a standstill (Grande & Hutter 2020). Protest and solidarity actions are only possible to a limited extent or online. "Third places", where citizens meet for exchange, are no longer available. But it is precisely existing associations that are activated even in times of crisis. The example of natural disasters shows that their limitation can have negative effects in the long term if no intervention is made (Wang & Ganapati 2018).

There is an enormous need for forms of solidarity-based behaviour to overcome the crisis in everyday life, but also to denounce grievances. However, bans on contact hamper classic forms of engagement. How is this dilemma resolved? What are its consequences? And how can civil society involvement be strengthened?

The project aims to investigate how this dilemma is dealt with. There is a lack of practical experience and scientific knowledge. Thematically, we follow the BUA Call Social Cohesion-Call. However, direct funding is needed to analyse the current dynamics. There are no comparable surveys, as regular studies on civil society in Germany were in the field before the crisis (Volunteer Survey 2019; Engagement Report) and current surveys exclude the topic (e.g. GESIS & SOEP COVID-19 Panels).

**Work packages and timetable**

In order to systematically record the current dilemma of civil society, we are planning a population survey (two waves) and an organisational analysis. The surveys need to be launched quickly into the field in order to capture the dynamics of the situation and provide timely politically and socially relevant knowledge. The study is designed to be both interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary: We are a team at the

intersection of sociology, political science and psychology. We also involve partners from civil society in data collection and knowledge transfer.

The project consists of five Work Packages. WP1&2 comprise two closely coordinated surveys: WP1 is based on population surveys at the individual level; WP2 on online research and surveys at the level of organisations and initiatives. The three PIs will jointly design the survey and carry out joint analyses. At the same time, WP3-5 will focus on the sociology of emotions and social inequality (von Scheve), personality psychology (Specht) and comparative civil society and organisational analysis (Hutter). The combination of these approaches is a key for understanding the conditions of solidary behaviour in current and future crises, which are characterised by severe contingency experience and uncertainty.

Data and analyses are continuously shared with actors from civil society, politics, science and the public. We are planning a project website, contributions in blogs, social media and the press, and a brochure. In order to link research and teaching, we will involve students as student assistants and in research seminars in the winter semes ter 20/21. At the same time, the funding provides the basis for a longer-term study of the social consequences of the corona pandemic. As outlined in the CVs, the project fits perfectly with our research interests and is embedded in ongoing projects (e.g. Protest Monitoring at the Centre for Civil Society Research, SFB 1171). Together with other colleagues, we are also applying for an Exploration Project within the framework of the BUA Social Cohesion Call.

**WP1 Survey individuals (all PIs)**

WP1 uses population surveys to ascertain the situation of those involved and affected. Questions on the commitment repertoire and the use of assistance are supplemented by questions from participation research on socio-economic status, gender, migration background, motivation, political attitudes and on embedding in and contact with organisations and social networks (Dalton 2017). In terms of social capital research, this will build the bridge to the organisational survey (WP2). The link between questions on individual and collective emotional experience during the pandemic, emotional solidarity (Woosnam & Norman 2010) and synchronicity (Dario Páez et al. 2015), life satisfaction and personality traits (including Big Five, control conviction, self-esteem, loneliness, worries, optimism) and their dynamic development is an innovative one.

The survey design includes two dimensions of comparison: time and region. Specifically, a panel survey with two waves in Germany and one wave in four other EU member states is planned. Based on many years of experience, the surveys are programmed by the company itself and high-quality access panels are used to recruit participants. Wave 1 comprises 3,500 people living in Germany. The scope and quota of the sample allow for quasi-representative statements on distributions and effects in Germany as well as on regional variance (especially East/West differences). Wave 1 of the survey is planned for September. This is an ideal time to ask about current engagement in the exceptional situation and at the same time to look at future conflicts and engagement. In wave 2 (Jan. 2021) 700 people will be interviewed again to observe continuity and change. In addition, the survey will be conducted in four other countries (Austria, Sweden, Italy and Poland; N= 1,200 each). The countries vary in pandemic-related factors as well as the general nature of civil society (cf. WP5).

**WP2 Survey organisations (all PIs)**

WP2 serves to collect organisational data. Existing and new coalitions play a key role in organising support in the pandemic and facilitating engagement. It is unclear to what extent formal and informal as well as newly formed and longer-established associations respond differently to crises. These organisational adaptation processes are the focus of WP2. They are essential explanations for solidarity-based behaviour and for assessing the potential and needs of civil society for crisis management.

Online research (including social media and websites) is being carried out to map civil society involvement in Germany. These must be launched hastily in order to secure solidarity offers and dynamics. Civil society organisations and initiatives will then be surveyed (Brake and Weber 2009). The online survey is carried out in cooperation with the 'Institute for Protest and Movement Research (ipb)'. As the population is not

yet known even for formalised organisations (Priller et al. 2012), a key task is to create a systematic sample and recruit respondents. For this purpose, organisations are recruited via existing 'ipb' networks. The research is conducted in cooperation with the ‚Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement (BBE)' and ‚Bewegungsstiftung'. The cooperation partners are also involved in the survey design and knowledge transfer. In addition, initiatives newly created in the context of the pandemic and recorded in step 1 are recruited. This is an important contribution, as informal associations are neglected in civil society research as an enabling structure for engagement. However, we suspect that spontaneously emerging associations and existing informal networks are particularly susceptible to rapid adjustments.

**WP3 Analysis of emotions (von Scheve)**

Based on WP1&2, WP3 analyses how individual and collective emotions experienced during the pandemic influence civil society engagement. It is known from movement research that feelings of insecurity and dissatisfaction are condensed within discourse and rituals into (collective) emotions such as anger and indignation and thus may galvanize a mobilising effect (Jasper 2014; Salmela & v. Scheve 2017). Shared emotional experience is an important source of solidarity. This applies to forms of engagement that aim at resistance and protest as well as to those that focus on cooperation and solidarity. Negative emotions experienced together in the face of a crisis can also promote solidarity and prosocial behaviour (e.g. Garcia & Rimé 2019). Solnit (2010) summed this up in her commission 'A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disasters'. The interaction rituals of committed citizens in particular make shared emotions tangible in specific situations, create feelings of belonging and maintain commitment (Collins 2004). WP3 therefore asks which emotions are formative and which are their triggers during the pandemic (e.g. loneliness, illness), what they relate to (e.g. self, identity, other, social groups) and how they are stratified (e.g. gender, age, education). Furthermore, WP3 asks what specific emotions are associated with engagement or its restraint during this crisis. In particular, the emotional consequences of contact restriction and physical distance as specific to this crisis will be the focus of attention: How are (collective) emotions experienced when interaction rituals are only mediated by the media and the circle of interaction partners is severely restricted? And what consequences does this have for the generation, quality and scope of feelings of solidarity?

**WP4 Personality Analysis (Specht)**

Based on WP1&2, WP4 analyses the role of a developing personality among civil society actors and (potential) recipients of civil society support. On the one hand, personality has an impact on individual crisis management (Specht et al., 2011) and influences whether people tend to be proactive in coping (Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995), thus potentially demonstrating a particular solidarity. At the same time, the crisis poses new challenges to engagement through contact restrictions, which often necessitates new forms of cooperation and intervention and is influenced by the individual ability to try out new things (John et al., 2008). Typical amplifiers of engagement, such as social exchange and public visibility, are also limited. It remains to be seen which personality traits favour engaged coping and how the engagement of previously non-committed persons can be facilitated. On the other hand, not all potential recipients of solidarity-based behaviour, e.g. people in need or social groups with common concerns, are equally supported and heard. Here too, personality has an effect: For example, it is easier for compatible people to accept support, but incompatible people are more likely to make their own needs heard (Jensen-Campbell et al., 2020). It remains to be seen which personality traits make it easier to receive support under the current conditions and who feels overlooked in overcoming the crisis and therefore needs additional attention in order to prevent personal and social conflicts in the medium term. Ultimately, the personality is subject to lifelong changes that can intensify individual or collective crises (Specht et al., 2014). Potential personality changes in the crisis-affected society and their dynamic interaction with civil society engagement are investigated by means of the longitudinal survey in WP1.

**WP5 Analysis Context (Hutter)**

Based on WP1&2, WP5 analyses how contextual differences affect the way civil society deals with the dilemma mentioned at the beginning. Under which political and social conditions can civil society's

potential for crisis management unfold (or not)? What is needed during a pandemic to enable a level of solidarity that meets the need for support and critical reflection? WP5 is based on work done on opportunity structures and effects of social movements (Bosi et al. 2018; Hutter 2014) and on the role of social capital in crises and disasters (Aldrich 2012; Wang & Ganapati 2018). This research shows that crisis management depends on the degree to which people are affected (including the extent of economic dislocation). At the same time, the strength of civil society before the crisis and political measures to cope with it play an important role. The latter influence, for instance, how existing and new alliances adjust to the crisis situation, whether they focus on different target groups (Uba & Kousis 2018), seek new fields of work or express political demands. This, in turn, influences the individual's scope for solidary behaviour. The surveys in WP1&2 offer an advantage in accounting for the fact that these factors vary within Germany (over time, region, organisational fields) as well as in a country comparison. Based on the findings of WP5, measures can be derived for the targeted strengthening of civil society in current and future crises.

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