Transnational solidarity as a factor of the EU's system persistence

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Research question

How can transnational solidarity influence the future development of the European Union in a stabilizing or destabilizing manner?
United in diversity?
United in diversity?

danger of state bankruptcies

European Stability Mechanism (ESM)

growing redistribution between EU member states

stronger financial interconnectedness within the EU
Unity in crisis?

- success of these economic policies is uncertain
- serious political and social challenges like growing public protest, successful anti-European parties such as *Front National* in France or *Alternative für Deutschland* in Germany, and the reappearance of national stereotypes („Pleitegriechen und Jammerdeutsche“)
- Obviously, the „Union“-part within the EU is strongly threatened.
- Future developments are unclear: Is the EU, which now still unites so many states and people, stable enough to overcome all these problems and risks or will it fail as a *system*?
The EU’s future
...from a system theorist’s perspective

• To ask for the stability (or: persistence) of a political regime like the EU is a classical system theoretic approach.
• Why did I choose this perspective?
• In most analyses concerning the EU’s future, I missed a conceptual foundation that could explain the causal relations between the social and political processes on a more abstract level.
• Looking for a more abstract theory I found system theory.
• System theory may not be the most popular approach in modern political science, but I am convinced that there is at least one aspect of the EU’s future that can be explained really well by system theory...
The EU’s future
...from a system theorist’s perspective

• ...and that is: the social grounds of the EU’s stability.
• I think that the social cohesion, or better *solidarity* between the Europeans is one of the main factors that will decide the EU’s system stability.
• This argument may sound pretty obvious for all those who are into solidarity as a part of European integration – but for most political scientists it is not.
• Concerning the effects of the crisis, they mostly analyse the political reactions to economic problems, in order to forecast where the EU is steering at.
But what is solidarity exactly?

„Solidarity is a feeling of being connected to and responsible for others. (...) Solidarity refers to the type of relation in which people feel that they have an obligation to help others, for instance, because they experience a connection and ‘we-ness’ with them based on a community of interest and values – to help others so that they are empowered and can stand on their own feet.“ (Coicaud 2011: 2464)

action resulting out of it or at least a willingness or readiness to act solidarity

emotions, attitudes
Since intergovernmental fiscal solidarity and research on it is already in full bloom (Kleger/Mehlhausen 2013), we should ask for the existence and quality of the people’s actual willingness to show solidarity and redistribute on a transnational level.

The gap between transnational willingness for solidarity and the actual operation of intergovernmental fiscal solidarity could become one of the most challenging problems for the EU’s legitimacy.

Speaking as a system theorist: If solidarity can be seen as a system stabilizing resource, a lack of it could become the most problematic aspect of support for the EU.
Easton’s model and solidarity

Support for:
• regime
• political authorities
• political community

strongly connected with concepts of group identity connected to territoriality, social cohesion and solidarity
But how to measure transnational solidarity?

• Already Émile Durkheim said that solidarity was a moral phenomenon that you could not directly observe - let alone measuring it – and that you need a proxy to study it (Durkheim 1988 [1893]: 111).

• For measuring emotions and attitudes representing transnational solidarity, especially the willingness of the Europeans for transnational redistributitional solidarity there is existing survey data (European Social Survey, International Social Survey Programme, European Values Study, Eurobarometer, European Quality of Life Survey, European Election Study, European Equality Survey)

• But measuring transnational solidary action is not that easy. There are many indicators but they have not been analyzed that systematically yet.
Discussion

• General or specific comments or questions

• What does acting solidary on a transnational level mean to you?

• How would you measure that?
References


