



Executive Summary

of the launch of the

Centre for the Study of Contemporary Solidarity (CeSCoS)

held
15 November 2018

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Funded by:



**universität
wien**

Institut für Politikwissenschaft

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Report approved by CeSCoS research group members.

The Department of Political Science at the University of Vienna launched its new Centre for the Study of Contemporary Solidarity (CeSCoS) on the 15th November 2018. Hosted in the heart of Vienna at the Saal der Labstelle, the day-long launch event explored multi-disciplinary perspectives of the contemporary understanding of the concept of *Solidarity* in research and practice. The morning and afternoon sessions (9.30am-4pm) in English featured talks by the CeSCoS research group beginning with an introduction by Professor Barbara Prainsack, Director of CeSCoS and her close collaborator Professor [Alena Buyx](#) (TU Munich). This was followed by keynote speeches by members of CeSCoS' international [Advisory Board](#), including Professor [Carol Gould](#) (City University NY), Professor [Linsey McGoey](#) (University of Essex), Professor [David Townend](#) (Maastricht University), and [Bernard Dichek](#) (filmmaker, Israel). The second part of the day - the evening session - in German began at 4.30pm with a keynote by the renowned author Dr [Auma Obama](#) (Auma Obama Foundation Sauti Kuu) followed by a talk by Professor [Peter Dabrock](#), Chairperson of the German Ethics Council, before concluding the day with a reception. The audience comprised of numerous renowned international colleagues and collaborators from across academia, policymaking, and industry, as well as a number of early-career scholars and doctoral students from various disciplines including CeSCoS' own research team members.

Aptly titled 'Solidarity in research and practice – why now?', the launch event aimed to reinvigorate a discussion on the use of the concept of solidarity in contemporary politics, policy, and other domains of practice. This was highlighted by Professor [Barbara Prainsack's introductory speech](#) focusing on CeSCoS' aims to explore the relevance of solidarity 'as an organising principle for policies and institutions, to address key societal challenges such as the reform of healthcare systems and the increase of social disparities'. Professor [Alena Buyx](#), external co-director CeSCoS, took the audience through the historical twists and turns that preceded their collaborative work on solidarity prior to the foundation of CeSCoS in 2017; from their (Professors Prainsack's and Buyx's) chance meeting in London in 2010, to a prestigious grant from the Nuffield Council of Bioethics in 2011 and a book capturing the central idea of solidarity as an analytical tool (Prainsack and Buyx, 2011). A brief introduction to these authors' conceptualisation of *solidarity* followed, ranging from the historical origins of the notion of *solidarity* and its understandings in Marxist, Leninist, communitarian and rational-choice concepts to the authors' own conception of solidarity as "shared practices reflecting a collective commitment to carry 'costs' (financial, social, emotional or otherwise) to assist others" (Prainsack and Buyx, 2011, p. xiv). To illustrate a case where a solidarity-based approach can give specific guidance for the design of policies and institutions, Barbara Prainsack discussed the increasing 'datafication' of ever wider aspects of our personal and collective lives. She showed how the three-tiers of solidarity – from interpersonal practices of solidarity on the first tier, to group solidarity, to legal and contractual norms of solidarity on the third tier - might be used as a framework to build institutions of data-'citizenship' that enhance democratic rights in practice (Prainsack and Buyx, 2011).

As such, both [Barbara Prainsack's and Alena Buyx's](#) talk stressed the need to debunk a general belief of *solidarity* as irrelevant for resolving contemporary challenges by highlighting its fundamental social embeddedness in practices aimed at collective institutional building. At the same time, the introductory talks actively encouraged discussion and debate around CeSCoS' conceptualisation of *solidarity* particularly, in relation to the world within which it was situated, to concepts and issues of social justice, reciprocity, altruism, relational autonomy and so forth. This in turn, set the tone for the day and the nascent research area of *solidarity* to explore its relationship and relevance to society through multidisciplinary perspectives, in particular, the ability of its spirit and concept to shape policy that bring together evermore fractured societies. Re-emerging themes of the day included the

difficulty of conceptualising solidarity, the importance of institutions and infrastructures in embedding solidaristic practices in society, and the need to cultivate a disposition towards solidarity.

[Professor Carol Gould](#), Professor of Philosophy at City University New York - a widely renowned social philosopher and political theorist - presented the human rights (or its lack of) implications of the multi-layered interpretations and tensions of solidarity across national boundaries at transnational level. Drawing on present day similarities in the political-economic circumstances across the Atlantic, Professor Gould explored differences between policymakers and publics 'disposition to solidarity' mostly around labour market organisation to understand the (dis)advantages of network-v-unitary solidarity, plurality-v-conflicting interests, and out-v-in-group diversity in practice. Unsurprisingly, this fuelled an energetic debate among the audience around the challenging question of what was meant by 'disposition to solidarity' and how it could be cultivated, if at all. Should the state nudge its citizens towards a favourable 'disposition to solidarity'? If so, how might that be operationalised (or institutionalised) in practice and what were its implications for democracy? Or, was it the individual's responsibility to cultivate a 'disposition to solidarity'? Furthermore, how would the blurring of 'scale' between local-v-global relate to notions of 'citizenship' in cultivating such a disposition? For as an audience member argued "if solidarity is based on ontology of relations i.e. fundamental interdependence between peoples then 'citizenship' is exclusionary? In such cases, is the fundamental interdependence between people framed by global norms - a global communitarian perspective - more appropriate? According to Professor Gould, the answer lay in a turn towards the welfare state regimes of institutionalising solidarity - for, if people were given opportunities to flourish as a result of solidaristic institutions then there would likely be an inclination to perpetuate it.

[Dr Linsey McGoe](#)y, Associate Professor in Social Theory and Economic Sociology at the University of Essex, extended Professor Gould's discussion to present a more granular look at the scope and nature of the political-economic (dis)similarities across nations. Drawing on a close reading of Adam Smith's seminal treatise *Wealth of Nations*, McGoe

y argued against the popular 'mis-reading' or selective reading of his work as a green signal for unfettered *laissez faire* opportunism. Instead, using multiple quotes from the book, McGoe

y put forward Smith as a believer in state intervention (regulation) for operationalising the 'invisible hand' and cited the current UK government's recent policy reversal away from private procurement of public services after the spectacular failure of the private sector to deliver efficient public services as a case in point. According to McGoe

y, this suggested a heartening shift towards more state intervention that could be seen as emblematic of an emerging solidarity between policymakers and publics, the rulers and the ruled. For the audience, McGoe

y's reliance on Smith raised questions about the perspectives of other prominent political and economic theorists like Rawls' communitarianism, although few present disagreed with the need for greater state intervention to enhance distributive and social justice.

[David Townend](#), Professor of Health and Life Sciences Jurisprudence at Maastricht University, kicked off the afternoon session. His presentation focused on the relationship between data protection laws, the use of big data in research and the concept of solidarity. Emphasising the apparent tensions between patient rights, data protection laws such as the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and solidarity, Professor Townend sketched out the current patient rights paradigm. The patient is portrayed as autonomous, as a consumer of health care who is independent and in control of her own health, treatment and data. In a similar vein, the data subject is in control of her data under the GDPR. The GDPR and current laws on patient rights promote a rhetoric of individualism that might be difficult to reconcile with an understanding of solidarity that accentuates collectivism.

This can lead to barriers in the use of big data for research purposes. Professor Townsend called for an overhaul of the law to introduce a framework of patient rights based on solidarity: *Solidarity Patient Rights 3.0*. Such a framework would be based on similarity and not on a process of 'othering' that over-emphasises individualism over collectivism; it would be based on mutual necessity; and it should reframe the professional relationship between clinician, researcher, and patient to reflect a more holistic picture of what it means to enact solidaristic practices in research.

Next, we moved away from academic and conceptual nuances of solidarity to enactments of solidarity in real-life contexts. [Bernard Dichek](#), a journalist and filmmaker from Israel, gave fascinating insights into his journalistic research on artist-run initiatives around the world, which took him from urban hubs such as Berlin to remote locations such as Murmansk in Russia. Artist-run initiatives grew out of the lack of opportunities for young artists to break into the art scene, a lack that has persisted for a long time in many countries. Within the collectives, young artists come together to share creative and exhibition spaces, curate each other's work and learn about the business of running exhibits and exhibit venues. Many of these initiatives also offer courses or exchange opportunities for young artists from other countries. All of them have seen a great public interest in their work and activities, drawing new and diverse crowds to their exhibits. Artist-led initiatives can thus be seen as a prime example of individuals coming together to act in a solidaristic way to share and build upon similarities with peers. Bernard Dichek and members of the audience agreed that artist-led initiatives provided an inspiration for cultivating a disposition for solidarity in society with the latter reflecting a re-emerging theme of the day.

The afternoon session concluded with a [panel discussion on 'Why do we need Solidarity?'](#) chaired by [Dr Katharina Kieslich](#) (University of Vienna). Discussants included [Dr Christiane Druml](#) (UNESCO Chair on Bioethics, Medical University of Vienna), [Dr Jörg Flecker](#) (Professor of Sociology, University of Vienna), [Dr Ine van Hoyweghen](#) (Professor at the Centre for Sociological Research, KU Leuven), [Maria Hofmarcher - Holzhaecker](#) (Health systems expert, Health System Intelligence Vienna) and [Dr Lukas Schlögl](#) (Post Doc Researcher, University of Vienna). Dr Kieslich began the discussion with the question of 'What kind of solidarity was worth fighting for?' which elicited concern among panel members around the emerging development of exclusionary solidarities around the politics of far-right ideologies (Prof. Flecker), the politics of the multi-payer Bismark model that pitted solidarities of payers against solidarities of policymakers and publics (Hofmarcher-Holzhaecker). The concern extended to the viciousness of institutionalised 'structural' solidarity embedded in the reimbursement structures of welfare regimes (Prof. van Hoyweghen) and in the structures of consent-autonomy in clinical research (Dr Druml). For Dr Schlögl, the panel's 'discourse of concern' around the emergence of exclusivist solidarities was symptomatic of solidarity's 'idealist baggage' usurped and popularised by the left as a broad universalist communitarian utopia that had instead hollowed out the concept as an effective praxis for its institutionalisation in practice. This turned the discussion towards a consideration of the possibility of a solidarity for all of humanity. A vibrant panel-audience discussion ensued around whether the flattening of differences between peoples under a single umbrella of solidarity might not instead run the risk of reinvigorating narrow exclusivist solidarities particularly in light of historical affinities to differentiate between peoples based on biology and genetics. Eventually, what emerged was a considered conceptualisation of solidarity as an action 'to do no harm then to do good' and the methodological necessity to distinguish the conceptual from the justificatory problems of solidarity.

The German-speaking part of the day began with a welcome address by the Vice Rector of the University of Vienna, [Professor Christa Schnabl](#). This was followed by an inspirational keynote speech

from Dr Auma Obama, the Founder and Director of the Sauti Kuu Foundation that seeks to give a voice to financially and socially disadvantaged children and youth in Kenya and other countries on the African continent. Dr Obama questioned the Western portrayal of the African continent as poor and disadvantaged, highlighting the abundance of human and natural resources that the continent has to offer. She called for the participation of African countries and peoples in global political and economic processes that affect and concern them; whether on a global and national scale, or at individual and group level, solidarity should not be used as a concept that permits exclusion or demarcation. Solidarity enacted as one-way activities to help other members in a given group is not solidarity; rather than teaching people how to fish, we need to talk and ask if fish is what people want and need. The moment we start communicating in a global or national society, we learn about the similarities we share, allowing us to build a more solidaristic community.

Peter Dabrock, Professor at the Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nuremberg, and Chairperson of the German Ethics Council, rounded up the day by speaking about the role of solidarity in the digital age. He posed the question whether we will be able to uphold the European-centric understanding of solidarity in an age in which we readily provide Google and others with large amounts of our data, arguing that the very foundations of how we live together are challenged by digital transformation. Enactments of solidarity are societal obligations, obligations that sit between the order of justice and the requirement to care for others. However, such enactments are threatened, and possibly eroded, by our inability to understand fully the effects of digital transformation on our practices of solidarity. One solution explored by Professor Dabrock was that we draw attention to the inequalities in work practices that may arise in the digital era with many members of society facing the real danger of losing their jobs. Professor Dabrock intimated that the universal basic income (UBI) might be a policy avenue that could mitigate some of the negative impacts of the digital transformation in employment processes. However, as a practical policy option, the idea of UBI currently remains under-developed. Nevertheless, paying attention to societal inequalities and the need to acknowledge people's achievements are requirements in ensuring that the basis for solidarity in our society are not eroded by digital transformation processes. The presentation ended with a lively discussion about the role that conflict plays, or should play, in establishing solidaristic practices, and whether open conflict in the form of protests or demonstrations is not key to promote solidarity in the 21st Century.

The day ended with a reception attended by symposium participants, friends of CeSCos, and members of the press. It was an opportunity to begin and continue conversations around the questions raised throughout the day on a personal level, an opportunity to coalesce around shared interests and shared goals of extending the field and the concept of 'solidarity' in research and in practice, and most of all an opportunity to thank Professors Prainsack and Buyx and the CeSCoS team for making it all possible.