Transnational Solidarity, Migration and the Refugee Crisis: (in)formal organising and political environments in Greece, Germany and Denmark

Kanellopoulos K, Duru DN, Zschache U, Loukakis A, Kousis M, Trenz H-J.

Abstract
Over the last decade, the unprecedented inflow of refugees and migrants into the European Union has posed a significant challenge to Europe, with solidarity being contested on two fronts: First, the question of solidarity with refugees in terms of meeting adequate measures of protection and meeting their elementary needs; and, secondly, the question of solidarity within the European Union in terms of sharing the cost and burden of hosting these refugees among the member states. One driving factor of these contestations is that the solidarity challenge in facing the 'refugee crisis' is taken up differently in transit countries in Southern Europe and destination countries in the north. Wishing to shed light on how national contexts impact on transnational solidarity organising, we draw on fresh sets of cross-national evidence from a random sample of 277 Transnational Solidarity Organisations (TSOs) in Greece, Germany and Denmark. The aim is to illustrate the effects of political opportunities and threats during the 2007-2016 crises period, on migration-related solidarity activities organised by TSOs. We will do so through tri-national comparisons, tracing migration-related TSO patterns across time. The data used is produced in the context of the TransSOL project by a new methodological approach (Action Organisation Analysis) based on hubs-retrieved organisational websites and their subsequent content analysis.[1]

Keywords: Civil Society, migration, refugee crisis, Solidarity Organisations, Political Opportunities, Comparative Politics, European Politics, European Union, far-right votes, Greece, Germany, Denmark

1. Introduction

With the so-called refugee crisis unfolding since late 2011, the number of migrants entering the European Union (EU) has increased drastically. Such an unprecedented inflow of foreigners in need of protection poses a significant challenge to the Europe of solidarity and human rights. On the one hand, the urgency to take humanitarian action is underscored by the tragedies at Europe's external borders, especially the fatalities of migrants crossing the Mediterranean, which hit record levels in 2015 (Feischmidt et al. 2018; Pries 2019). On the other hand, the "Europe of solidarity and human rights" is increasingly compromised in the way the refugee crisis is reinterpreted as a security challenge, with a growing number of countries deciding to seal off their borders and to suspend commonly agreed standards of humanitarian aid and protection (della Porta 2018), symbolising the

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EU's failed approach towards asylum (Crawley et al. 2016; Czaika and Hobolth 2016; De Genova 2016; 2018; Feldman 2011; Hatton 2011). In this new constellation, solidarity in Europe is contested on two fronts: First, the question of solidarity with refugees in terms of meeting adequate measures of protection and satisfying elementary needs of the victims of persecution; and, secondly, the question of solidarity within the European Union in terms of sharing the cost and burden of hosting these refugees among the member states.

The contentious politics of transnational solidarity in the EU involve several actors: cross-national coalitions between civil society organisations, confrontations between political parties from the left and right, intergovernmental conflicts, intra-institutional conflicts (e.g. between the European Parliament and the European Commission) and increasingly a nationalist backlash among the populations of Europe. One driving factor of these contestations is that the solidarity challenge in facing the 'refugee crisis' is taken up differently in transit countries in the south of Europe and destination countries in the north. Political parties and governments debate, for instance, whether the first arrival countries in the south should receive support from the EU facilitating transit of refugees to northern destinations, or whether these countries in the south (and east) of Europe should also play their part in providing reception services (in accordance with the Dublin Convention). Another driving factor of contestation are the different interpretations of national governments over their European and international obligations, and the choice of more liberal or restrictive approaches towards asylum. For example, whereas under SYRIZA's radical left government and Merkel's great coalition government, the inflow of refugees was often facilitated in Greece and Germany, it was considerably constrained under the right-wing government in Denmark.

In this article, we wish to understand how the so-called 'refugee crisis' has impacted civil society's transnational solidarity organising across Greece, Germany and Denmark, national contexts reflecting heightened tensions due to increased flows of refugees, but also differential solidarity experiences. Civil society is a key agent in the unfolding 'crisis', first, as a provider of first aid in the form of local solidarity action, secondly, as a defender of human rights in the application and making of national or European law and policies, and thirdly, as a promoter of transnational solidarity in international politics. In meeting the challenge of refugee solidarity, civil society actors and organisations need to find a balance between their social and political commitment on the one hand, and on the other hand, local and transnational commitment. They are sometimes primarily engaged in local solidarity action to provide social welfare and care and meet the basic needs of their beneficiaries. In providing services, they often rely on established schemes of cooperation with local and national government. Other times, they take political sides and engage in a struggle for social justice and rights, often in opposition to government. They 'think globally and act locally'(della Porta et al. 1999), but they are often also actively engaged in transnational solidarity action, which can supplement, but sometimes also compromise their local action. New research using a more inclusive definition of transnational solidarity organisations shows that during the recent crises period, such solidarity is found more frequently at the local level (Kousis et al. 2020).

To account for this dynamic interplay of European-transnational and local solidarity contestation in Greece, Germany and Denmark, we locate Transnational Solidarity Organisations (TSOs) engaged in refugee/migrant solidarity in any of the three policy fields: migration, disability and unemployment. What makes this study unique is its focus on transnational solidarity organisations in relation to opportunities and threats arising from the macro/national-context of legal frameworks, institutional settings and existing regimes of the EU and national governance. We thus consider the local space as a creative field for civil society innovations and actions with a potential to shape larger national, European and global policies. By moving from the local to the national and transnational, we take the opposite view that is taken in existing studies on transnational and European civil society, which commonly starts with an analysis of the institutional role of European-, often Brussels-based umbrella organisations and their participation in EU governance (Kohler-Koch 2010; Liebert and Trenz 2010; Ruzza 2004). In the following, we first lay out our conceptual framework of bottom-up transnational solidarity mobilisation in relation to opportunities and threats provided by the macro-context of EU governance and 'crisis. We then explicate our innovative research design of Action-Organisation Analysis that proceeds through random sampling of transnational solidarity activism in different national contexts. In the empirical part, we collect evidence of the differentiated patterns of transnational civil society activism in our three countries, and explain the differences as well as the commonalities in the manifestations of refugee solidarity in relation to a set of standardised variables such as degrees of formalisation of civil society action, far-right opposition, type of government and inflow of migrants/refugees. We conclude with a view on emerging transnational opportunity structures and threats for solidarity mobilisation.

2. Organising Transnational Solidarity and Political Contexts

In the wake of the so-called refugee crisis, solidarity has become a contentious issue in Europe. Comparative analysis has shown varying degrees of support for helping refugees across Europe and differentiated policy responses (Koos and Seibel 2019). Country differences matter in the way populations express support towards refugees, and the degree to which governments and civil society are willing to provide assistance. At the same time, the European Union has been notoriously unable to agree on a common position regarding how to share the burden of refugee solidarity, and its focus on 'securitisation' has undermined the status of protection of refugees and their life chances in the EU (Lazaridis and Wadia 2015; Trauner 2016). Such a situation of drawbacks from human rights protection has not only increased insecurity among refugees, but has also put serious constraints on the ability of civil society support organisations to mobilise solidarity action. From the existing literature, we know that the capacities of refugee solidarity organisations to provide basic services of assistance for refugees has been compromised in many ways in recent years (Feischmidt et al. 2018; Pries 2018). All European countries have experienced cuts in welfare services, which is partly explained by the regimes of austerity imposed by the economic and financial crisis. As a consequence, the relationship between civil society and government has become more confrontational in many respects (Federico and Lahusen 2018; Zavos et al. 2019). In tandem with decreases in state support (Kousis et al.2020), there has been an increase in the demands and numbers of beneficiaries. To the extent that local civil society reacts to these real and perceived threats, we can talk of an

increased likelihood of bottom-up ‘politicisation’ of refugee solidarity, which fundamentally recalibrates the interplay between social care and political mobilisation, and between local and transnational solidarity action.

If the field of civil society activism has become much more controversial, we need a research design to account for this dynamic interplay between the local and the transnational in refugee solidarity contestation. The existing literature on refugee solidarity is often case-specific, focusing on selected evidence from single countries (e.g. (Kaitatzi-Whitlock and Kenterelidou 2017; Piłat and Potkańska 2017; Zanfrini et al. 2008). The contentious politics of solidarity is, however, only partly understood when looking solely at one region, e.g. countries of first arrival or countries of final destination, but needs to be discussed from a transnational-European perspective.

To approach our tri-national comparison, we first highlight the organisational character of citizens solidarity initiatives for migrants and refugees. The (in) formality of refugee/migration TSOs is an important feature reflecting national-historical contexts with more informal ties/less resources typically found in the south of Europe and more formalised/more resourced patterns of civil society organisation in the north (Eder and Kousis 2001). While in Greece, solidarity is often mobilised ad-hoc and in an informal way by collectivities at the local and even neighbourhood levels to support refugees who arrive, mainly with practical help (social support, basic needs, food), Denmark and Germany’s efforts to provide assistance for refugees are not only backed by more powerful resources, but are also better coordinated both from below and above. Yet, research also shows that even though the formal volunteering sector in Greece is not as developed as those in Denmark and Germany, it has increased significantly during the last two decades (Kanellopoulos et al. 2020; Afouxenidis and Gardiki 2014; Sotiropoulos and Bourikos 2014).

Secondly, we underlie a political opportunity approach (Tilly and Tarrow 2007; Goldstone and Tilly 2001), which considers favourable and unfavourable conditions for transnational solidarity action as mobilised mostly from below by local civil society. By taking a bottom-up perspective, we explain the emergence of transnational solidarity action from local and national civil society within the broader framework of the EU regime of asylum, and more specifically within the context of ‘crisis’ (Trenz et al. 2015) that set the conditions for differentiated responses, but also provide specific opportunities and threats for local solidarity action. By comparing Greece, Germany and Denmark, we are able to identify such differentiated responses in relation to the particular features of opportunities and threats in time and place, but also the interlinkages of these conditional factors in the EU framework of asylum.

Civil society is considered a key player in the mobilisation of solidarity, locally, nationally and transnationally. We refer to the classical liberal definition of civil society as comprising those activities that link citizens to the common good and help to develop virtues of democracy (de Tocqueville 1840). In advanced capitalist democracies, there is an institutionalised and constitutionally guaranteed space for civil society as the ‘third sector’, comprising those non-profit associations that defend the notion of a common good, and

justice beyond the partiality of interests (Cohen and Arato 1992; Habermas 1996). Civil society may be regarded as global, in the basic sense of maintaining a universal value orientation, which includes developing a shared understanding of the challenges of globalisation from below and engaging in solidarity action beyond national borders (Bartelson 2006; Keane 2003; Walzer 1998). Yet, contemporary civil society may also be regarded as local, in terms of how it enacts this agenda of global justice, and establishes rules of conduct and practices of solidarity in local and national government (Herkenrath 2007). Important functions of civil society in national and international politics comprise their contributions to raising problem awareness and discourse of global justice: their engagement in concrete solidarity action such as providing services for people in need; their building of networks with other solidarity actors, nationally and transnationally; their impact on legislation and government (Arato 2011; Liebert and Trenz 2010).

Beyond this background, we ask two questions: 1) how is the refugee crisis situation experienced as a threat and translated by grassroots support groups into opportunities for solidarity action that involves wider groups of civil society; and 2) how are threats and opportunities structured differently in destination and transit countries, and what role do civil society organisations play in solidarity action respectively? The first question systematically investigates the formation of issue coalitions in a situation of crisis: How and under what conditions does a broader civil society coalition emerge focusing on the issue of humanitarian protection and supporting each other in action and mobilisation (Beamish and Luebbers 2009; McCammon and Moon 2015)? Following our political opportunity approach, we understand this issue-coalition as being dependent on several factors, such as the magnitude of the problem, the opponent - e.g. the strength of right-wing and xenophobic counter-mobilisation, the supportive and/or constraining role of government, or the impact of international networking, NGOs and transnational mobilisation. The second question controls for cross-country variation in the mobilisation of refugee support action, which allows us to investigate the conditions and manifestations of transnational solidarity.

3. Method and Data: Action Organisation Analysis & TSOs

Our research design is unique in the way it approaches migrant and refugee solidarity organisations not through a purposive sample of a few key players who dominate the field, but through random sampling of the broader field of alternative civil society organisations. Relying on this new Action Organisation Analysis (AOA) approach, we aim to conduct a comprehensive and systematic study of the field of civil society activism (Giugni and Grasso 2018; Kousis et al. 2018a). The unit of analysis is the innovative transnational solidarity initiative/organisation (TSO), a specific formal or informal group of initiators/organisers who act in the public sphere through solidarity events with visible beneficiaries and claims on their economic and social wellbeing – including basic needs, health, and work – as depicted through the TSO website/online sources (project report TransSOL 2016; Kousis et al. 2018b). Innovative solidarity reflects responses to actual everyday social challenges, mostly via direct action, in times of crises and embracing online means to promote their cause[2]. According to our criteria of selection, organisations

[2] https://transsol.eu/project/work-packages/

are 'transnational' in terms of at least one of the following categories: (a) organisers with at least one organiser from another country, or supranational agency, (b) actions synchronised or coordinated in at least one other country, (c) beneficiaries with at least one beneficiary group from another country, (d) participants/supporters with at least one participating or supporting group from another country, (e) partners/collaborating groups with at least one from another country, (f) sponsors, with at least one from another country or a supranational agency (e.g. European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European, Social Fund (ESF)), (g) frames with cross-national reference/s, (h) volunteers with at least one volunteer group from another country and (i) spatial, at least across two countries (at the local, regional or national level/s). (project report 2016[3]; Kousis et al. 2020). Excluded from the random sample are organisations which were: (1) irrelevant to our three fields and devoted to other areas of work (e.g. elderly care, child care), (2) exclusively organised (or led) by the state, or the EU, or private corporations, (3) non-solidarity oriented, and (4) with a non-transnational, purely local/national orientation, i.e. without any of the nine transnational features (a)–(i) mentioned above. The randomly selected TSOs are solidarity-oriented in terms of at least one of the following categories: (a) mutual-help, mobilising or collaborating for common interests (bottom-up, solidarity exchange within group), (b) support or assistance between groups, (c) help or offer of support to others, and (d) distribution of goods and services to others (top-down solidarity from above) (project report 2016; Kousis et al. 2018a).

The approximate population of TSOs in all three countries was produced through hubs-retrieved organisational websites based on Google searches by each national team. The number of retrieved TSO websites for Denmark, Germany and Greece are 920, 8,491 and 5,346 respectively (Marketakis et al, UoC-Forth deliverable, 2016). This includes TSOs which engage in solidarity action in the three selected sectors of the project (migration/refugees, unemployment and disabilities). We then drew a random sample of 300 TSOs from this population per country (100 for each of the three fields) and the subsequent coding phase (Kousis et al. 2018a). For the purposes of this article, from the total of 900 TSOs for the three countries, we drew a second sub-sample of **277** migration/refugees related TSOs (TransSOL Project WPX Report, 2016). At the aggregate level, the majority of these TSOs conduct local level activities (GER 94.8%, GR 80.9%, DK 70.7%). The vast majority of TSOs have organisational structures within the national boarders (GER 91%, GR 83.1%, DK 90.2%), while a little over half (51%) belong to umbrella organisations at the national or subnational level.

Our comparative analysis proceeds, first, with a discussion of the creation of migration/refugees related TSOs (mTSOs) over time and their degree of formalisation in each country. We will use this as an indicator of opportunities, i.e. different forms and degrees of civil society solidarity engagement with refugees in times of crisis and economic recession. To establish how such opportunities are related to perceived threats, we explain, secondly, the creation of TSOs over time in relation to a number of control variables:
a) The evolution of the far-right vote in the elections for the European Parliament in the three countries since 1989;

[3] https://transsol.eu/files/2016/12/Integrated-Report-on-Reflective-Forms-of-Transnational-Solidarity.pdf

b) The political orientation of the governmental party or coalition. While centre-left governments can be considered as a window of opportunity for the mobilisation of progressive social movements and will, expectedly, lead to an increase in TSO creation, we discuss centre-right governments as threats that are likely to lead to a decrease in the ratio of TSO creation;
c) The actual numbers of asylum seekers and registered immigrants per year in each of the three countries.

4. Analysis

4.1. Between formalisation and grassroots activism: organising for transnational solidarity towards refugees/migrants across countries and time

Through our AOA, we can partly replicate existing knowledge of a north-south divide (Eder and Kousis 2001) in degrees of formalisation of TSO, which explains potential and limitations of solidarity action towards refugees in different country contexts. Yet our comparative, tri-national perspective also offers new insights into timing that explain rapid shifts and differentiated responses in the mobilisation of refugee solidarity and establish conditions for the emergence of informal, bottom-up mobilisation of transnational solidarity.

Figure 1 shows differences in degrees of formalisation, which is still mirroring the traditional North-South divide between a more informally/less resourced organised civil society sector in Greece and more formalised/more resourced organisational patterns of the civil society sector in Denmark and Germany. Formal, often membership-based organisations with stable staff and long-term-funding are at the base of transnational solidarity action in Germany and Denmark, whereas informal, often ad-hoc and bottom-up initiatives carry the main burden of transnational solidarity action in Greece. In both Denmark and Germany, TSOs are formalised within existing welfare state arrangements, which foresee basic services such as accommodation and food supply in reception centres, and basic health care and benefits for incoming refugees. TSOs typically collaborate with local authorities to provide welfare services. In Greece, state-civil society relationship are much more confrontational, and informal citizens/grassroots solidarity initiatives often mix transnational solidarity action with political activism to raise awareness of the rise of Golden Dawn and the fascist threat (Kanellopoulos et al. 2020). It should however be noted that the explanatory force of in/formality of TSOs is limited, since degrees of formalisation do not necessarily explain different degrees of engagement of the population in volunteering activities. In both Germany and Denmark, an ethos of volunteering exists with a rich landscape of non-profit associations and charities engaging local citizens in activities such as giving legal advice to asylum applicants, providing translation services, language tutorials, support of labour market integration, or assisting with measures for social integration. In contrast to Greece where volunteering primarily takes place as a *substitute* to state aid and remains informal and locally dispersed, volunteering in Denmark and Germany is rather *supplementary* to state action and as such is formalised, professionalised and also rewarded with state incentives such as tax deductions on donations for donors and

membership fees. Formalisation thus creates opportunities, especially for smaller grassroots organisations to gain legal status in order to continue and extent their solidarity work.

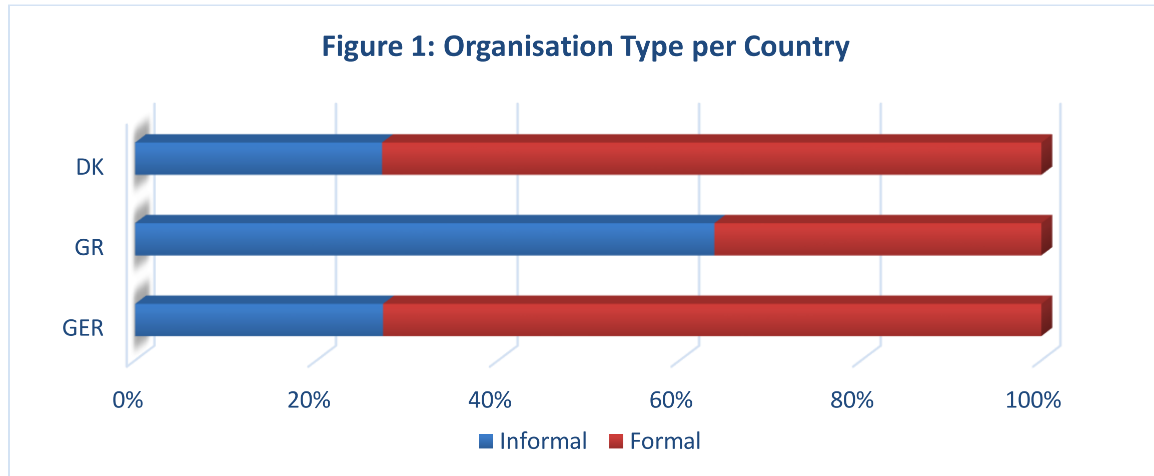


Figure 1: Organisation Type per Country

In order to better understand threats and opportunities to transnational solidarity action in the current context of crisis, we need to analyse the emergence of TSOs over time. Figure 2 shows that the traditional North-South divide in degrees of formalisation of TSOs has indeed been shattered by the shock of the post 2010 crises, leading to an exponential growth in informal solidarity action in Greece, but, unexpectedly, to even higher degrees in Germany. The spread of informal TSOs in Germany during the 2010s outside the structures of formalised aid provided by the welfare state points to an important shift in opportunity structure. A new grassroots mobilisation of refugee solidarity in Germany can be understood as a response to the practical needs of many refugees who arrived in larger numbers than established welfare structures could handle. The precariousness of refugees together with the increasing restrictiveness of formal aid provided by the welfare state explain the shift from formal to informal TSOs in Germany. In Denmark, however, traditional patterns of formalised welfare remained largely intact; the country stands out for its almost complete absence of informal grassroots mobilisation during the years of crisis.

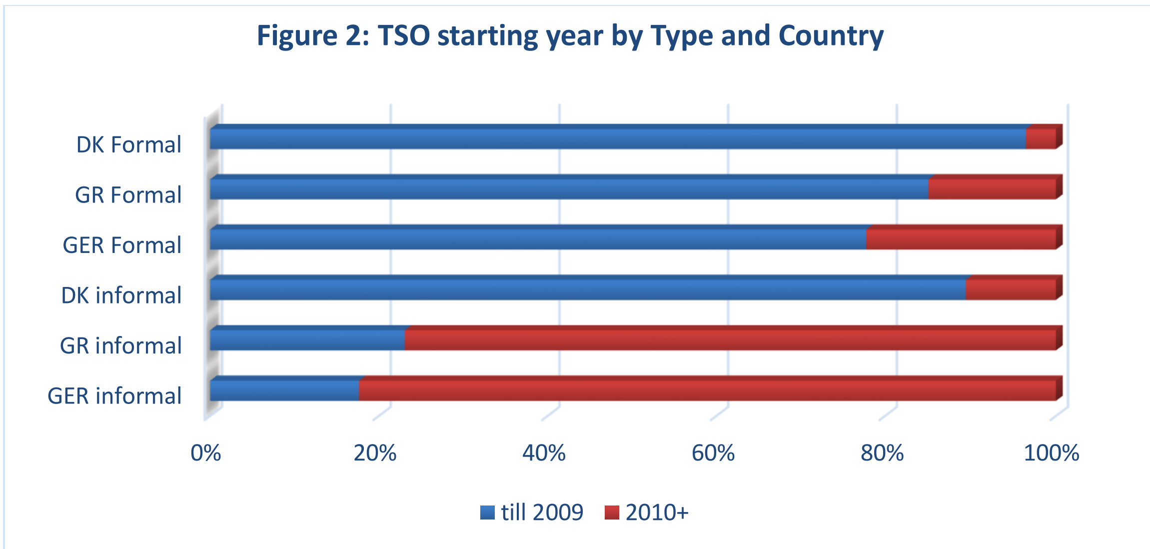
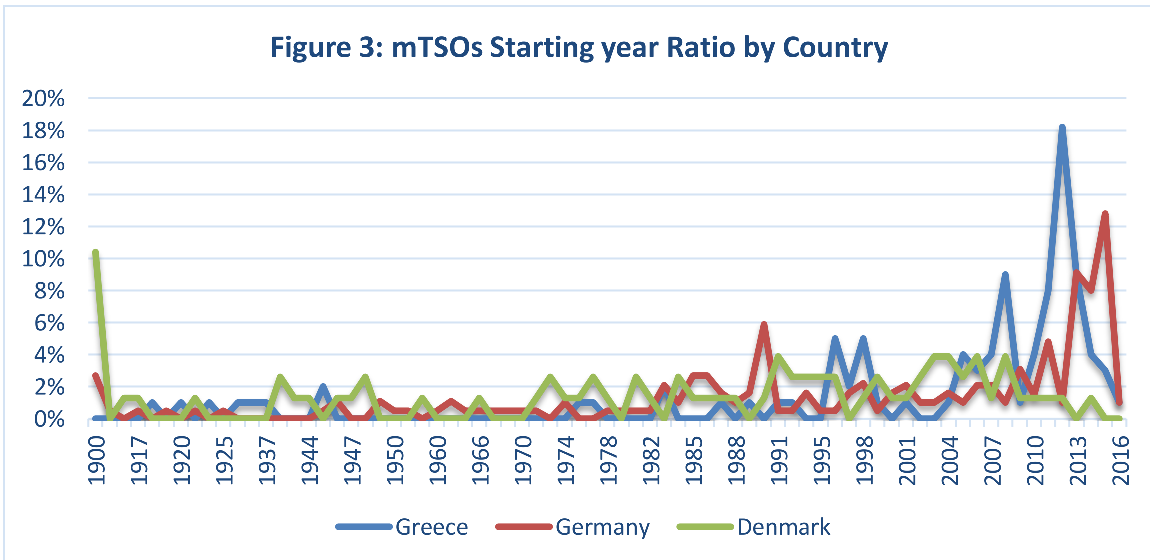
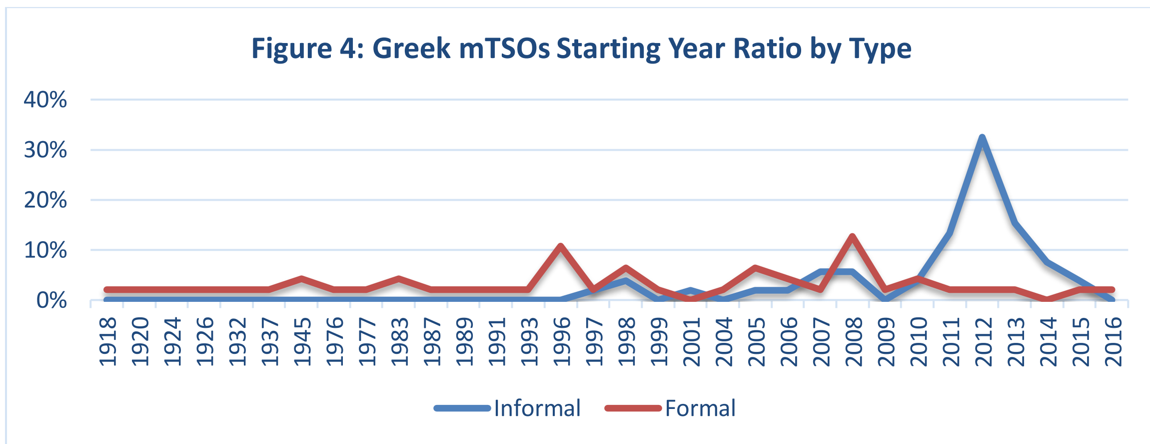


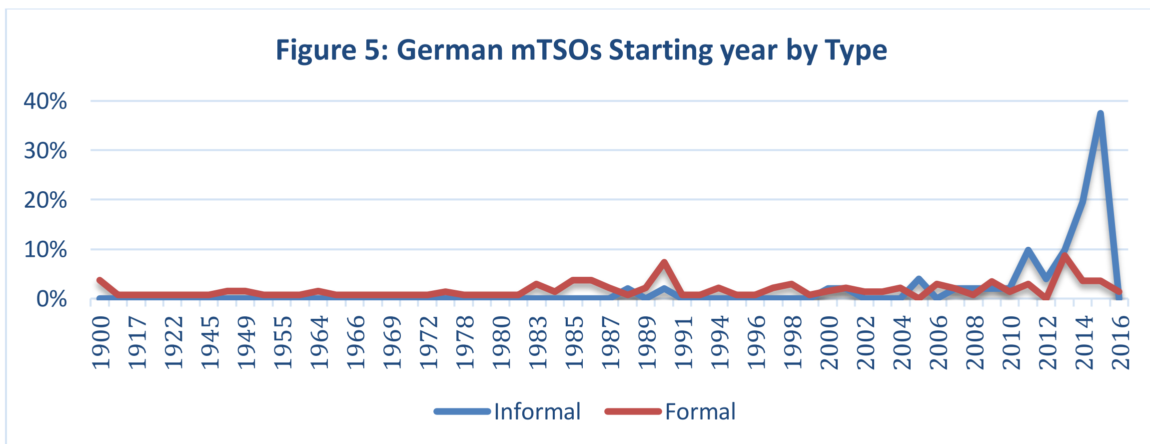
Figure 3 allows for a more nuanced picture of the different timing of the emergence of refugee/migrant TSOs. The stability of Denmark's civil society over time, with more than 10% of TSOs being active for a 100+ years, is evident. The increase in the number of migration and asylum applicants since the early seventies led to a slight increase in TSO activism, and by 2010, most TSOs active today had been established. In Germany and Greece, however, refugee and migration TSOs show an exponential growth after 1989 in Germany, and after 1993 in Greece in response to the inflow of migrants and refugees from former Communist countries, and especially after 2013 in response to the so-called 'refugee crisis'

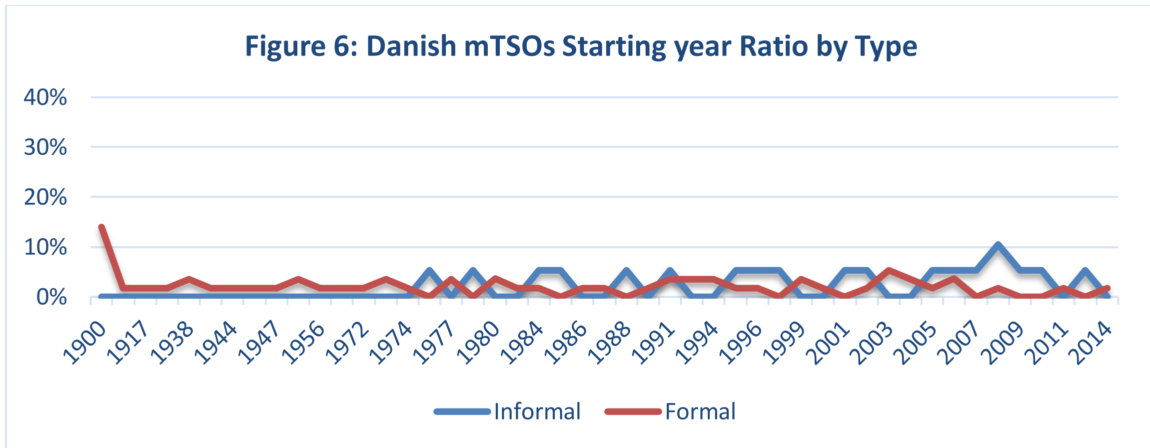


Figures 4, 5 and 6 once again confirm the shift from formal to informal TSOs in Germany and Greece, which is clearly related to the massive inflow of refugees since 2013 in both countries. In Greece, informal TSOs were also dominant before 2008, while in Germany,

this is a new pattern with a sharp increase in new informal TSOs documented between 2013 and 2015. During the recent refugee crisis, German TSOs also increasingly played a substitutive function, with solidarity mobilised spontaneously and volunteers providing basic help in the reception centres and thus relieving state and welfare organisations of their duties. In Denmark, however, informal TSOs only emerged in the early seventies in the wake of new social movements and since then, we observe an interplay between formal and informal types of organisation, which supplement each other in the provision of services for migrants and refugees. Volunteering by Danish citizens in the form of providing basic help for incoming refugees still remains substantial, but is embedded within the formal structures of state aid and welfare.







4.2 Comparing political contexts, migration flows, far right votes and TSO creation

In the previous section, we could identify differentiated patterns of responses in the way transnational solidarity became mobilised in the context of the so-called refugee crisis. In the following, we broaden this picture by looking at a number of explanatory variables to account for this variation in the mobilisation of transnational refugee solidarity. We assume that TSOs in a specific country context are dependent on the following factors: the development of far-right votes, political orientation of government and the number of asylum applications and immigrants across time.

In the Greek case, attitudes towards migration throughout most of the 20th century were shaped by the experiences of many Greeks who emigratedto Western Europe and the US. Greece only ceased to be a country that "exported" immigrants in the 1970s after the fall of the dictatorship and the transition to democracy. Increasing numbers of migrants were attracted after the fall of the "Iron Curtain", the opening of the border of its impoverished northern neighbours, Albania and Bulgaria, and the Yugoslavian wars in the 1990s. Another increase in the number of incoming migrants occurred during the economic boom after Greece joined the Eurozone in the 2000s. As can be seen in Table 1, numbers of asylum applicants and immigrants remained relatively stable over the years, with high numbers in the early nineties and again in 2015 and 2016. Xenophobia and racism increased with the rise in the number of immigrants but never became a salient topic in Greek politics as newly arriving immigrants from neighbouring countries were perceived as temporary, and the Greek 'ethos of hospitality and solidarity' still prevailed (Swarts and Karakatsanis 2013; Kiprianos et al. 2003). The Greek state also saw immigrants as valuable contributors to the growth of the national economy, but did not plan and implement a coherent integration policy (Triandafyllidou 2009; Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini 2011).

This attitude of 'laissez-faire' was shattered in 2007 when LAOS (a far-right party with a clear anti-immigration agenda) entered Parliament. After the 2009 elections, the centre-left PASOK government under George Papandreou subsequently passed legislation giving citizen status to the children of immigrants born and raised in Greece. PASOK's term in

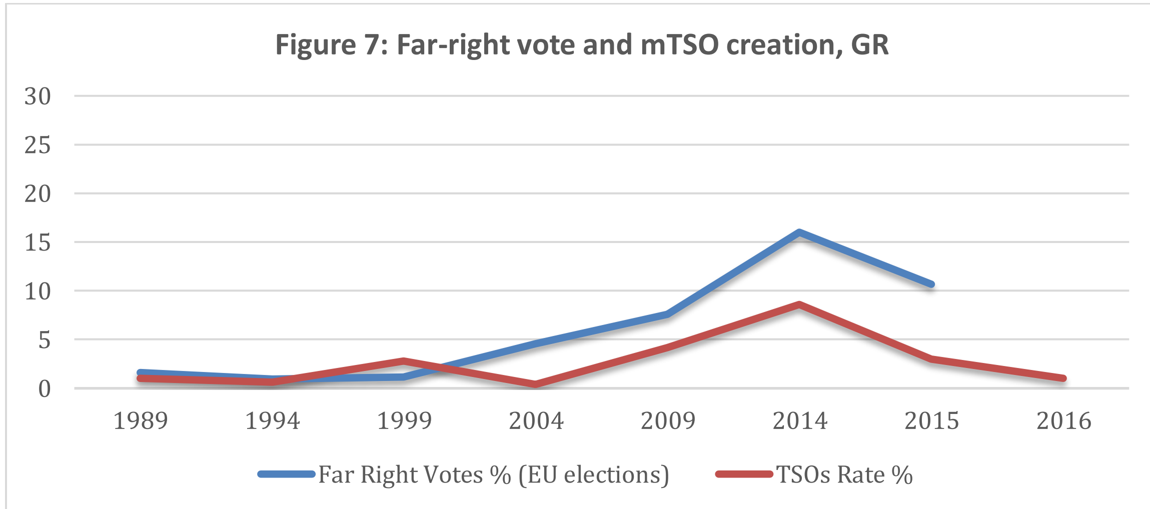
office in 2009 coincided, however, with the sovereign debt crisis and the later Troika bailout packages and forced austerity measures. After a series of mass protests, Papandreou's government resigned in 2011 to be replaced by a caretaker government comprised of PASOK, centre-right Neo Demokratia (ND) and the far-right LAOS (Kanellopoulos and Kousis 2018). In 2012 elections, leftist party SYRIZA, with an openly pro-immigrant agenda, became the main oppositional party, but the political agenda on immigration issues had moved to the right. The openly xenophobic neo-nazi political party, Golden Dawn, entered parliament for the first time and ND, under the leadership of Antonis Samaras, formed a coalition government with the remnants of PASOK and DIMAR (a right-wing split off from SYRIZA). Samaras' government followed a "law and order" agenda and abolished Papandreou's pro-immigration legislation. In 2015, SYRIZA formed a government with ANEL (a far-right anti-Troika split of ND) with the promise to end austerity policies. Immigration issues were not prioritised, neither did the new government insist on harsh policies of border control, but instead facilitated the transit of incoming civil war refugees from Syria to central and western European countries.

As we can see in Figure 7, there is a clear correlation between the number of TSOs created after 2004 and the increase in far-right votes, even though numbers of incoming asylum applicants and migrants were not on the rise during those years (Table 1). Both the rates of TSO creation and far-right votes peaked in 2012-2014, thus before the unfolding of the so-called 'refugee crisis'. TSO creation may thus be seen as a response to the rise of Golden Dawn, which was met by the bottom-up mobilisation of numerous newly emerging informal antiracist and antifascist groups (Kostopoulos and Kanellopoulos 2018). There is instead no correlation between the type of government and the ratio of TSO creation (see Table 1). The political orientation of the government does not seem to offer any significant favourable opportunity for the mobilisation of solidarity groups. Despite the exponential rise in numbers of incoming refugees in 2015-2016, the field of TSOs did not increase in size, but existing TSOs which were formed in previous years in response to right-wing extremism redefined their agenda and became engaged in refugee solidarity.

Table 1: Migration flows in Greece 1989-2016

Period and Type of Government	Average number of asylum seekers per year	Average number of immigrants per year	Average number of new mTSOs per year
1989-1992 Centre Right	3,853	131,156	1.00
1993-2003 Centre Left	3,288	94,696	1.45
2004-2008 Centre Right	14,157	66,145	4.20
2009-2011 Centre Left	11,837	59,721	4.33

2012-2014 Coalition	9,077	58,386	10.33
2015-2016 Coalition	32,158	90,657	2.50



In the German case, the post-war Federal Republic of Germany opted for an open and liberal approach towards asylum. In the Cold War period, the country had taken in large numbers of refugees, both ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe but also various groups of people escaping from war and persecution in other parts of the world. In 1993, the liberal constitutional asylum guarantee was changed leading to a substantial drop in the number of asylum seekers, which only recently rose again to levels similar to and even higher than those of the early nineties (Bosswick 2000;) see Table 1). In 2015 alone, it is estimated that the country welcomed about 1,000,000 migrants of whom 476,000 applied for asylum. This corresponds to a share of 35% of the total number of asylum applications in the European Union. This unprecedented influx of refugees was made possible by the government's August 24, 2015 decision to suspend the Dublin procedures and open the gates for refugees who travelled the Balkan route via Greece and Hungary (Ostrand 2015).
Unlike Greece, the German system of reception is highly formalised, providing basic welfare services and accommodation to all registered asylum seekers. Asylum procedures are coordinated by the Federal Agency for Migration and Refugees, but responsibilities for accommodating asylum seekers lie with the municipalities. The Federal Agency distributes asylum seekers equally throughout the country. After being allocated to one of the local reception centres, their freedom of movement is restricted and they are not allowed to take any jobs during their first three months of stay in Germany. Only accepted refugees have full access to social welfare, education and housing, the right (and actually the duty) to learn the host-country's language and hence the opportunity to proper labour market integration.
This formalised system of reception is set up to accommodate high numbers of people. It is decentralised with responsibilities shared between the regional governments and the municipalities. Numerous forms of assistance are provided by formally organised welfare organisations, among them the Churches, local associations and more political

organisations defending a liberal interpretation of the right to asylum (such as *Pro Asyl*). With increasing restrictions of state welfare services, the support provided by these associations has become more substantial, especially with regard to social protection, education or fighting against detention and/or deportation.

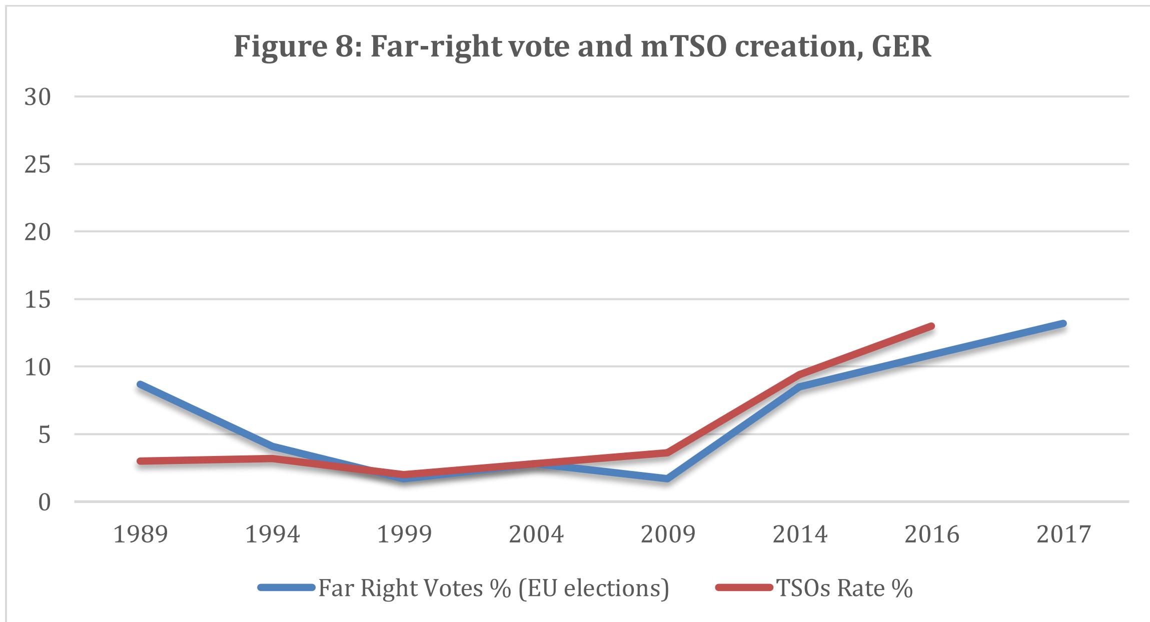
As in Greece, the political orientation of the government does not seem to affect the ratio of TSO creation over time (see Table 2). Until 2013, the ratio of TSO creation was the same under centre-left and centre-right governmental coalitions. It was only after 2013, at the wake of the refugee crisis, that we observe an impressive increase in TSO activism. In the past, German governments of both centre-left and centre-right have been perceived as threats to transnational solidarity with their insistence on harsher border controls and asylum legislation. In the EU context, however, German governments also offered opportunities for TSOs, and repeatedly stepped forward as a strong defender of European solidarity, partly out of self-interest when calling for more equal burden sharing among the member states. During the so-called refugee crisis, Merkel famously initiated the 'welcoming culture' and accommodated unprecedentedly high numbers of refugees, yet after the first initial months, shifted emphasis in November 2015 in an attempt to close the Balkan routes. For the same reason, the German government was a prominent defender of the EU-Turkish deal that sought to limit and control new arrivals on EU territory. At the same time, solidarity was outsourced in the form of financial aid for assistance in countries of first arrival. This new strategy was backed by the operations of German humanitarian associations who received funding from both the government and the EU for providing services in Greece and Turkey.

The decision of the Merkel government to open the borders for refugees has been strongly contested domestically. The initial 'welcoming culture' during the late summer and early autumn of 2015 mobilised hundreds of thousands of Germans in solidarity with the refugees, many of them providing first assistance to newly arriving migrants. This is clearly visible in our data with the average number of TSOs rising exponentially in the years of 2013-2016 (Table 2). Well before the end of the year, however, resistance against the open border policy began to grow within the governmental coalition, and over the New Year public opinion changed rapidly after the alleged sexual assaults on German women by immigrant men in Cologne. Since then, support for extreme right-wing anti-immigration groups such as Pegida (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident) and Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) has gained momentum. As shown in Figure 8, the increase in the number of far-right votes as an indicator of rising xenophobia, is directly related, as it was in Greece, with TSO creation. Many TSOs thus emerged before the massive inflow of refugees took place in 2015 (see Table 2). Transnational solidarity mobilisation was therefore not simply triggered by the humanitarian emergency situation of late summer, 2015, but by long-term political concerns with racism and xenophobia.

Table 2: Migration flows in Germany 1989-2016

Period and Type of Government	Average number of asylum seekers per year	Average number of immigrants per year	Average number of new mTSOs per year

1989-1997 CentreRight	191,120	1,151,720	3.00
1998-2004 Centre Left	73,938	826,935	2.71
2005-2008 Coalition	23,989	683,030	3.00
2009-2012 Centre Right	53,026	457,967	5.00
2013-2016 Coalition	387,754	1,037,827	14.50



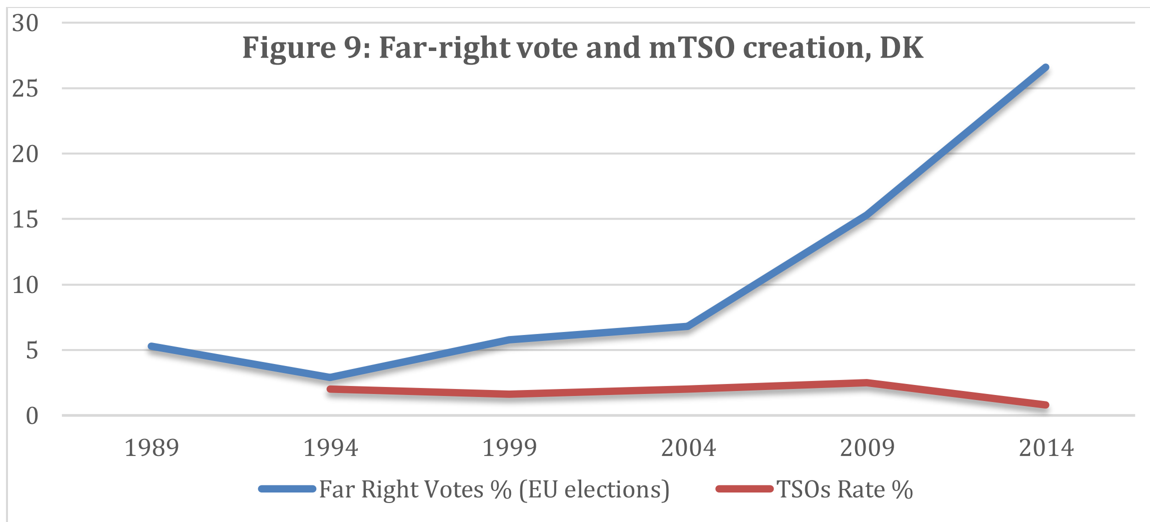
In the Danish case, the strong welfare state provides, on the one hand, a supportive infrastructure for the reception of immigrants and asylum-seekers and their integration in Danish society. On the other hand, immigration is often seen as a challenge to the universalistic, tax-financed welfare state (Duru and Trenz 2020; Nannestad 2004). We thus observe a parallel development in Denmark of a proliferation of TSOs in support of refugee and immigrant solidarity and simultaneously, increasing state restrictions to control the intake of new migrants and their access to welfare services that is paired with a general attitude of 'welfare chauvinism' among the population (Trenz and Grasso 2018). Transnational solidarity activism towards refugees and migrants is backed by the Danish ethos of solidarity and a tradition of civil society voluntarism that involves large parts of the population. Such bottom-up solidarity mobilisation is strongly anchored in local communities. At the same time, it is often highly formalised, state-funded and organised in a way to support existing state services, not to substitute for them. New restrictive measures that limit the access of immigrants to welfare state services were implemented by both centre-left and right-wing governments in the past, but as can be seen in Table 3, did not lead to an increase in TSO activism over time.

Especially during the so-called refugee crisis, the Danish government's approach was among the most restrictive in Europe and was fundamentally opposed to the open-door policies followed by neighbouring Germany and Sweden. At the peak of the 'crisis' in

September and October 2015, Danish authorities facilitated transit to Sweden, but declined accommodation and registration of refugees in Denmark. Calls for a stronger engagement in European solidarity and a commitment to burden-sharing were rejected at the time by the Danish government, but were taken up by TSOs who mobilised street protests in opposition to the restrictive governmental policies. The field of TSO activism during the ‘crisis’ thus changed substantially, from a collaborative to a more confrontational style in opposition to state authorities and from providing services that were supplementary to state aid to accommodating the basic needs of refugees, substituting for the lack of state infrastructures (Duru and Trenz 2020).
Another peculiarity of the Danish case is that unlike Greece and Germany, the increase in far-right votes in Denmark did not result in an increase in TSO creation (Figure 9). Due to high degrees of formalisation, Danish TSOs tend to be long established and do not react quickly to political change. Despite the substantial increase in the numbers of far-right votes after 2004, the number of TSOs remained or even declined. This, from our comparative perspective’s surprising finding, is partially explained by the traditionally non-political agenda of TSOs in Denmark: many bottom-up initiatives by citizens were set up to provide practical help, not to mobilise in the fight against racism and xenophobia. In a similar vein, the number of incoming migrants and refugees did not impact on the rate of TSO activism over time (see Table 3). Here as well, the explanation of a routine collaboration between state authorities and long-established TSOs applies. When Europe was confronted with the sudden influx of civil war refugees, the basic infrastructure for TSOs in Denmark was already in place and only had to be activated. Extrapolating these findings, we can nevertheless conclude that the Danish system of TSOs is not immune to change. The bipolar tendency in Denmark of a strongly rooted ethos of universal welfare that is increasingly contradicted by restrictive state policies towards refugees and migrants has become a driver of politicisation of the TSO sector.

Table 3: Migration flows in Denmark 1989-2016

Period and Type of Government	Average number of asylum seekers per year	Average number of immigrants per year	Average number of new mTSOs per year
1990-1994 Centre Left	9,533	42,765	1.50
1994-2000 Centre Left Coalition	6,475	52,460	1.57
2001-2010 Centre Right Coalition	4,368	54,363	2.10
2011-2014 Centre Left Coalition	7,960	58,986	1.00
2014-2016 Centre Right Coalition	13,558	76,438	0.00



5. Conclusions

This paper offers new comparative insights into how migration and refugee crisis-related solidarity organisations proliferate in three different national contexts. More specifically, our innovative approach of Action Organisation Analysis produces systematic and comparative data on, a) how the refugee crisis was experienced as a threat and translated by solidarity groups into opportunities for action and, b) how threats and opportunities are structured differently in destination and transit countries. Unlike previous works on transnational solidarity, which focus on actions beyond national borders, our findings for the three countries unravel migration related transnational solidarity taking place at the subnational level with the majority of TSOs retrieved from organisational websites engaging in local level activities.

Two sets of findings are illustrated. First, the traditional North-South divide in degrees of formalisation of TSOs does not apply since the post 2010 crises. A drastic rise in informal solidarity action is documented both in Greece and at even higher rates in Germany, reflecting an important shift in the opportunity structure and a pragmatic response to the practical needs of many refugees during the recent refugee crisis. By contrast, Denmark's traditional patterns of formalised welfare remained unchanged, reflecting the stability of civil society over time.

Despite this weakening of the traditional patterns of formalisation, the orientation of informal civil society grassroots towards the state remains decisive for the organisation of transnational solidarity towards refugees. In contrast to Greece, where volunteering primarily takes place as a substitute to state aid and remains locally dispersed, volunteering in Denmark and Germany is rather supplementary to state action and, as such, professionalised and also rewarded with state aid such as tax deductions on donations and membership fees. Such opportunities thus create incentives for formalisation, especially for smaller grassroots organisations to gain legal status in order to continue and extent their solidarity work.

The second set of findings concerns the effect of national political contexts on transnational solidarity organising. Interestingly, our data illustrate that in both Greece and Germany, though not in Denmark, there is a clear correlation between the number of TSOs created and the increase in far-right votes. In Greece, both rates of TSO creation and far-right votes peaked in 2012-2014, before the 'refugee crisis', as a political response to the rise of the neo-Nazi party, Golden Dawn, which was met by bottom-up mobilisation of numerous newly emerging informal antiracist and antifascist groups. The rise of TSOs should therefore not simply be read as the spontaneous and short-term mobilisation of humanitarian aid in the context of crisis, but also as an indicator for the changing conditions of domestic political contestations about solidarity. In both Germany and Greece, many TSOs emerged before the massive inflow of refugees in 2015, as a result of long-term political concerns about racism and xenophobia. However, in the Danish case, the substantial increase in the far-right votes after 2004 was not followed by a rise in TSOs; their numbers remained the same, or even declined. The highly formalised Danish TSOs tend to be long established, and do not respond quickly to political change.

Overall, we can thus conclude that the proliferation of TSOs in the context of 'crisis' was rather driven by threat and not opportunity. TSOs responded to various threats such as economic hardship, the rise of right-wing extremism and xenophobia and substantial inflows of migrants and refugees. In the absence of perceptions of threat, such as in the case of Denmark, no noticeable changes of the field of TSOs took place. Civil society responses to threat are, at the same time, turned into opportunities for the mobilisation of voluntary action, which spread in Greece and Germany, but not in Denmark. These opportunities for transnational solidarity remain, however, confined to the sector of informal and local civil society and do not translate into a more formalised and unified political response to the macro-structural context of constraining and/or enabling legal provisions, institutions and regimes of EU and national governance.

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