

**The Role of Solidarity Initiatives During Times of  
Economic Crisis and Austerity: Alternative Forms of  
Resilience and Resistance in Greece and Italy**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates the role of solidarity initiatives in Greece and Italy from 2008 onwards during the period of economic crisis and austerity. Two in-depth case studies are conducted which explore the causes and responses to crisis, first from the government and European Union institutions, then from social movements and solidarity initiatives. This is followed by a comparative analysis. The principal findings that emerge from this comparison are that Italy's solidarity initiatives prioritise post-material values in both practice and outcomes, whereas Greece's solidarity initiatives utilise post-material values in their practices but ultimately prioritise the delivery of material outcomes. This thesis concludes with an investigation into the causes of these differences, identifying four factors that are considered to be primary: the severity of the economic crisis, the extent of welfare retrenchment, the presence of innovative social movements, and the role of social cooperatives in welfare service delivery.

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## Introduction

For Southern Europe in particular, the economic crisis of 2008 resulted in tumultuous political, economic, and social conditions. Stagnant economic growth and high sovereign debts caused domestic governments to enact sweeping austerity measures, retrench their welfare systems, and institute changes to labour market laws that have weakened workers protections (de la Porte and Heins 2016). Declining wages and living standards, as well as the perceived democratic unaccountability of European Union (EU) institutions charged with managing the crisis, have prompted widespread social movements to mobilise against its effects and the responses of government. The most prominent example of these movements in Southern Europe are the Indignados, which were responsible for mass demonstrations, deliberative assemblies, and the occupation of major public spaces in both Spain and Greece throughout 2011 and 2012 (Ornellas et al. 2017; Arampatzi 2018, 53–54). In the years following these events, radical anti-austerity parties utilised the strength and sentiment of such movements to increase electoral volatility and overturn longstanding party dominances, most notable in the rise of SYRIZA in Greece, Podemos in Spain, and the Five Star Movement in Italy (Bosco and Verney 2016; Tronconi 2018).

In tandem with the electoral shifts that occurred in the wake of these movements, a wave of grassroots civil society organisations were established across Europe with the purpose of resisting the politics of austerity and exploring innovative methods of coping with the effects of welfare retrenchment, increased precarity, and the economic crisis more generally (LIVEWHAT 2016). These initiatives, which belong to the “solidarity economy” (Rakopoulos 2014), exist outside of the mainstream economy and political landscape, relying not on EU and state run programs of service provision and assistance but instead upon voluntary action, self-organisation, and mutual-aid. They are motivated not by a primary logic of philanthropy, but

rather by a collective sense of solidarity and a shared need to go beyond dominant socioeconomic practices in order to meet the demands of living in difficult economic times (Zamponi and Bosi 2018b, 797).

Solidarity economies cover a wide range of functions; for example, the provision of medical care and pharmaceuticals, community schooling and child care, collective kitchens and producer-to-consumer food distribution, time banks, and alternative currencies (Vathakou 2015, 167). According to Conill et al. (2012, 211–12), the economic crisis encouraged the flourishing of alternative social and economic practices by making impossible the prospect of living meaningfully under the existing institutions and economic frameworks that were failing. The inability of successive domestic governments, the European Union, and the finance and banking sectors to prevent or manage the crisis made the prospect of reorganising economic activity around autonomous practices not only more necessary, but also relatively more realistic of success. Such structures also make the possibility of collective political action more realisable by broadening personal networks, demonstrating alternative methods of economic behaviour, providing spaces for collective deliberation, and educating people on political and economic issues.

Moulaert and Ailenei (2005, 2041) document a history of social and solidarity economic practises throughout the world in four prominent generations dating back to the nineteenth century. According to their analysis, each generation emerged in response to disruptive societal shifts (such as the transition to competitive regulation in the 1840-50s or the adoption of mass-production techniques in the 1970s) or economic crises (such as the Panic of 1873 and the Great Depression of 1929). Kousis and Paschou's (2017, 144–45) argue that a fifth generation has arisen in the years following the economic crisis of 2008 which has primarily taken place in Southern Europe, where the effects of the crisis have been most severe.

This research will explore the different responses to crisis that have occurred within the solidarity economies of two Southern European countries: Greece and Italy. This thesis will attempt to show how solidarity economies develop and change depending on the severity of crisis and across different national contexts. Great variance between these cases is evident in the types of initiatives that have proliferated, the values that they pursue, the outcomes that they achieve, and the beneficiaries that they target. In Greece, the development of the solidarity economy is unprecedented and has introduced economic practices that were absent prior to the crisis as a means of coping with its effects (Calvário and Kallis 2017, 602). These include a broad range of initiatives that primarily seek to address peoples' immediate material needs through the provision of basic goods, services, and structures of mutual-aid. In Italy, there has been a proliferation of organisations and practices that were already prominent, most notably Solidarity Purchase Groups (G. Sacchi 2018). These groups utilise mutual-aid and bottom-up organisation to demonstrate alternative means of economic activity and to promote ethical consumption that values sustainability and local communities (Signori and Forno 2016).

This research takes the form of a comparative case study and analyses the solidarity economies of two countries: Greece and Italy. The period of analysis begins in 2008 at the onset of the Eurozone crisis and stretches up until the present day. However, some factors pre-dating this period, such as the historical role of social cooperatives in Italy, are taken into account in an attempt to explain the differing outcomes between the two cases. Several scholars have noted the connection between welfare state retrenchment and increases in solidarity economy activity (Rakopoulos 2014, 204; Mavrikos-Adamou 2015, 60–61; Conill et al. 2012, 211). Given that the Italy and Greece have both undergone extensive austerity measures and welfare retrenchment since the crisis, it is expected that the scope and depth of these policy changes will be reflected in the services and aims of solidarity initiatives in each country.



As austerity and welfare retrenchment become the norm in many Western countries, I believe it is necessary to analyse those places already most effected so as to better understand how citizens and communities supplement their loss of access to services, goods, and income, as well as how they politicise these actions.

The study of solidarity economies across countries is extremely limited by a lack of cross-country or even national-level data. Much of the existing literature focuses on small numbers of organisations in particular cities or regions and has been produced within the fields of human and economic geography using ethnographic research techniques (see Arampatzis 2017, 2018; Fickey and Hanrahan 2014; Gritzas and Kavoulakos 2016; Petropoulou 2013; Steinfors, Hendriks, and Pijpers 2017). At the macro level, the LIVEWHAT (2016) project (Living with Hard Times: How Citizens React to Economic Crises and Their Social and Political), funded by the European Commission, has conducted an online content analysis of the websites of 4,297 different Alternative Action Organisations (AAOs) (which include but are not limited to solidarity initiatives) located in France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. This represents the most comprehensive source of cross-country empirical data and the only known dataset on alternative economic and political organisations in post-crisis Europe. Several quantitative research articles have recently been published using this data as the basis for cross-country comparative research (see Cristancho and Loukakis 2018; Giugni and Grasso 2018; Kalogeraki, Papadaki, and Pera Ros 2018; Kousis 2017; Loukakis et al. 2018; Uba and Kousis 2018; Zamponi and Bosi 2018b).

Where this research differs is in its use cross-country empirical data gathered by LIVEWHAT as the basis of a qualitative investigation into the differences across the two cases. With a few notable exceptions (see Calvário and Kallis 2017; Kalogeraki, Papadaki, and Pera Ros 2018), very few examples in the existing literature situate solidarity economies within a comparative framework during the post-crisis era. Reports generated by LIVEWHAT (2016)

allow for this approach to be explored. Using this source, national profiles of the two countries can be observed and then elaborated upon using existing ethnographic and sociological research that is representative of the trends shown in the data. This research will thus fill a gap in the literature by combining observations at the level of individual initiatives and localities with data collected at the national level.

Comparison between these countries has two distinct advantages. First, both belong to the Southern welfare state model identified by Ferrera (1996, 2005). The Southern model is typified by generous pensions benefits, highly fragmented labour markets, occupation-based income maintenance, weak social safety nets for the young and unemployed, large public-sector employment, and nominally (though in many instances not substantively) universalistic health care systems (Ferrera 1996). The high degree of labour market segmentation in these countries and the emphasis on contribution-based transfers rather than services has resulted in a polarised system that provides security and protection to those in the formal core while providing very little to “outsiders”, such as those in the large informal sectors, the long-term unemployed, irregular workers, and immigrants (Ferrera 2005, 4–5). Due to systemic administrative inefficiencies and inconsistencies, the capacity for means-testing is generally low and has resulted in weak social protection outcomes. Risk of poverty is high in these countries and is alleviated primarily by the informal safety net of strong familial ties (Ferrera 2005, 5).

A second advantage is that both cases were hit severely by the economic crisis. Certainly among the countries covered by LIVWHAT, Greece and Italy were two of the most affected (Giugni and Grasso 2018, 784). However, there is substantial variance in each country’s experience of crisis with regards to rates of unemployment, risk of poverty, average wages, and GDP growth. Speaking broadly, Greece was far more affected than Italy. These factors will be taken into consideration when explaining the different causes of solidarity

initiative establishment and the roles that they play in alleviating economic hardship across the cases.

While this research will exploit these differences in attempting to show how solidarity economies arise and what causes the differences between them, it will also be limited by the extent of these differences. Historical, cultural, political, legal, and economic contexts all play a role in determining how and in what ways citizens' initiatives mobilise to overcome shared hardship outside of traditional state and NGO structures. This thesis identifies two factors in particular—the presence of innovative social movements and the role of social cooperatives in delivering welfare services—as particularly important and explores the influence that they have had in shaping the operations of solidarity initiatives in Italy and Greece.

# Chapter 1

## The Solidarity Economy in Theory and Practice

### Situating the solidarity economy within the third sector

While many of the structures and practices under discussion are not necessarily new and ample research has been conducted on them in earlier periods, scholarly interest in alternative economic and political organisations has increased alongside their rise in prominence following the Eurozone crisis. Despite the renewed interest in the field of study, there is significant variance in the terminology used to describe these organisations and considerable conceptual fuzziness between disciplines, researchers, and across different regions. The LIVEWHAT (2016) project encapsulates the broadest range of organisations by designating formal and informal groups addressing economic, political, and cultural issues under the term Alternative Action Organisations (AAOs). The only stipulation that differentiates AAOs from other organisations in the wider ‘third sector’ of civil society is that they are “not operated or exclusively supported by mainstream economic and political organizations (i.e. corporate, state, or EU related agencies)” (LIVEWHAT 2016, 10).

The term AAOs covers an extremely broad set of organisations that can be divided into six categories: informal and protest groups, social economy, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), charities and church, unions/associations, and municipalities/regions (LIVEWHAT 2016, 50, 55). Examples of activities that AAOs are involved in include: addressing basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter; providing legal, education, and medical services; arranging cultural events such as festivals and artistic displays; organising alternative economic initiatives such as bartering networks, local currencies, time banks, and producer-consumer distribution channels; promoting specific interests relating to the environment, women’s rights, animal rights, and renewable energy; and combatting hate crimes and human trafficking.

Not only are AAOs extremely broad in their aims and activities, but they also differ greatly in their internal structures and decision-making processes. As Kalogeraki, Papadaki, and Pera Ros found in their analysis of AAOs, some groups display indicators of formality and hierarchical organisational structures, evident in the presence of written constitutions, leadership positions, the use of committees to address certain issues, and paid staff such as media spokespeople, treasurers, and administrative assistants (2018, 865). On the other hand, more informal and non-hierarchical groups are run predominantly on a voluntary basis and make decisions through general or neighbourhood assemblies.

Another prominent distinction that separates AAOs is the orientation between those who actively participate in the organisation and those who benefit. Some groups adopt a bottom-up approach that mobilises people to act in ways that are mutually beneficial, while others adopt a top-down approach that is more in keeping with traditional forms of philanthropic and altruistic activities that maintain a distinction between those contributing labour or resources and those on the receiving end (LIVEWHAT 2016, 88; Uba and Kousis 2018).

The term AAO therefore casts a wide net that captures much of the third sector and which applies to many traditional NGOs, charities, and church-run initiatives that could hardly be considered outside of the cultural and economic mainstream. This study is concerned with a narrower subset of the third sector that has flourished in Southern Europe in the wake of the Eurozone crisis (Kousis and Paschou 2017, 142), but which is further removed from—and in many cases explicitly opposed to—dominant social and economic norms. This subset can be characterised by its primary value of solidarity as an organising principle and by its politicisation of alternative economic activities as a challenge to capitalism itself. Generally described as the “solidarity economy” (Rakopoulos 2014), existing literature reveals a wide range of terms that describe this concept and the different activities and structures that fall

within its conceptual framework. For example: Benmecheddal, Gorge, and Özçağlar-Toulouse (2017) describe bartering systems, alternative currencies, and time banks as “alternative markets”; Calvário and Kallis (2017) talk of “alternative economies” when describing producer-consumer food distribution groups in Greece, whereas Grasseni (2014b) and Guidi and Andretta (2015) uses “solidarity purchase groups” to describe similar initiatives in Italy; Arampatzi (2017) speaks of “urban solidarity spaces” while Vathakou (2015) uses the term “citizens’ solidarity initiatives” to encompass a wide range of practices from collective kitchens and clothes distributors, to social medical centres and exchange networks.

At the conceptual level, the solidarity economy should be differentiated from the social economy, with which it is often conflated. While social economy initiatives often employ the concept of solidarity in their organisational structure and decision-making norms in a way that differs from mainstream capitalist firms, they are nonetheless market-orientated and monetarily based (for example, cooperative firms) (Kousis 2017, 123–24). In contrast, initiatives belonging to the solidarity economy operate primarily in non-market and non-monetary ways. A common theme evident in almost all of the literature regarding solidarity initiatives is an emphasis on non-hierarchical organisational structures and grassroots mobilisation; scholars frequently describe these initiatives as arising “from below” or in a “bottom-up” manner (Arampatzi 2017; Andretta and Guidi 2017; Calvário and Kallis 2017; Kousis and Paschou 2017; Rakopoulos 2014).

### **The principles, aims, and transformative effects of solidarity initiatives**

Speaking at the broader level of alternative economies, to which solidarity initiatives belong, Hillebrand and Zademach (2014, 9) describe them as:

[...] strategies of production, exchange, labour/compensation, finance and consumption that are in some way different from mainstream capitalist economic

activity and give occasion for rethinking the economic system in itself.

Typically organised by activists and run with the assistance of those they benefit, their aim is not to generate profit but rather to satisfy the needs of society by way of non-market based methods of production, distribution, pricing, and consumption (Vathakou 2015, 170). By re-orientating the economy as a function of society and not solely the determinant of the market, solidarity economies make visible potential ways of living and acting that depart from currently dominant forms of economic and political organisation.

The key principles that solidarity initiatives adhere to and advance are mutual aid, self-organisation, and direct-democracy. Central to the principle of mutual aid is the notion of reciprocity. Depending upon the function that any particular initiative serves, participants are encouraged to go beyond simply utilising the services and goods provided to them by also contributing in some manner (Vathakou 2015, 174). For example, someone who eats at a community kitchen might be expected to help with the preparation of food and distribution, so long as they are able. Similarly, time banks work to facilitate the exchange of services via non-monetary means through a system of time credits that participants accrue by providing their own services to others (Arampatzi 2017, 2160). As much as possible, participants are encouraged not simply to take from solidarity initiatives, but to contribute in a way that ensures their reproduction while also fostering the understanding that communities can organise themselves in ways that are mutually beneficial for all involved. Mutual aid practices thus give hope to those who participate by facilitating self-responsibility in a way that is beneficial to others, which Conill et al. say increases trust in a community and builds a network of security (2012, 226–28; Calvário and Kallis 2017, 608).

Adherence to these principles is what, in most cases, sets solidarity initiatives apart from typical non-governmental organisations (NGOs). According to Vathakou (2015, 173),

solidarity initiatives promote cooperation, reciprocity, and equality in a horizontal way, whereas NGOs typically operate in a “one-way” philanthropic manner. Philanthropy thus implies a strict hierarchical divide between those providing and those benefiting from the supply of goods and services. According to solidarity activists interviewed by Vathakou (2015, 174), this can have potentially negative consequences such as the perpetuation of relations of dependency and a perception of “self-misery” in those who simply receive. Conversely, solidarity initiatives attempt to break down this barrier by emphasising mutual aid and reciprocity. Furthermore, decision-making within NGOs is typically organised in a top-down fashion that separates those who make decisions from those who carry them out. This type of separation is unusual in the solidarity economy, where decisions are made and implemented via “direct democracy from below”, which can include anyone involved with the organisation and often members of the wider community as well (Vathakou 2015, 176).

Another way that solidarity initiatives differ from NGO-run initiatives is that they are not typically organised or funded by philanthropic actors, the state, or the EU (Vathakou 2015, 178). Instead, they are often financed through crowdfunding, cultural events, and by donations from individuals and local social institutions. Solidarity initiatives generally reject funding from the state on the grounds that the latter are responsible for implementing the very policies that make them necessary. They also fear that their objectives may become compromised if they take assistance from the state. The fact that NGOs are more open to state funding than solidarity economies is indicative of the former seeking to address the short-term consequences of crisis rather than present alternatives. Solidarity initiatives, on the other hand, are concerned with challenging the existing structural conditions that resulted in economic crisis, which in many ways positions them in opposition to the state (Vathakou 2015, 186).

Many researchers have noted the connection between the growth of solidarity economies and economic crisis, the retrenchment of welfare provisions, and privatisation of



public services (Rakopoulos 2014, 204; Mavrikos-Adamou 2015, 60–61; Conill et al. 2012, 211). Rakopoulos (2014, 199) describes this relationship as “dialectical” in that solidarity economies “arise in the midst and against markets in crises”. As Conill et al. (2012, 225–27) argue, the economic crisis and the austerity measures that it has provoked revealed the instability of the welfare state and the risks associated with being dependent upon it. Trust in one’s community and the development of a strong network are one way in which individuals can work actively to reduce their reliance on the welfare state. Vathakou argues that solidarity economies not only work to mitigate the deficiencies of the state, but they also encourage individuals to form a “protective web” based on trust among participants, safeguarding them from the dislocation and income volatility caused by the market by becoming more involved and solidifying bonds in their communities (2015, 170).

### **Politicising alternative economic activities**

Involvement in solidarity initiatives can be understood as an inherently political act from both the perspective of those involved with organising them and on the part of their beneficiaries. Wigger (2018, 35) argues that alternative socioeconomic practices are a form of “radical praxis” that is often overlooked by social movements literature due to the fact that they exist outside of traditional political structures and are not formally associated with political advocacy groups, movements, or unions. Despite this, they perform a transformative function—or at least illustrate the potential for such transformations—in a subversive manner best conceptualised using terms derived from the anarchist tradition such as “prefiguration” and “propaganda by the deed”.

These concepts, according to Wigger (2018, 35), entail engaging with political and economic structures in ways that go beyond simply protesting or reacting to the current state of things. Rather, prefiguration involves imagining and actively putting into practice potential

future reorganisations of social and economic relations. In this way, prefigurative activities bring utopian visions partially into reality in an experimental way that never fully captures the entirety of the imagined future but provides spaces in which such visions can be modelled, disseminated, and improved. Similarly, acts of ‘propaganda by the deed’ intervene visibly in the dominant political and economic landscape, providing an example that inspires others to replicate and spread similar activities.

Solidarity initiatives are “prefigurative” in the sense that they do not just imagine alternative potential futures, but instead bring them into being as “praxis-oriented experimentations” (Arampatzi 2018, 60). This not only applies to the organisers of these initiatives, who gain experience in coordinating alternative means of structuring economic production and distribution, but it also applies to the beneficiaries who are introduced to new ways of fulfilling their needs and participating in the economy. According to Vathakou (2015, 179), solidarity economies are “a path toward profound self-education” in which all those involved have the opportunity to learn how to make decisions democratically in a group and play an active role in the provision of their needs, which builds self-confidence and skills.

In their very functioning then, solidarity economies work to provide communities with a sense of optimism that they have some control and influence over the factors dictating the provision of their basic needs. This often implies a spatial reorientation of economic activity back towards municipalities and neighbourhoods “at the everyday life level”, as Arampatzi describes it (2018, 61). A notable example of this type of spatial reorientation is evident in the operation of time banks, which are participatory organisations that facilitate the exchange of goods and services through alternative currencies and non-monetary means such as the exchange of labour hours (Arampatzi 2017). As Conill et al. (2012, 217–18) argue, initiatives such as these reorientate economic activity in society by linking the value of currency directly to the productive activities and capacities of the communities they are used in. In effect, these

types of solidarity initiatives partially divorce local communities from the euro, which is considered to be determined by forces and interests beyond the control of local communities.

Not only do solidarity initiatives bring idealistic alternatives into view, but they also have the potential to facilitate political action in segments of the population who may otherwise be excluded or find it difficult to engage with the political arena. In their analysis of the effect that material deprivation plays in facilitating and constraining political activity, Giugni and Grasso (2016) suggest that individuals experiencing economic hardship may be too overwhelmed by the task of meeting their material needs and consequently become disengaged from politics; working extra hours, multiple jobs, or searching for employment can take up time that might otherwise be spent engaging with political actions and issues. Furthermore, the loss of employment or the inability to find work plays a negative role on political mobilisation by reducing the size of an individual's personal network through which political information and planned activity might spread. However, they also suggest that economic hardship increases potential sources of grievances, prompting individuals to engage in political activities where possible to bring about change through collective action. Solidarity initiatives may help to overcome this inherent tension between economic hardship and political mobilisation by politicising the very activities and structures that people engage with in order to satisfy their material needs.

### **A critique of the solidarity economy: facilitating neoliberalism?**

Many scholars note a range of potential problems that are inherent to these organisations. One core issue that all solidarity initiatives face is that, despite their attempts to demonstrate alternative economic possibilities, they must still operate from within the very system they seek to oppose; it is simply not possible to function completely outside of the capitalist economy. For this reason, Calvário and Kallis (2017, 610) express concern that the costs of land,

resources, and transport threaten the viability of pricing goods according to social need rather than according to market demand. This is particularly true of agricultural producer-consumer initiatives such as no-middlemen groups in Greece and Solidarity Purchase Groups in Italy, which cannot avoid the use of land and the requirement of transporting goods from the farm to consumer. Social pricing of goods may also be undermined by further reductions in purchasing power; these initiatives must be able to cover their costs and farmers the cost of production.

Calvário and Kallis (2017, 610) also found that many of the organisers of solidarity initiatives were themselves unemployed and suffering “fatigue” from their unpaid work. Recognition that solidarity initiatives cannot continue to be sustained by voluntary labour during times of economic decline was also observed by Rakopoulos (2014, 201). This speaks to a broader issue with solidarity economies, which is that they often accept the responsibility of providing basic welfare provisions in areas in which the state is absent or has withdrawn, often by relying on the unpaid labour of organisers and participants. As Vathakou (2015, 181) notes, solidarity health clinics, for example, cannot indefinitely compensate for the failings of public health systems under austerity. Without accepting state or EU funding, they are entirely reliant on the capacity of public donors to pay the costs. This may prove difficult if wages remain stagnant and demand for their services continues to increase due to the neglect of the public system. Their reliance on unpaid work also sets a precedent for exploitation given that private health clinics must pay for the expertise and labour of their workers while at the same time competing with solidarity-based medical centres that do not.

Critics such as Samers (2005, 880–81) and Harvey (2001) claim that such initiatives often romanticise small-scale and local economic activities. This leads to an unquestioned assumption among solidarity initiative organisers, as well as the scholars that study them, that large-scale production is inherently exploitative while ignoring the potentially exploitative relations that can exist and be reinforced by small-scale and localised economic activities.

There is also a lack of analysis conducted on the role of power relations and gender within solidarity economies (Gritzas and Kavoulakos 2016, 322). Another aspect that requires further exploration is the accessibility of solidarity economies for those without established connections and networks in their neighbourhood. Solidarity economies are often a function of “bonding social capital”, which fosters trust based on networks of relationships made in person (Mavrikos-Adamou 2015, 48). Whether or not immigrants, the disabled, and other people with potentially reduced social networks are included within the scope of solidarity initiatives also deserve greater attention.

One final line of criticism addresses the supposed contradiction inherent to the political project of anti-austerity and anti-neoliberalism being pursued in an autonomous and decentralised manner. The emphasis on deliberative democracy practiced by autonomous assemblies prevents separate organisations from pursuing a unified set of goals and methods. This is what Badiou (2018, 25, 27) refers to as the “cult of egalitarian collectives”, which is the claim that such initiatives will always fail to enact their transformative vision due to their emphasis on immediate action, as well as their lack of long-term strategic thinking and intra-group coordination. This theoretical argument is evident in the findings of Benmecheddal, Gorge, and Özçağlar-Toulouse (2017, 198), whose interviews with those involved in alternative exchange networks in Greece revealed that many producers and consumers utilise these structures only as a temporary arrangement to meet their immediate needs. They found that many interviewees expect to return to mainstream capitalist arrangements once economic conditions allow for it, indicating that alternative exchange networks and initiatives do not pose a challenge to capitalism but are instead complimentary to it.

## Chapter 2

### The Case of Greece

#### **The causes and effects of economic crisis in Greece**

Greece was at the epicentre of the wider Eurozone crisis that began in 2008 and has been the country most deeply affected by it (Flassbeck and Lapavistas 2015, chap. 10). According to the European Commission's report on the Greek economy published shortly after the crisis took shape, irresponsible government spending caused primarily by an oversized and overpaid public sector was at the root of Greece's economic woes (2010, 3–7). This had the effect of applying upward pressure on private sector wages which eroded Greece's external competitiveness within the Eurozone. Coupled with excessive and unsustainable pension and health systems, this led to ongoing budget deficits that resulted in high levels of government debt. The wider global financial crisis undermined investor confidence in the Greek government's ability to pay back its loans, which increased the interest on government bonds to unmanageable levels. General government debt has since increased from 103 percent of GDP in 2007 to a high of 181 percent in 2016, where it has approximately remained (Eurostat 2018b).

Greece has been severely affected by the sovereign debt crisis and the wider global financial crisis. Following a seven-year period of annual growth after entering the Eurozone in 2001, Greece's real gross domestic product (GDP) declined by 26 percent between 2007 and 2013 from a peak of 22,700 euros per capita to a low of 16,800 (Eurostat 2018d). GDP growth has since been slow, rising to only 17,400 euros by 2017. Unemployment skyrocketed from a pre-crisis level of 8.4 percent to a high of 27.5 in 2013 (Eurostat 2018e), the highest rate in Europe post-crisis. During this same period, average wages declined by 22 percent and household disposable income dropped by 25 percent (OECD 2018; Eurostat 2018a). The youth

have been particularly hard-hit with the unemployment rate of those under 25 years of age reaching a peak of 58.3 percent. In what many authors describe as a “brain drain” (Leontidou 2015, 97; Kaitatzi-Whitlock 2014, 29; Hadjimichalis 2014, 502), high youth unemployment has prompted many of Greece’s best educated and skilled young people to migrate outside of the country in search of jobs.

### **EU-led crisis management and backlash of the demos**

Following the crisis of 2008, Greece has become what Badiou has called an “open-air political lesson” (2018, 23). EU-level institutions headed primarily by the Troika (comprised of the European Commission, European Central Bank, and International Monetary Fund) have led a path to recovery that has relied upon conditional loan agreements enforcing strict fiscal discipline and labour market flexibility. As Sotoris (2017, 171) describes, this has resulted in reduced sovereignty for Greece as the country has become a “testing ground for a new aggressive version of European integration”.

Theodoropoulou (2016) argues that Greece has been subjected to an unprecedented degree of intrusion into its domestic policy agenda under the conditions of Memoranda of Understanding agreements signed with the Troika, especially with regard to social policy and labour market reforms. Faced with impending default on their sovereign debt and prolonged exclusion from market financing, Greece faced the potential of forced exit from the Eurozone. Given the economic ramifications of such a scenario, the EU has been able to leverage greater negotiating power and impose intrusive fiscal targets, welfare reforms, and structural overhauls upon the Greek government. The process of reform and acquiescence with the Troika’s demands began under the Prime Ministership of the unelected Lucas Papademos, former vice president of the European Central Bank, who in 2011-2012 headed an interim coalition

government comprised of members of both the major centre-left and centre-right parties, as well as other unelected technocrats (McDonnell and Valbruzzi 2014, 658).

Since the onset of the sovereign debt crisis in 2008, Greece has implemented a number of tax increases and has undergone a major set of reforms and spending cuts to its public sector and welfare system, including changes to pensions and unemployment benefits, salary freezes, mass layoffs, labour market reforms increasing flexibility, and the weakening of collective bargaining agreements (Zartaloudis 2014; Theodoropoulou 2016). Combined with an already weak social safety net, polarised levels of protection between the formal and informal sectors (Ferrera 1996, 2005), high levels of unemployment, and significant reductions in household income (Rakopoulos 2014, 607), the effects of the debt crisis and the subsequent period of austerity have been severe. As a result, the portion of Greeks at risk of poverty or social exclusion has risen from 28.1 to 35.6 percent between the years 2008 and 2016 (Eurostat 2018c).

This has prompted widespread backlash from a broad spectrum of the Greek populace. Resistance to the crisis and its resultant recovery process has taken a number of forms including the Indignados (the indignants) movement that saw 200,000 people demonstrate in Syntagma Square opposite Parliament and then proceed to occupy the space for the months of May and June in 2011 (Georgiadou et al. 2017; Pantazidou 2013). According to Arampatzi (2017, 2158), the Indignados movement, which began in similarly crisis- and austerity-stricken Spain and occurred concurrently with the global Occupy movement, marks a formative point in the Greek population's response to crisis. The spontaneous occupation of Syntagma Square and the broader "movement of the piazzas" functioned as a "laboratory for experimenting with practices of self-organisation, mutual aid and solidarity-making" (Arampatzi 2017, 2158; Leontidou 2012).



On the back of anti-austerity sentiment, the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) overturned decades of two-party dominance to form government in 2015 and organised a national referendum in which a majority of voters rejected the terms of the Troika's 2015 bailout agreement (Katsourides 2016). Despite the impressive mobilisation of resistance and the electoral successes of anti-austerity positions and parties, little has changed in the government's ability to follow through on their promises. SYRIZA has been largely incapable of affecting the changes it had envisioned due to the reduced fiscal sovereignty it exercises as a member of the Eurozone and under the conditions of its conditional bailout agreements (Aslanidis and Rovira Kaltwasser 2016, 1078). The government has since committed itself to fulfilling the terms of its most recent agreement with the Troika as soon as possible (Maltezou 2017).

According to Badiou (2018, 25–27), popular mobilisation and electoral politics have failed to bring about substantive change because they are based in the abstract negation of austerity and not in a shared affirmative belief in a unified, alternative future arrangement. Anti-authority sloganeering and oppositional politics are effective tactics in mobilising protestors and voters but are a poor basis for enacting change. Such 'movementist' tactics lack any positive theoretical project, long term strategy, or discipline, instead prioritising immediate action in opposing the current state of affairs. Badiou claims that "any politics must be built around a system of what it affirms and proposes – not around what it denies or rejects" (2018, 24–26).

### **The unprecedented rise of the solidarity economy**

One subset of political engagement and austerity resistance that Badiou (2018) seems to overlook is the phenomena of solidarity economies that have become widespread in Greece since the onset of the crisis. With many residents unable to meet their basic needs under current

conditions, an unprecedented network of solidarity initiatives emerged in Greece with the intent of providing people with the services, goods, and care no longer adequately provided by the state via non-market-based means (Rakopoulos 2014; Huliaras 2015, 10). These include medical centres, community kitchens, producer-to-consumer distribution of food, free education programs, alternative currencies, and shared child-care. According to their organisers and participants, these informal structures of social and economic activity challenge neoliberal austerity while simultaneously modelling, trialling, and projecting alternative political and economic methods of organisation and behaviour.

According to Arampatzi (2017, 2158), the common practice in solidarity initiatives of decision-making through neighbourhood assemblies originated in the radically democratic and experimental forms of organisation that occurred during the Indignados occupation of Syntagma Square in Athens during May and June of 2011 (see also Daskalaki and Kokkinidis 2017, 1307; Pantazidou 2013). Calvário and Kallis make a similar point, stating that the self-organised occupation of Athens' squares acted as a "trigger" for a wider solidarity movement in Greece (2017, 608). From these spaces, a range of alternative social, political, and economic practices "dispersed across the city" and served as a model for solidarity initiatives of all kinds (Arampatzi 2017, 2158). In many cases, solidarity initiatives emerged directly out of the Indignados movement, organised by activists involved with the occupation at Syntagma Square (Vathakou 2015, 167; Papaoikonomou and Valor 2017, 171).

At least 213 different solidarity initiatives have begun operating since the onset of the crisis, prior to which they were not a prominent feature of Greek society (Rakopoulos 2014, 194; Kalogeraki, Papadaki, and Pera Ros 2018, 859, 862). In a country renowned for its low levels of volunteerism, public trust, and civic engagement, the crisis has produced a definite shift in the way many people participate in the economy and in their communities in order to fulfil their needs (Clarke, Huliaras, and Sotiropoulos 2015, 1–3; Huliaras 2015, 11).

The most prominent type of solidarity initiative in Greece are ‘no-middlemen’ initiatives, which coordinate the distribution of food directly between producers and consumers. By bypassing the oligopolistic formal market and utilising a system of pre-orders, farmers benefit from being paid immediately at a higher rate and consumers save approximately 20 to 50 percent on their basic food products such as potatoes, vegetables, cheese, flour, and oil (Calvário and Kallis 2017, 603, 607). In addition to this, most initiatives require that farmers give 2 to 5 percent of their produce to families suffering from extreme poverty. Approximately 22% of Greeks have benefited from no-middlemen initiatives (Rakopoulos 2014, 194). According to Calvário and Kallis (2017, 609), no-middlemen initiatives are politically orientated in that they seek to demonstrate non-corporate ways of reorganising the agricultural food industry that can also be applied to other sectors.

While informal networks of cooperation between solidarity initiatives are present, there is no centralised control or coordination of them. Rather, initiatives are self-organised and act autonomously in conducting decision-making processes at the local level (Calvário and Kallis 2017, 603; Kritidis 2014; Arampatzi 2017, 2160). This occurs through open assemblies in which issues and plans are deliberated upon and decided by consensus rather than a majoritarian basis when possible (Vathakou 2015, 175–76). Not only does this give communities a greater say in the production and distribution of resources, but it also promotes a political agenda of democratic deliberation that has come under severe curtailment by the imposition of austerity measures.

Clarke (2015, 75) observes that one of the motivating factors for people to become involved in informal organisations in Greece, such as solidarity initiatives, may be due to the fact that contributing to them with unpaid work allows the participant greater access to the services that they provide due to the centrality of mutual aid and reciprocity discussed above. As Calvário and Kallis (2017, 610) found, many of the organisers of solidarity initiatives in

Greece are themselves unemployed. Organising or volunteering in solidarity initiatives can offer the individual more immediate aid than formal organisations and may therefore be a more effective means of responding to one's vital needs.

The rise of solidarity economies is also consistent with prevailing methods of social trust in Greece. Mavrikos-Adamou (2015, 48, 58–61) observes that Greece's form of civic engagement is typified by "particularised forms of trust over generalised forms of trust". This is evident in the prevalence of both "unsocial capital" and "bonding social capital". The former is exhibited by widespread distrust of government, politicians, and formal institutions, whereas the latter refers to greater levels of trust in those one knows directly, such as family, friends, and neighbours. Welfare retrenchment, high levels of unemployment, and dropping incomes have placed even greater strain on these informal networks. Greek society's preference for "bonding capital" may form part of the explanation as to why the solidarity economy, which is an extension of these types of close personal relationships, has become prominent during a time when reliance upon close family and friends has become less feasible.

### **The solidarity economy as opposition to neoliberalism**

Greek solidarity initiatives are not simply a method of coping with strenuous economic circumstances; they are "not just a reaction to hardship" but are also inherently and consciously political in their goals (Rakopoulos 2014, 199). This manifests in two distinct ways, both negatively and positively.

In the negative sense, solidarity initiatives are political in that they situate themselves in opposition to neoliberalism, austerity, and the failing of representative democracy. According to Calvário and Kallis (2017, 609) one trait that all Greek solidarity initiatives share in common is "the goal of defeating the politics of austerity." Vathakou notes that these types

of organisational structures are consistent with far-left and anarchist perspectives and that many of the founders of them have backgrounds in political activism along these lines (2015, 174).

On top of their functional activities in providing goods and services, many initiatives also organise awareness-building events, run websites and social media pages, and produce newsletters dedicated to providing an analysis and educating their communities on issues relating to the origins of the debt crisis and the ongoing state of austerity (Vathakou 2015, 172–74). They are also frequently involved in the coordination of demonstrations and petitions aimed at protesting newly implemented policies that affect their communities, like rises in the cost of utilities and increases in taxes. As Vathakou (2015, 173) states, they are seeking to address the causes of their economic circumstances and not just mitigate the negative effects that are produced. This is another clear instance in which solidarity initiatives differ from typical NGOs; in abstaining from state funding they are able to act autonomously and promote a political agenda that goes against the state.

The antagonistic relationship with the state also flows in the other direction. Calvário and Kallis (2017, 610) claim that one of the main barriers that Greek solidarity initiatives face, and particular those that distribute food and other goods in public places, is intervention and repression from local authorities. Local councils often refuse to issue permits allowing them to operate in public due to laws restricting mobile trade near other businesses with similar products. Distributions are often shut down by police and producers sometimes fined up to one thousand euros each.

As Arampatzi (2018) points out though, the relationship between the solidarity movement and the state has been complicated since SYRIZA formed a coalition government in 2015. In 2012, SYRIZA helped establish and has continued to support the running of the ‘Solidarity for All’ network, which operates as the primary platform for coordinating activities, information, and infrastructure between different solidarity initiatives in Greece. Now that

SYRIZA has succumbed to the austerity politics demanded of it by the Troika, Arampatzi observes that there is a tension between the goals of the activists that it supports and the policies that it implements. This same problem is true of EU funding; Vathakou (2015, 178) states that some initiatives are more inclined to accept EU funding depending on the purpose of the specific grant and the perceived degree to which acceptance would compromise their independence.

In the positive sense, Greek solidarity economies are political in their consciously transformative aims. As Arampatzi (2018, 57–59) describes, the network of solidarity initiatives in Greece are a “strategic alternative to austerity neoliberalism” in that they engage citizens in the struggle against market forces and create spaces in which to practice and model different ways of orientating the economy within social relations.

## Chapter 3

### The Case of Italy

#### The causes and effects of economic crisis in Italy

Italy's experience of economic crisis and recession began in 2008 with the onset of the global downturn and the regional Eurozone crisis. However, it was not until July of 2011 that Italy's financial situation became acute as, in what Zamponi and Bosi refer to as a "spread crisis", the interest rate on government-issued bonds rapidly increased relative to more stable EU countries such as Germany (2018a, 142; Pavolini et al. 2016, 145). By this point, deteriorating conditions in Portugal, Spain, and Ireland necessitated that these countries request financial assistance from the European Commission. Meanwhile, the existing bailout package in Greece had failed to ease an ever-worsening crisis in that country. According to S. Sacchi (2016, 164–65), these factors had a contagious effect that prompted financial markets to lose confidence in Italy's ability to service its sovereign debt (which at 1.9 trillion euros was the fourth highest in the world in absolute amount), resulting in higher costs of borrowing as well as a national political crisis. Between 2008 and 2014, Italy's sovereign debt increased from 102 percent to 132 percent of GDP, at which point it has remained stable (Eurostat 2018b).

Though not as severely affected as the other countries of Southern Europe, detrimental signs of the crisis are evident by many measures in Italy when compared to 2008 levels. Real GDP declined 10 percent by 2013 and is still yet to reach parity (Eurostat 2018d). Unemployment, and especially youth unemployment, rose markedly from 6.7 to 12.7 percent and 21.2 to 42.7 percent respectively at their peaks in 2014 (Eurostat 2018e). Average wages and average household disposable income declined slightly by 3.5 and 5.5 percent respectively and have since returned to their 2008 levels (OECD 2018; Eurostat 2018a). For the country's poorest and most vulnerable though, things are far from having returned to pre-crisis normality;

25.5 percent of the population were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2008, but this number has increased steadily to a high of 30 percent according to the latest data from 2016 (Eurostat 2018c).

### **Technocratic governance and the response from civil society**

Following the escalation of the crisis in Italy during 2011, EU institutions have played an increasingly prominent and influential role in determining domestic policy decisions in the country (Pavolini et al. 2016, 131–32; S. Sacchi 2016). When the Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi proved unable to institute the reforms necessary to restore market confidence, a new technocratic government headed by Mario Monti, an un-elected former EU Commissioner, was appointed by the president with the support of the major centre-right, centre-left, and centrist parties (S. Sacchi 2016, 169; Streeck 2016, chap. 5).

The Monti-led government soon passed a series of reforms to labour market laws and the welfare system at the behest of EU institutions. During a period in which demand for social protection was expanding, the government reduced spending and implemented an increase in the retirement age, stricter conditions on accessing the seniority pension, and relaxed the laws on dismissing full-time permanent employees (Pavolini et al. 2016, 135–36, 142–44). Additionally, the government cut approximately 8 billion euros of funding from the national health system, placed a freeze on hiring, and introduced a range of co-payments for those claiming medical services (Pavolini et al. 2016, 148).

Unlike Greece, Spain, and Portugal, Italy never entered into a conditional agreement with the European Commission, European Central Bank (ECB), and International Monetary Fund (known collectively as the Troika) in exchange for bailout money (Zamponi and Bosi 2018a, 142). However, S. Sacchi (2016, 160) argues that the Italian government's compliance with the policy suggestions of EU institutions was the result of the "implicit conditionality" attached to the ECB's decision to provide financing to the Italian government through the



purchase of government bonds on the secondary market. According to Pavolini (2016, 153), the austerity measures implemented during this time have entered Italy into an “age of permanent strain” in which the “decision-making process [is] characterized by extreme haste, intense tensions, growing anxiety among the population and growing public unrest”.

Social unease and contestation was exhibited through traditional forms of political mobilisation such as strikes and protests, including the 15 October 2011 protest in which hundreds of thousands of people demonstrated in Rome as part of a global wave of anti-austerity protests (della Porta and Andretta 2013, 24). But the innovative Indignados movement, which loudly occupied public squares across Spain and Greece in their opposition to austerity and practiced experimentations with alternative forms of organisation and resilience, failed to take root in Italy. Known locally as the ‘acampadas’, the self-declared “Italian Indignados” established only a small and insignificant presence at the Piazza San Giovanni in Rome which went unrecognised by other social movements and did not spread further throughout Italy (Andretta and della Porta 2015, 40; della Porta and Andretta 2013, 24).

Adretta and della Porta (2015, 41–42) suggest that organised opposition to austerity politics was generally weak in Italy because the main civil society actors involved with contentious actions—primarily unions and associations—lacked autonomy from the centre-left Partito Democratico, which was itself involved with implementing or supporting the passage of austerity policies. However, anti-austerity politics has come to the fore with the rapid rise of the populist Five Star Movement, which refuses to classify itself as a party (Grasseni 2014a, 91). In its first general election in 2013, the anti-austerity and eurosceptic Five Star Movement won more votes nationally than any other party (Tronconi 2018, 166), a result that it replicated in the 2018 election.

## Alternative methods of resilience and the role of solidarity initiatives

What is the role of the third sector in responding to crisis and austerity? How has this changed when compared to the period prior to the crisis? The LIVEWHAT (2016) project provides some answers to these questions in their content analysis of the websites of 500 Italian Alternative Action Organisations (AAOs). AAOs are defined as formal and informal groups aiming to address economic, political, and cultural issues and that are not operated by the state, EU, or corporate actors (LIVEWHAT 2016, 10).

Representing 56 percent of their sample, LIVEWHAT research indicates that Italian AAOs are most frequently involved with arranging and promoting alternative methods of consumption and food sovereignty (2016, 34, 57). Included in this category are “consumer cooperatives, community sustained agriculture, community food networks, slow food, fair trade, [and] de-growth groups”. In Italy, the most prominent example of these types of organisations are Solidarity Purchase Groups (*Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale*), which are discussed at greater length below. These informal, horizontally organised groups engage in “political consumerism” by coordinating the purchase and distribution of food between members and specifically chosen producers. In so doing, they seek to promote alternative ways of living and values such as environmental sustainability, local production, and healthier food consumption. The second highest frequency of AAO activity belongs to the category ‘culture’, with 50.4 percent of Italian AAOs responsible for activities including festivals and artistic, sporting, and musical events in order to “raise awareness” (LIVEWHAT 2016, 55–57).

In their analysis of LIVEWHAT data, Uba and Kousis (2018, appendix) found that communities are the most frequently cited “constituency group” (referring to beneficiaries and participants) of Italian AAOs at 58 percent, followed by consumers and small enterprises at 37 percent. Only 21 percent cited the economically vulnerable as a constituency group, which is a lower figure than in any of the eight other sampled countries except for France.

Surprisingly, organisations involved with the provision of basic or urgent needs, which include food, shelter, clothing, and medical care, represent only 22 percent of the sample of Italian AAOs (LIVEWHAT 2016, 57). Of the nine countries studied, France was the only other country to show such low engagement with activities involving basic or urgent needs provision, whereas countries such as Greece, Germany, and Sweden all showed figures of above 60 percent. Furthermore, of the Italian AAOs that do engage with basic or urgent needs provision, the vast majority were founded prior to the crisis (LIVEWHAT 2016, 60).

Only 4 percent of Italian AAOs in the sample made reference to reducing the impacts of the economic crisis as part of their aims (LIVEWHAT 2016, 69). Rather, Italian AAOs are predominantly motivated by the goal of promoting alternative economic practices (60.4 percent), the promotion of sustainable development (33.4 percent), and community/collective empowerment (30.4 percent). This fits with Uba and Kousis' finding that Italian AAOs are the most "bottom-up" in their solidarity orientation compared to the other eight European countries analysed, which is to say that they are the most likely to prioritise mutual-help by mobilising and facilitating cooperation between people in pursuit of common interests (2018, 825). The authors note that the bottom-up type of solidarity approach is more likely to benefit middle class constituency groups than top-down approaches that prioritise providing support and essential needs (2018, 819).

### **The role of the solidarity economy in Italy: from the 1970s to now**

The development of an Italian solidarity economy occurred well before the Eurozone crisis. It first emerged in the late 1970s to supplement Italy's welfare system, which primarily operated through monetary transfers such as pensions, but was lacking in the delivery of social services (Borzaga and Santuari 2001). After a period of rapid economic development, the Italian economy had slowed by the end of the 1970s and new social problems became prominent, such

as an increase in homelessness, drug addiction, and socioeconomic disadvantage for young people as well as adults (Borzaga, Poledrini, and Galera 2017, 4). During this time, voluntary, bottom-up, solidarity organisations emerged to address issues of social exclusion and fill notable gaps in the welfare system through the provision of health care, education, and other social services at the local level (Borzaga, Poledrini, and Galera 2017, 6; Picciotti et al. 2014, 216).

These relatively small organisations were initially prohibited from providing services to the general public, instead being restricted to members only, but throughout the 1980s and 1990s a legal framework was developed that enabled these initiatives to formally extend their operations to the public under the designation of ‘social cooperatives’ (Borzaga, Poledrini, and Galera 2017, 6–7). This ensured that they maintained their not-for-profit orientation, participatory decision-making process, and mix of paid and voluntary work. Borzaga and Santuari (2001, 177–78) claim that these cooperatives were recognised as particularly innovative and efficient, operating to address specific needs identified at the local level and taking advantage of existing relationships and networks of trust to accomplish their goals.

Over time, these initiatives have transitioned from being mostly voluntary, solidarity-orientated organisations to being increasingly incorporated into the Italian public sector through outsourcing. As of 2014, at least 7,600 social cooperatives operated throughout Italy, deriving 70 percent of their revenue from government contracts and 26 percent from the sale of goods and services (Riva and Garavaglia 2016, 442; Borzaga, Poledrini, and Galera 2017, 17). As social cooperatives have become more dependent on the state for funding, there has been an increase in regulation and oversight of their activities, thus significantly reducing their autonomy (Borzaga, Poledrini, and Galera 2017, 9). Whereas social cooperatives were predominantly volunteer-run at their inception, paid employees now constitute the majority of their workers. Borzaga and Santuari claim that the current lack of volunteers in social

cooperatives has weakened their relationship with the communities they operate in and has hindered their ability to react dynamically to specific local needs (2001, 174–75, 178).

While social cooperatives still operate on a non-profit basis and maintain their horizontal methods of organisation and decision-making, they have effectively transitioned away from many of the characteristics that would situate them within the solidarity economy. Instead, they now constitute a unique means of state-backed service provision via outsourcing. Riva and Garavaglia (2016, 436) go as far as to describe the role of social cooperatives as a “main pillar of the national welfare system”.

Nowadays, the most prominent type of initiative belonging to the Italian solidarity economy is the widespread network of Solidarity Purchase Groups (SPGs) (Bosi and Zamponi 2015, 376–77), which Hankins and Grasseni (2014, 5) describe as:

[...] informal, non-contractual and fluid groups of people that negotiate both amongst themselves and between themselves and their suppliers, in order to choose and procure food and household objects according to different (and also changing) criteria: from locally sourced to organic food, to food and items produced without labour exploitation, and a combination of these and other requirements.

In the vast majority of SPGs, tasks are divided among the membership and the members themselves coordinate the collection, storage, and distribution of goods (Signori and Forno 2016, 478). Roughly one quarter are organised by a group within the organisation or are managed by a cooperative. In most cases, monthly meetings are held in which the members deliberate and decide upon what products to purchase from which producers, as well as discuss guiding principles of the group.

Having originated in the mid 1990s, a number of scholars attest to the growth of the SPG movement throughout Italy in the years following the crisis (Guidi and Andretta 2015, 451). As of 2014, 980 groups were registered in the online database of SPGs. However, research at the regional level indicates that the actual number of organised groups is far higher in actuality. In the region of Lombardy, Signori and Forno (2016, 477) mapped 429 groups—

almost twice the number registered in that region online—with a userbase of over 7,000 families. Grasseni (2014b, 186) found similar discrepancies between existing groups and those officially registered, indicating that the actual growth of SPGs since the crisis has been “momentous” and “practically hidden from view”.

Through the use of web-based surveys, Signori and Forno (2016, 478–79) found that the majority of SPG members are female, most are middle aged, and most have families. The majority of the participants belong to the middle class and are highly educated, with 60 percent working in clerical or teaching jobs. The less well-off represent a significantly smaller portion of SPG members, with only 4.4 percent classified as workers, 2.7 percent as unemployed, and 4.1 percent as pensioners. Furthermore, they found that access to cheaper produce was mentioned as a reason for joining an SPG by less than half of those surveyed. In line with the profile of Italian AAOs outlined above, many more respondents were motivated by ideals of community-building, with 79.6 percent wishing to support local producers and 63.5 percent wanting to broaden their personal network, and ecological sustainability, with 56.2 percent mentioning environmental concerns.

However, the most frequently cited motivation for joining an SPG was the desire to eat healthier food, mentioned by 82 percent of members. This figure highlights a point of debate within the study of SPGs regarding the extent to which collective purchasing should be understood as a politicised act or whether it should be regarded as simply an individualistic consumption choice (G. Sacchi 2018, 75). Grasseni (2014b, 186) takes a sceptical view in claiming that, although up to seven million people may take part in collective purchasing, years of ethnographic research and quantitative data collection lead her to believe that only one hundred thousand do so out of a commitment to the principle of solidarity and hence as a political act.

On the other hand, G. Sacchi (2018, 75–77) argues that participation in SPGs is an ethical consumption choice that positions the participant within political discourses of sustainability and fairness regarding agricultural production and trade. Implicit in SPG participation is a rejection of the unfair market outcomes of “extractive capitalism” in favour of a “post-capitalist ecosystem” in which purchasing choices are based on factors external to a product’s use-value alone (G. Sacchi 2018, 76). Furthermore, according to Signori and Forno (2016, 476), SPGs are political in that they act as “socio-pedagogic laboratories” in which alternative methods of deliberation, decision-making, delegation, and division of labour can be experimented with.

There is also evidence that the economic crisis has increased the degree of politicisation of SPGs compared to the preceding period. In their analysis of quantitative and qualitative surveys, Guidi and Andretta (2015, 469–70) found that many SPG members interpret their participation in these groups as a means of combatting their sense of powerlessness by giving them an opportunity to influence their local economies. Only a small minority of SPG organisers reported that their groups had not been influenced by the economic crisis. The profile of the average SPG appears to have shifted as well in the post-crisis period, with Zamponi and Bosi (2018a, 154) finding that newer members of SPGs were more likely to be unaffiliated with political organisations, more distrustful of political actors, but also more likely to feel engaged in political activities and events than members who had joined previously.

## Chapter 4

### Comparative Analysis

#### The aftermath of crisis: recession, intervention, and austerity

Although the economic crisis was felt particularly harshly in all of the Southern European countries, Greece was undoubtedly the most affected in terms of the extent, immediacy, and longevity. In both Greece and Italy, the global financial crisis undermined investor confidence in each government's ability to avoid defaulting on its loans, driving up the cost of long term borrowing and thus the cost of financing government deficits. But as Figure 1 shows, the cost of borrowing began to rise much earlier in Greece than in Italy and reached a catastrophically high rate of interest from which it is still yet to fully decline. Partially as a consequence of this, the level of government debt increased more rapidly in Greece from a similar starting point, eventually stabilising at around 180 percent of GDP compared to 130 percent of GDP in Italy

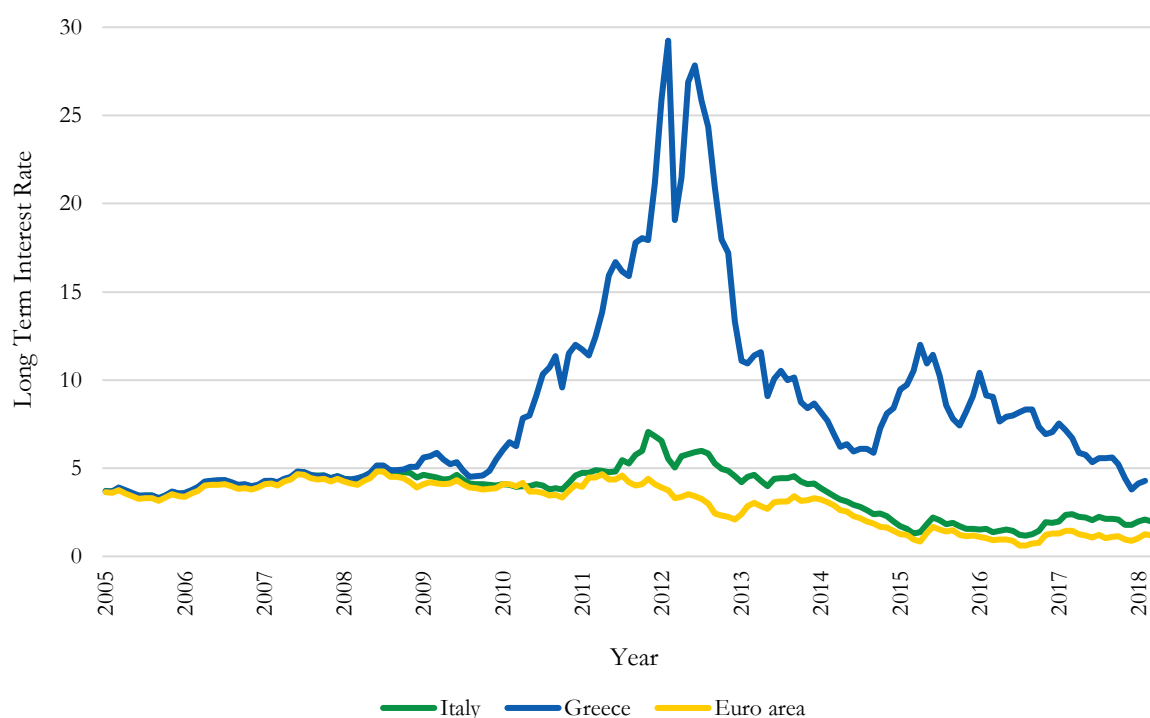


Figure 1: Long term interest rates, 2005-2018.  
Source: OECD (2018b)



(see Figure 2). The necessity to enact cuts to government expenditure through austerity measures was thus more immediate and necessary in Greece than in Italy.

Economic activity took more of a hit in Greece with GDP declining by 26 percent at its lowest point compared with 2008 levels, whereas Italy's GDP declined by 10 percent (Eurostat 2018d). In almost every sense, Greece fared much worse than Italy: unemployment rose by 19 percentage points in Greece compared to 6 points in Italy, average wages dropped by 22 percent compared to 3.5 percent, disposable income fell by 25 percent compared to 5.5 percent, and the portion of the population at risk of poverty and social exclusion increased by 7.5 percentage points compared to 5.5 points (Eurostat 2018e, 2018a, 2018c; OECD 2018).

In some important respects, the response from EU institutions and each country's government was similar between the two cases. In both, EU institutions recommended a variety of austerity measures that involved cuts to social protection expenditure, welfare state retrenchment, and changes to labour market laws (Theodoropoulou 2016; Pavolini et al. 2016).

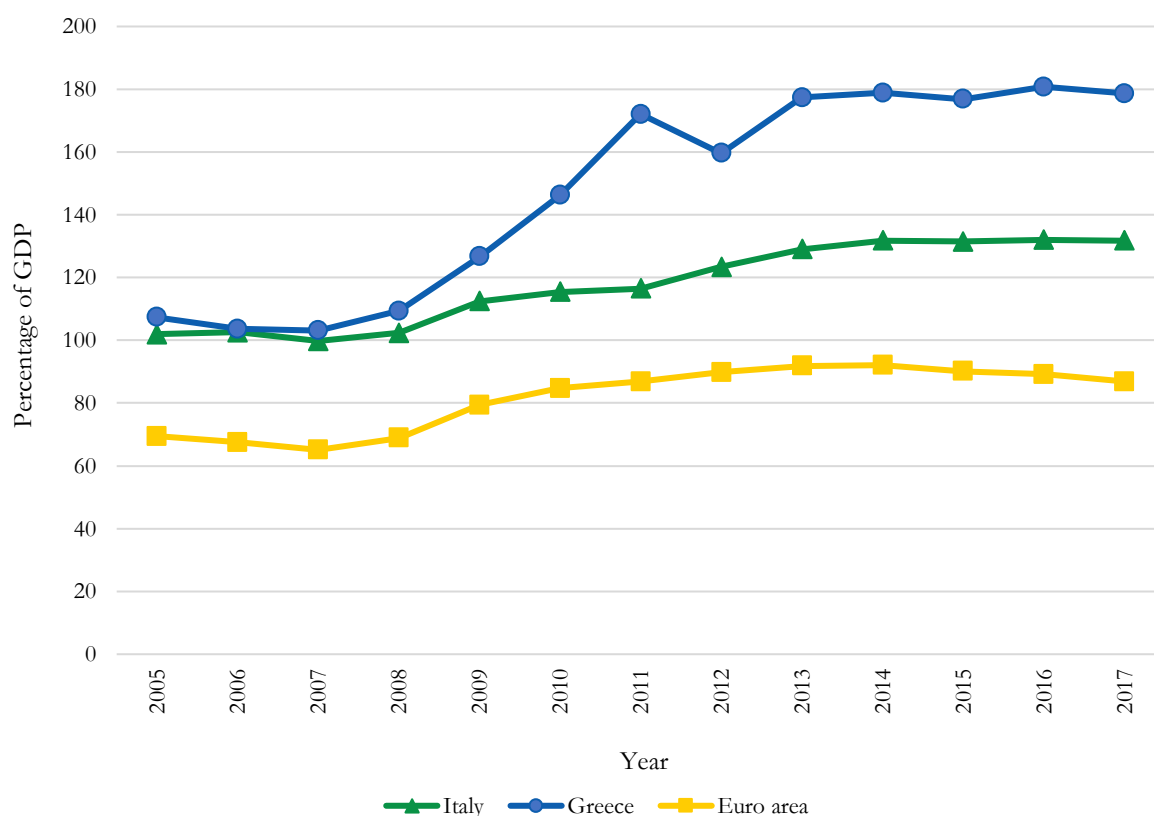


Figure 2: General government gross debt as a percentage of GDP, 2005-2017  
Source: Eurostat (2018c)

Many of these policy reforms were implemented during 2011 and 2012 by interim governments headed by unelected technocrats with former roles as leading EU economists (McDonnell and Valbruzzi 2014).

However, there are also significant differences in the two countries' experiences of crisis management that are worth noting. The first relates to the role that EU institutions played in advancing their recommended policy changes. Italy implemented the EU's policy recommendations to ensure that the European Central Bank would continue financing the government through its purchase of government bonds (S. Sacchi 2016). Italy thus avoided having to enter into any formal, conditional bailout programme that would have involved strict surveillance and enforcement measures. Greece, on the other hand, had no choice but to sign a series of Memoranda of Understanding agreements that provided routine funding on the condition that the government implement the Troika's recommended policy reforms. This has resulted in what some scholar claim is a reduction in Greece's sovereignty (Aslanidis and

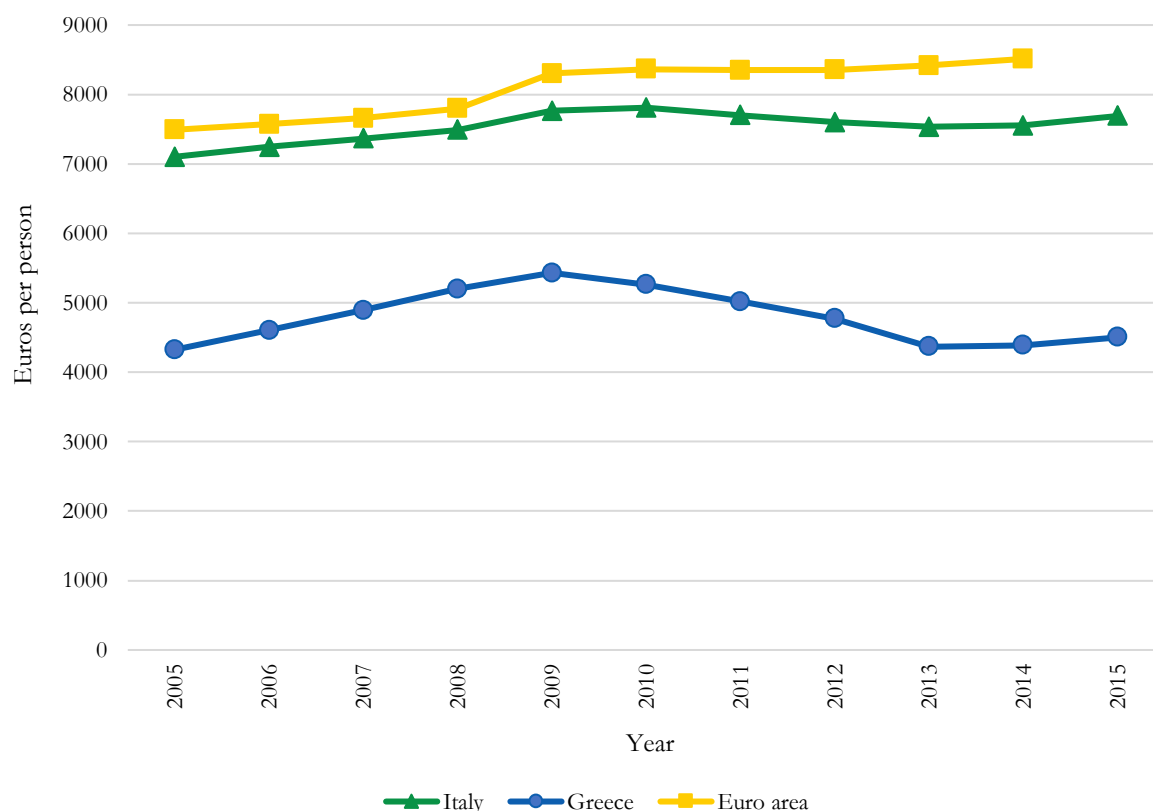


Figure 3: Expenditure on social protection per head of population, 2005-2015  
Source: Eurostat (2018b)

Rovira Kaltwasser 2016, 1078; Sotoris 2017). The second major difference is in the severity of welfare retrenchment. As Figure 3 shows, expenditure on social protection per person was already significantly lower in Greece than in Italy and has declined even further under austerity.

In sum, while there are notable similarities between the two cases in terms of the causes of economic crisis and the response from government and EU institutions, Greece suffered a worse economic decline, greater interference from the EU, and deeper cuts to welfare and social protection. However, the net effect that the crisis has had on the poorest citizens of both countries is comparable; the percentage of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion has risen markedly in both countries to levels well above the average across the Eurozone (see Figure 4).

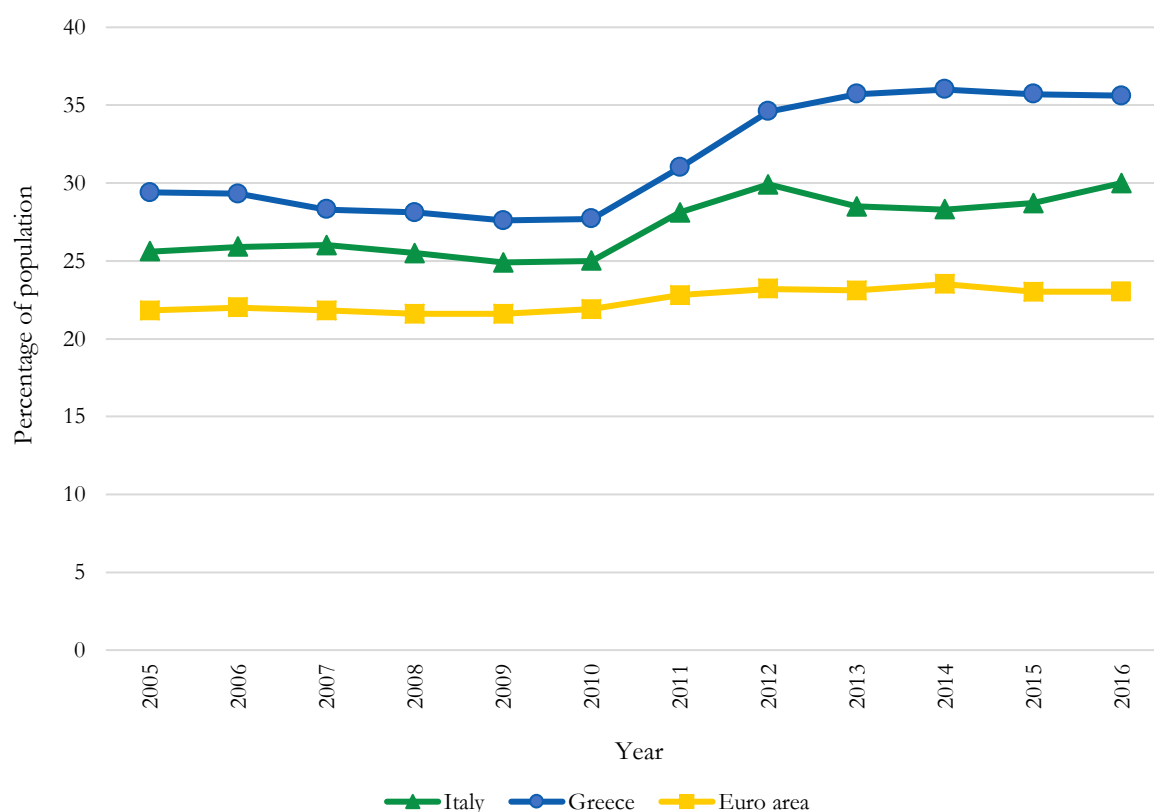


Figure 4: People at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2005-2016  
Source: Eurostat (2018d)

## Popular opposition, mobilisation, and collective resilience

In both countries, mass popular opposition arose in response to the austerity measures and the perceived democratic un-accountability of the EU institutions that played such a dominant role in their implementation. Electorally, this is evident in the meteoric rise of anti-austerity, populist parties; namely, SYRIZA in Greece and the Five Star Movement in Italy. Outside of formal political channels though, the response from social movements and civil society differ greatly between the two cases. In Greece, backlash against austerity, welfare retrenchment, and EU interference took place in public squares across the country in a movement known as the Indignados, most notably in Syntagma Square opposite the Parliament building in Athens (Georgiadou et al. 2017; Pantazidou 2013). For a two-month long period, Syntagma Square became an occupied site of camps in which innovative social and economic practices utilising direct democracy, self-organisation, and mutual-aid were experimented with and where new networks of solidarity were formed (Arampatzi 2017, 2158). The square was also the site of regular demonstrations involving as many as three hundred thousand people at its peak (Sotirakopoulos and Sotiropoulos 2013, 448). While there were notable demonstrations that took place in Italy at around the same time, the innovative tactics and practices of the Indignados failed to take root in the country (Andretta and della Porta 2015, 40; della Porta and Andretta 2013, 24).

Looking at civil society more broadly, there is great variance between the two cases in terms of the types of initiatives and activities that non-state, non-EU operated organisations take part in to help citizens cope with the reality of living in hard economic times. Despite the broad similarities in the experience of crisis that have been discussed above, these groups—which have been referred to as Alternative Action Organisations (AAOs) throughout this thesis—operate very differently, hold different values, pursue different goals, and are utilised by different demographic groups in Greece and Italy. Both show a high prevalence of

organising cultural events, but Greek AAOs are much more likely to take part in providing for basic or urgent needs whereas Italian AAOs are predominantly involved with alternative consumption activities (LIVEWHAT 2016, 57).

The most striking difference is their propensity to take part in activities related to the provision of basic or urgent needs. In Greece, 63 percent of AAOs are involved with this type of activity whereas the same true of only 22 percent of Italian AAOs. This is a surprising figure given that both countries experienced a similar rise in the percentage of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion (see Figure 4). While it is true that the severity of crisis was much worse in Greece than in Italy, even countries that were much less affected, such as Germany and Sweden, indicate that over 60 percent of their AAOs take part in activities related to the provision of basic or urgent needs. At just 4 percent, it would seem that these issues have had little influence on the operations of Italian AAOs (LIVEWHAT 2016, 69).

Another significant difference between Italian and Greek AAOs is in the percentage that work to provide emergency support and services to immigrants and refugees: 2.8 percent of Italian AAOs compared to 18.2 percent of Greek AAOs (LIVEWHAT 2016, 59–60). Coding of the LIVEWHAT data took place between February and July of 2016, shortly after the migration crisis of 2015 in which Italy and Greece were the two most frequent countries of first arrival for asylum seekers and refugees entering Europe (Zamponi 2018, 97). However, a likely explanation for this may be that the number of people entering Greece was much greater than in Italy during 2015: 856,723 compared to 153,842 respectively (UNHCR 2016).

Rather than issues of immediate need, Italian AAOs typically aim to promote alternative economic activities, sustainable development, and community empowerment. The aims of Greek AAOs are vastly different, with the three most frequently referenced organisational aims being to combat economic crisis and austerity, achieve social change, and promote health, education, and welfare outcomes. These differences are evident when

comparing the most prominent kinds of solidarity initiatives in the two countries: Solidarity Purchase Groups (SPGs) in Italy and no-middlemen groups in Greece. These two types of horizontally-organised solidarity initiatives fulfil similar functions by connecting consumers directly with food producers and arranging for the collection, sale, and distribution of products at mutually beneficial prices. However, there is substantial variance in the aims, values, and typical beneficiaries of these groups. SPGs are motivated by a desire to go beyond the current “consumer society”, support and build community networks, and reduce the environmental impact of consumption (Signori and Forno 2016, 477–79). In contrast to this, the no-middlemen initiatives began as a form of protest against the little compensation that merchants offer farmers for their produce, as well as the high prices of basic foodstuff for consumers (Calvário and Kallis 2017, 603; Rakopoulos 2014, 196). Many of those who take advantage of no-middlemen initiatives are pensioners and families whose household incomes have declined as a result of unemployment, austerity, and welfare retrenchment. Unlike the Italian SPGs, which are motivated primarily by post-material and ideational goals, no-middlemen groups are responding to immediate material deprivation in a way that is consciously situated within the political and economic crisis of the moment.

The emphasis on satisfaction of material needs in the Greek solidarity economy is evident in the wide range of initiatives that exist to provide medical services, free or low-cost meals, and other basic goods such as clothing (Vathakou 2015, 171–72). On the other hand, there is little evidence in the existing literature of equivalent solidarity initiatives being prominent in Italy. LIVEWHAT (2016, 59–60) findings confirm this substantial difference in their samples of Italian and Greek AAOs: community kitchens make up only 1.4 percent of Italian cases compared to 11.2 percent in Greece; social health and medical providers make up 2.6 percent in Italy compared to 21.6 in Greece; clothing and item provision accounts for just

0.6 percent in Italy compared to 24.4 percent in Greece; and shelter and housing is addressed by 4.6 percent in Italy compared to 12.8 in Greece.

Unsurprisingly, these disparities result in great variance between the two countries in the typical beneficiaries that solidarity initiatives target. In Italy, survey data shows that users of SPGs are overwhelmingly middle-aged, middle class, highly educated, and employed in clerical or teaching jobs (Signori and Forno 2016, 478–79). Due to the wider variety of initiative types prominent in Greece, there is no equivalent survey data that is representative of the Greek solidarity economy. Kalogeraki, Papadaki, and Pera Ros (2018, 867) provide the nearest equivalent data in their analysis of the online content of solidarity initiatives, which they isolated from the wider dataset on AAOs gathered by LIVEWHAT. They found that the groups most frequently declared as the beneficiaries of Greek solidarity initiatives are socioeconomically vulnerable individuals (47 percent), children and youth (33 percent), and ethnic minorities and migrants (32 percent).

To summarise, the Greek and Italian solidarity economies can be described according to three factors that illustrate their core similarities and differences. First, in both cases, initiatives typically hold political aims of going beyond the existing economic paradigm and into a post-capitalist reality that cannot be achieved under current market conditions. Second, in both cases, initiatives engage in a prefigurative type of political action by creating spaces in which alternative methods of organisation, decision-making, and labour distribution can be experimented with and demonstrated. Third, the two cases differ vastly in how their activities achieve material or post-material outcomes. In Greece, solidarity initiatives typically benefit people in positions of social and economic disadvantage by providing them with their material needs. In Italy, solidarity initiatives typically benefit those in the middle class by providing them with a means of enacting their post-material values of ethical consumption, environmental sustainability, and personal health. In both cases, collective action is utilised in

a participatory manner that advances the values of community and individual empowerment. However, these goals are secondary to the more fundamental material and post-material outcomes that are initially pursued in each of the cases but which differ between them.

### **Explaining the material/post-material divide**

Why do the solidarity economies of Greece and Italy differ so drastically, not so much in their transformative aspirations, their organisational structures, or their practices, but in the immediate material and post-material outcomes that they pursue? The first potential explanation, and perhaps the most obvious, is that the severity of the economic crisis and austerity measures in Greece necessitated a more widespread response from solidarity initiatives in order to combat the higher rates of material deprivation and precarity. As described above, Greece's GDP, government debt, unemployment rate, average wages, and household disposable incomes were more negatively affected than in Italy during the period of crisis. Welfare retrenchment was also more extensive, with spending on social protection falling by a larger percentage and from a lower position in Greece than in Italy. As many scholars claim, the unprecedented emergence of Greece's solidarity economy occurred as a direct consequence of the economic crisis and austerity measures experienced in the country, whereas in Italy the solidarity economy was pre-existing (Rakopoulos 2014, 204; Mavrikos-Adamou 2015, 60–61; Vathakou 2015, 167). This, no doubt, accounts for some of the variance between the cases regarding the underrepresentation of solidarity initiatives pursuing material outcomes in Italy.

However, this cannot be the full answer; by no means did the Italian citizenry escape lightly from the crisis, nor did the government abstain from implementing harsh austerity. As a consequence, the percentage of the Italian population at risk of poverty or social exclusion (measured after social transfers) rose by 5 percent between 2009 and 2016 (see Figure 4;



Eurostat 2018c). This represents the second highest rise (behind Greece at 8 percent) throughout the entirety of the EU during a period in which the average rose by only 0.2 percent. In absolute terms, Italy now has the largest population of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU.

Why, then, did the Italian solidarity economy not transform to a similar extent as in Greece to respond to this surge of materially worse-off people? A second potential explanation identifies the role of innovative social movements in acting as a springboard for the growth and adaptation of the solidarity economy. As many authors note, the Greek Indignados had a transformative effect on the prevalence and organisational strategies of a range of different types of informal solidarity initiatives that soon spread across the country (Daskalaki and Kokkinidis 2017, 1307; Pantazidou 2013; Vathakou 2015, 167; Papaoikonomou and Valor 2017, 170). The Greek Indignados mobilised to protest the inept handling of the economic crisis and to counter austerity politics. It is thus unsurprising that the solidarity initiatives that grew out of this movement identified those same political and economic problems and sought to mitigate their effects.

There was no equivalent movement in Italy from which a transformation of the solidarity economy could have easily originated and spread. While small encampments of Indignados were briefly established in Rome, popular mobilisations against the effects of the crisis and austerity took more traditional forms such as strikes and demonstrations (della Porta and Andretta 2013, 24). This may have been because of the more gradual onset of the crisis in Italy or due to the lack of autonomy from the major centre-left party exercised by important civil society actors in Italy at the time (Andretta and della Porta 2015, 41–42). This speculative argument suggests that if Italy had experienced an innovative social movement similar to the Indignados in Greece, the potential for new solidarity initiatives to be established and spread throughout Italy would have been greater and these groups would have been more likely to

address the effects of crisis and austerity. Further research is thus needed to explore the role of social movements in providing spaces for solidarity initiatives to flourish.

Lastly, another possible explanation is that Italy's welfare system was able to respond to the material needs of Italy's worst effected groups and communities, lessening the necessity for solidarity initiatives to address these needs. As discussed in Chapter 3, social cooperatives began to spread throughout Italy in the late 1970s offering essential health, education, and other social services not adequately provided by the state. These informal, horizontal organisations, which were initially run predominantly by volunteers on the basis of solidarity with their local communities, were gradually formalised and integrated into the Italian welfare system through public funding and outsourcing (Riva and Garavaglia 2016, 442; Borzaga, Poledrini, and Galera 2017, 17). While they still retain many of the characteristics of solidarity initiatives such as an emphasis on participatory decision-making processes, a degree of volunteerism, and a focus on local communities, they are now overwhelmingly funded by the state and mostly staffed by paid workers. Italy's social cooperatives now constitute a "main pillar of the Italian welfare system" (Riva and Garavaglia 2016, 436) and should therefore not be considered as part of the solidarity economy.

Through qualitative interviewing, Riva and Garavaglia (2016) found that Italian social cooperatives have increased their autonomy and political agency during the period of economic crisis and austerity. They state that, as a consequence of welfare retrenchment, "the cooperative system has progressively assumed the role of director rather than of executor on the complex social welfare scene" (2016, 448). The ability of social cooperatives to react to the emerging needs of their local communities is strengthened by their decentralised and bottom-up organisational structure. Through pre-existing relationships and networks of trust, social cooperatives are better equipped to identify and address issues affecting the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups at the level of local communities compared to a strictly top-down,

national-level welfare system. The prevalence of social cooperatives in Italy may have crowded-out solidarity initiatives with similar goals relating to basic or urgent needs—and especially those relating to medical services—or otherwise reduced the necessity for them substantially.

### **Future prospects and the dilemma of politicisation vs sustainability**

Could the institutionalisation of Italy's social cooperatives serve as an example for Greek solidarity initiatives in the future? Italian social cooperatives have played a similar role to Greek solidarity initiatives in delivering material outcomes to those in need and have shown surprising resilience under conditions of crisis (Costa and Carini 2016). In contrast, Greece's emergent solidarity economy faces unique hurdles in achieving sustainability under current economic conditions. As some researchers noted, reliance upon the unpaid labour of solidarity initiative organisers, many of whom are unemployed, is seen as one of the major barriers to their ongoing sustainability (Calvário and Kallis 2017, 610; Rakopoulos 2014, 201). Another issue is that, due to cuts in social protection expenditure and stagnant incomes, demand for solidarity initiative services continues to increase at the same time as the pool of public donors shrinks (Vathakou 2015, 181).

At the cross-national level, Loukakis et al. (2018, 849) found that horizontally organised AAOs were significantly more likely to have recently become inactive, while those with paid employees were significantly more likely to have remained active. Greece's solidarity initiatives may be particularly susceptible to sustainability issues, given that they are notable for their horizontal organisational structures and for their almost complete absence of paid staff (Kalogeraki, Papadaki, and Pera Ros 2018, 865). However, Italian social cooperatives also shared these characteristics when they first became prominent in the late 1970s, yet still managed to become institutionalised.

Loukakis et al. (2018, 851) suggest that resource availability is influential in determining whether horizontal organisations achieve sustainability. In the case of Italian social cooperatives, access to resources were gained primarily through agreements with the government that ensured funding in exchange for the delivery of services. The prospect of Greek solidarity initiatives following this same path seems slim, in no small part because of the receding scope of government social spending. Just as importantly though, Greece's solidarity initiatives are highly politicised and decidedly opposed to state-funding for fear of compromising their independence (Vathakou 2015, 173, 178). Protestation, awareness-building, and an anti-neoliberal agenda are at the core of their identity (Vathakou 2015, 172–74; Arampatzi 2018, 57; Rakopoulos 2014).

For Greek solidarity initiatives, following the example of the Italian social cooperatives in entering into service-delivery agreements with government would allow them to overcome some of the primary barriers to long-term sustainability that they face, such as lack of resources and an inability to pay their organisers. However, this would entail a compromise of their solidaristic values and transformative goals. For now, this does not seem like a trade-off that Greek solidarity initiatives will have the opportunity to make. Nonetheless, comparison between these two cases highlights a possible conceptual dilemma that solidarity initiatives face between politicisation and long-term sustainability.

## Conclusion

The potential for solidarity economies to mitigate the effects of economic crisis and austerity is both promising and, in some ways, problematic. Given the failure of electoral politics to reverse the trend of austerity and economic malaise, solidarity economies have emerged and grown as a means of coping with, resisting, and practicing alternatives to traditional, market-based means of production, distribution, and consumption. These initiatives further the principles of mutual aid, reciprocity, self-organisation, and deliberative democracy in meeting the needs and values of the communities in which they operate. In doing so, they promote the reorientation of the economy in social relations by placing production and consumption under the control of the communities in which they occur. This can have a potentially transformative effect on the way people engage with the provision of their basic needs, but also in how they relate to their neighbourhoods as an extended network of trust and reliance.

As this thesis has explained, there are substantial dissimilarities between the solidarity economies of Greece and Italy. In Greece, there is greater variety in the prominent types of initiatives; from those that address immediate needs such as collective kitchens, medical service providers, and essential-goods distribution networks, to those that experiment with new methods of production and consumption such as time banks. On the whole though, solidarity initiatives in Greece are focussed on ameliorating the effects of the economic crisis by assisting those who have been affected most by the recession and by the cuts to welfare that have occurred under austerity. This is achieved primarily through the delivery of essential services and goods to people and groups most in need, such as the homeless and the unemployed (especially the youth), as well as those who have limited access to the welfare system, such as those in informal employment and undocumented immigrants (Cabot 2016, 157). While Greek solidarity initiatives are often explicitly political, both in their vocal opposition to neoliberal

politics and in their implementation of ideational methods of organising and decision-making, underlying this political outlook is a more fundamental commitment to addressing issues of material need.

In Italy, solidarity initiatives are widespread but the range of different types of initiatives is limited almost exclusively to Solidarity Purchase Groups (SPGs). While these organisations have continued to grow during the economic crisis, few of them report being motivated to act due to the effects of the crisis or austerity. The same is true of their beneficiaries, who are primarily motivated by the desire to consume healthier foods, form stronger community ties, and promote alternative means of consumption. While access to cheaper produce is a factor for many participants, most belong to the middle class and are employed in the formal sector rather than belonging to the most precarious and disadvantaged groups of society who were most severely affected by the crisis. Like Greece's solidarity initiatives, Italy's SPGs engage in prefigurative type of political action through their use of horizontal organisation and decision-making structures. But unlike Greek solidarity initiatives, both their methods and outcomes are oriented towards post-material values. Italian SPGs use ideational practices that emphasis participation and deliberative democracy in pursuit of post-material values such as community empowerment, environmental sustainability, and ethical consumerism.

In comparing the aims, practices, outcomes, and typical beneficiaries of the Italian and Greek solidarity economies, this thesis has highlighted the divide between material and post-material outcomes that exists between the two cases. It has also explored four major factors that are most probable to have caused this difference. The first factor was the severity of the economic crisis, which was greater in Greece than in Italy. The second factor, which was deeply interrelated with the first, was the extent of welfare retrenchment that occurred under austerity, which, again, was greater in Greece than in Italy. These two factors caused more

extensive material deprivation in Greece, thus requiring more attention from solidarity initiatives in the delivery of essential goods and services. However, a somewhat surprising finding was that Italy's population of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion grew by an exceptionally large amount, almost matching the increase in Greece and far exceeding the average throughout the European Union. Yet, despite this, solidarity initiatives in Italy are far less oriented towards meeting basic material needs than in other less-affected countries such as Germany and Sweden.

The final two factors, which may help in explaining this peculiarity, are the presence of an innovative social movement and the role of social cooperatives in the delivery of welfare services. There was no social movement in Italy equivalent to the Greek Indignados, from which the recent wave of Greek solidarity initiatives spread. Italy also has a long history of social cooperatives stretching back to the 1970s which have gradually been incorporated into the welfare system, potentially crowding out or lessening the need for solidarity initiatives to address material issues. Identifying these two factors and explaining their relationship with the operations of solidarity initiatives has been the primary contribution of this thesis. These two factors also point towards a potential dilemma that solidarity initiatives face between politicisation and long-term sustainability that is worthy of further research.

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