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## The Danish Welfare State and Transnational Solidarity in Times of Crisis

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### Introduction: Civil Society and the Welfare State in Denmark: Towards Confrontation?

Civil society and the state are often seen as competing in the provision of social welfare. States provide welfare through compulsory regimes with an emphasis on social control, thus establishing a hierarchical relationship between the providers of welfare and its recipients. Civil society

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organisations instead provide voluntary services that are meant to empower the recipients of welfare and emancipate them from the state. Civil society and civic spheres of solidarity action are in this sense distinguished by their attempts to escape from hierarchies and seek independence from the state. In this tradition, the private sector of civil society and the public sector of the state remain sharply distinguished (Cohen and Arato 1992; Trenz 2005). A civic sphere of society that is not elitist but participatory has historically developed in opposition to the state (Alexander 2006; Klein 2013). As such, it develops within existing state structures but also often builds transnational links and networks beyond the state (Lahusen and Grasso 2018; Liebert and Trenz 2011).

The Scandinavian model of the welfare state challenges such assumptions about the confrontation between state and civil society and their differentiation as two distinct spheres. Such a dichotomy between civil society autonomy against state authoritarianism has never applied in the Scandinavian context (Esping-Andersen 1985; Hort 2014; Trägårdh 2007). The Scandinavian countries did not simply develop as welfare states but as welfare societies (Rodger and Campling 2000). As such, they institutionalised welfare services and programmes that became embedded in the civic sphere. The Scandinavian countries are, in fact, exemplary of an alternative, Polanyian reading of state–civil society relationships based on embedment with both the state and civil society organisations embracing a notion of the good society to be protected from the damaging effects of capitalism (Caporaso and Tarrow 2008; Polanyi 1997). In this tradition, state and civil society can be said to form a totality (Berg and Edquist 2017). Arguably, such strong alliances between civil society and national welfare states would reduce incentives for civil society actors to engage in European and transnational networking. More recently, however, the European Commission is in search of a new type of alliance between state and civil society, as well as at member state level with the adoption of a New Public Management Approach and the decentralised governance of

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welfare in cooperation with social partners (Christensen and Læg Reid 1999; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004).

However, this embedment and collaboration of the state and the civil society was challenged by the welfare retrenchment and the structural reform in 2007 and civil society began to be at odds with the state. Compared to Southern and Eastern European countries, Denmark and other Nordic countries have been less hit by the 2008 financial crisis. The Danish economy performed well with some stagnation in the initial crisis years, but it witnessed immediate recovery and generally low rates of unemployment (6.3% as compared to 7.7% in Sweden and 9.3 in Finland in April 2015).<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, prior to the financial crisis, in 2007, Denmark went through a structural reform of the local government system with significant changes and overall cuts in the distribution of welfare. Mailand (2014) draws attention to the fact that it is difficult to separate the effects of the financial crisis, austerity measures and those of the structural reform in 2007. As an outcome of the 2007 structural reform, 273 municipalities were merged into 98, and 14 counties were reduced to 5 regions. The reform aimed to 'create economies of scale and improve welfare services' (Mailand 2014: 420). This increased the responsibility and the budget for the municipalities with regard to education (schools and day care) and care for the elderly, disabled, children and youth (Mailand 2014: 420). This restructuring, followed by cuts to welfare benefits, increased competition among civil society organisations for funding.

Furthermore, Danish civil society has a hybrid structure, where municipalities work together with civil societies (Fehsenfeld and Levinsen 2019). For instance, municipalities are in charge of welcoming, accommodating and integrating refugees to the Danish society and labour market. Nonetheless, they collaborate with civil society organisations in pursuing their duty and responsibility. Especially during the peak of refugee arrivals in 2015, many municipalities relied on collaboration with refugee civil society organisations and volunteers, ranging from welcoming them, providing basic needs and helping with their registration to

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<sup>1</sup>As of April 2015. See [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Unemployment\\_rates,\\_seasonally\\_adjusted,\\_April\\_2015.png](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Unemployment_rates,_seasonally_adjusted,_April_2015.png)

providing Danish language classes. Another level of hybridity occurs, when civil society organisations provide services as well as advocacy in the sense that they aim to protect the social rights and well-being of the refugees (Fehsenfeld and Levinsen 2019). This kind of hybridity has two challenges: First, the cooperation with local governments with civil society can imply that the government intervenes in the civil societies' actions and hence controls them. Secondly, this can increase the tension between government and civil society, when these organisations play their role in advocacy and oppose the government in order to fight for the social rights of the refugees. Bearing in mind the challenges brought by the welfare retrenchment and cuts to the civil society (Boje 2015; Fehsenfeld and Levinsen 2019; Jensen 2015), we expect to observe more friction between the Danish civil society and the government.

In this chapter, we seek to answer: How were the Danish civil society sector and transnationally oriented grassroots solidarity mobilisation affected by the economic recession (post-2008) and welfare retrenchments and structural reform of the Danish welfare state? What are the challenges faced by the Danish civil society? Did welfare retrenchments and structural reform of the Danish welfare state reduce the scope of solidarity activism, or do we observe progressive ways to expand civil society solidarity activities paired with new initiatives, transnational aspirations and cooperation?

Hence, we focus only on small-scale transnational solidarity organisations (TSOs) that have a transnational dimension in the performance of solidarity (for instance, helping beneficiaries outside the nation, having transnational links, sponsors and partners, activities conducted in at least two countries), in the context of the TransSOL project<sup>2</sup> (see TransSOL 2016). Among the informal/grassroots TSOs selected for qualitative interviews, we approached (1) those who primarily offer practical help (either mutual support or charity) and (2) those who identify as part of a broader social movement, with the aim of social and political change. In order to grasp grassroots formations, mobilisations and new initiatives of solidarity, we aimed to find small-scale, informal, non-professional organisations; small NGOs; grassroots organisations/movements; activist groups and protest groups that are led by a few organisers and formed

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of non-paid workers and volunteers. We have interviewed 10 representatives (volunteer, organiser, head of the TSOs) from three fields of action—migration, unemployment and disabilities—adding to a total of 30 informants.<sup>3</sup>

## TSOs' Challenges to Welfare Retrenchment

Our respondents from grassroots organisations attributed cuts in welfare expenditure to domestic developments and decisions taken by national government and not to macroeconomic developments or effects of Europeanisation and the financial crisis. For them, there was a 'home-made [welfare] crisis' that was not linked to external events, but responsibilities were attributed domestically. While many of our respondents reported about the substantial financial cuts which the Danish welfare state has endured over the last decade, they did not relate these negative effects directly to the financial crisis. The challenges to the welfare retrenchment in Denmark therefore need to be discussed in the context of the liberalisation of markets and a new management approach of government, such as the structural reform. In order to understand the challenges our TSOs faced following welfare retrenchment, it will be useful to give a brief overview of the existing funding opportunities of the TSOs in our sample. Unions do not get any support from the government and are mainly funded by membership fees. Besides negotiating wages and working conditions, the trade unions also administer an unemployment fund and provide assistance for the unemployed to claim benefits. Contacts with relevant ministries are often used to prevent financial cuts in particular sectors (e.g., within the arts and the cultural sector). Some of the organisations in the migration field get funding from the municipalities to be able to execute their solidarity work. Nonetheless, the main aim of the protest groups in this field is to oppose the government, hence governmental support is out of the question. However, all the TSOs in the disability and health sector receive national state funding to some degree and collaborate with centres and specialised units of hospitals all over

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<sup>3</sup> For more information on sampling, see Introduction to this volume and <https://blogs.uni-siegen.de/transsol/files/2016/12/Integrated-Report-on-Reflective-Forms-of-Transnational-Solidarity.pdf>

Denmark. The disability field is the most dependent on public funding, and hence it was the most affected by the welfare retrenchment and structural reform:

The crisis has made it more difficult. And I say this because now people have begun to discuss the economy in relation to medicine [...] Before, this was not the case here in Denmark [...] I think this discussion is caused by the times we live in. (Disab5 09/2016).

They have become bureaucratic to apply for. Often you need to apply a very long time in advance. And the information you give has to be very precise. [...] Especially if you are a small patient organisation, you might feel that this is brutal. (Disab9 09/2016)

In Jöhncke's (2011) words, welfare has become 'workforce' in the sense that one needed to deserve the benefits and was pushed to work, which concerned all the fields. Active labour policies in the form of training and providing skills were aimed at the unemployed and the disabled to get back to work (Alves 2015; Møller and Stone 2013). The length of unemployment benefits was reduced from four years to two years (Mailand 2014). As an outcome of the public sector collective bargaining in 2011 and 2013, trade unions found themselves in more opposition with the state. Due to austerity measures, there was a freeze in wages in 2011 and a very low wage increase in 2012. As a part of the education reform, employers wanted to cease local agreements on schoolteachers' working hours and the ensuing government lockout of teachers without a prior call for strikes (Mailand 2014). Such government interventions challenged the power and autonomy of the trade unions. Our representatives from trade unions were highly sensitive towards the effects of the economic and financial crisis, which they relate to the neoliberal restructuring of the labour market and the more recent change of government. One of our informants articulated:

The government has changed their perspective in the ways they deal with unions. In the old days or many years ago, we had a cooperative system in Denmark where salary and so on were dealt with directly between the

employers' organisations and the workers' union and that has been the tradition in Denmark. But in the last ten or fifteen years, more and more stuff has been decided by the government or the Parliament. Not the salary itself, but a lot of stuff concerning the wellbeing of workers in their day to day work has been changed from being an issue between the unions and the organisations to an issue for the state or the government; that's a sectoral shift. [...] It could be issues about how many hours a week you should work or something, it could be issues about the benefits you get when you get pregnant and the rules concerning that. It is not like the laws have changed, but the incentives for the politicians to let these issues be dealt with by the unions are fewer now; they are more inclined to take the issues inside the government building and decide from there and they could make good or bad decisions and that is another issue. (Unemp7 10/2016)

For the small trade unions in our sample, the transformation of the Danish welfare state meant interferences in the autonomy of loan negotiations and even bans on strikes in particular sectors. Since 2008, the Danish government has also lowered the budget of the Danish regions, which has had indirect effects on loan negotiations in which regions as employers were involved. More frequent interferences by central government have been experienced by our respondents as major breaches in solidarity. In particular, the trade unions that represent public sector employees complained about the fact that the government was using its power to change legislation rather than playing its role as the employer in the collective bargaining with the trade unions. One of our trade union informants in the education sector recalled the 2013 lockout of teachers when the government and the public teachers' unions could not agree on the working hours; this disagreement ended in the government locking out primary and secondary schoolteachers for one month, without salary payment. Hence, we see that organisations in the unemployment sector are more and more in opposition to the state.

In the context of the so-called refugee crisis of 2015 and 2016, the number of refugees applying for asylum in Denmark was relatively low as compared to Germany and Sweden. Policies of deterrence by the Danish government, aimed at discouraging asylum seekers from applying for asylum in Denmark, has reduced asylum application numbers in the last

15 years (Gammeltoft-Hansen 2017). The number of asylum seekers in Denmark increased from 5115 in 2010 to 21,316 in 2016 but decreased again to 6266 in the following year.<sup>4</sup> The reason behind this jump in 2016 in Denmark is that in November 2015, Sweden introduced border controls at Copenhagen airport and blocked refugees from entering Sweden. Before these border controls were established, asylum seekers were mainly in transit to Denmark, with the aim of reaching Sweden, where the migration rules were much looser.

In order to accommodate the increasing number of refugees, more funds were allocated to TSOs in the migration field. This created more concern for the other fields, such as disability organisations:

We are highly concerned about the retrenchment of the development support [...] And the story about parts of this being relocated to refugees coming to Denmark ... I shake my head in disbelief. If you want to decrease the number of refugees in Denmark, then you should increase the support to where they come from. (Disab9 09/2016)

Nonetheless, civil society in the field of migration and refugees has been facing many challenges due to restrictions in migration policies, which have negatively affected the migrant situation, as well as asylum seekers and refugees living in Denmark. Waiting time for family reunification was extended from one year to seven years (Duru et al. 2018: 261). The controversial 'jewellery law' gives the police the right to search for and take valuables from the refugees in order to subsidise their stay in Denmark (Gammeltoft-Hansen 2017: 105). The rules for the acquisition of citizenship have also been tightened with new conditions imposed on applicants such as volunteering and community service, with studying not counting towards the years spent in Denmark in addition to the Danish language and citizenship tests. Danish language classes are no longer free. Gammeltoft-Hansen (2017) calls these policies 'deterrent policies' as they aim to discourage the refugees and migrants from coming and settling to Denmark. Following the 2008 crisis, the migrants'

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<sup>4</sup> Please refer to Danish Migration Agency for the statistics: <https://www.nyidanmark.dk/da/Tal-og-statistik/Tal-og-fakta>



unemployment rate was higher than that of the ethnic Danes, which was used by the politicians to justify welfare chauvinism. Since 2011, the government has become more restrictive towards the migrants and refugees regarding child, education and unemployment support (Jørgensen and Thomsen 2016). These restrictive and deterrent policy changes have put the TSOs in tension and opposition to the government. One informant, who helps Muslim women regarding their health and well-being, underlined that the benefit cuts have made the migrants poorer, but also the neoliberal approach of the government makes the rich richer, increasing overall vulnerability in Denmark. She says:

The poor women are poorer because they are not working. Some of them are now pensioners. They get very little money. You have to live 40 years in Denmark to get a pension. The politics now is for the rich people. Generally, it is not supporting people who suffer so much. You have many more problems now with the homeless and it is not just people who come from other countries, but also Danish people who become homeless. 'Oh you have no work? That is a pity! You can go on the street!' [As regards the migrant women], when you are sick, you need medicine and it costs money. It is expensive to be sick. (Migr5 08/2016)

Even though the information provided by our informant about the Danish pension system is factually incorrect, the underlying subjective perception is clear: That there is a decrease in governmental support for the vulnerable people, such as the sick, the elderly and the migrants.

Nonetheless, according to some of our respondents, the refugee crisis has brought a new momentum to the mobilisation of solidarity. Faced with the restrictions of the government, and the increasing number of refugees in need of help and guidance, more people have started volunteering in grassroots movements aimed at showing solidarity with refugees:

The 'refugee crisis', or whatever you want to call it, has [had the] impact [...] [that] [...] there have been more people and more volunteers, because I myself, would not have become a volunteer, you know, without hearing about these things and how we treat [immigrants]. I have always been opposed to the way we treat immigrants, but I have not known how to do [some]thing, or I have not been wired up enough to go out and find [some]thing to do. (Migr1 08/2016)

TSOs became activated in the sense that existing practical help organisations have expanded their activities and new organisations have been founded. Our TSO informants describe this as ‘an awakening of the Danish society’ and concur that many Danes have started to think ‘outside the box’. On the other hand, the informants who work with Muslim beneficiaries pointed out that the populist and anti-immigrant tone of the politicians and the dominant negative stereotyping of refugees in the media have brought threats to the Muslim population. This informant below draws attention to the rhetoric of the Danish People’s Party and adds that Danish people have forgotten about the contribution of the migrants to the Danish economy when they first came as guest workers in the 1970s:

Then we hear about people who make problems, and just get money from the social system. And now the rule is that it is very difficult to get any money. It is not as easy to live in Denmark as it was 30 years ago. The laws have tightened up. [...] There have been many politicians, who said: ‘They misused Denmark!’, there have been many parties, Danske Folke Parti has been very good since the nineties (at saying) ‘We have to stop this [migration] because they are eating all our bread. They are taking our countries. They have to go out. They are stealing from Denmark!’ Urgh. There are many people here who have done a lot of work for Denmark. This we forget. (Migr5 08/2016)

Some informants also mention that, despite the increase in volunteers and the practical support at the grassroots level, there is a huge lack of official support: The EU and Danish politicians should take responsibility and ‘the burden’ should be not only left to Greece and Italy but equally shared between all EU member states. One informant added that:

Denmark should have shown solidarity by helping more, for example, when we heard about all of those refugees drowning. I think Denmark and all other countries should have been much more eager to show that we can’t just accept just outside European borders; children, people are drowning in thousands! (Migr2 08/2016)

There is thus an awareness of the limited reach of their own grassroots solidarity actions in the form of charity and of the need to call for more sustainable state action, and the promotion of convivial solidarity at national, European and global levels.

To sum up, even though we argued in the introduction that civil society and the state are not strictly in opposition in Denmark, this ‘home-made crisis’ of welfare brought along a divide between the state and the civil society sector. We see more tension rising from the TSO representatives towards the government. With the increase in asylum seekers, a higher budget was allocated in the field of refugee solidarity, which allegedly had diminished expenditures in other fields (like disability). Thus, the reallocation of welfare services has posed remarkably different challenges for the three sectors of solidarity.

## **Types of Solidarity, Activities and Target Groups**

In the literature concerning solidarity, altruistic solidarity refers to inter-group solidarity, where one aims to benefit others by showing generosity, philanthropy and volunteering (Jeffries 2014). Altruistic solidarity stresses the difference between the helper and the one that is helped and implies that the helper/volunteer is separate/different from the ones that are helped, such as when an able-bodied person helps a disabled one. Solidarity can also take place in-group, and be mutual and reciprocal (Bruni 2008), where people within the group help themselves. In addition to these two types of solidarity, in our sample we have found another type: convivial solidarity (Duru 2020). Convivial solidarity is a collective work in order to fight for a common aim and to find solutions to a common concern in a non-communitarian way without separating/classifying people by ethnicity, religion, citizenship or nationality. People who show convivial solidarity do not categorise or hierarchise persons in need. Hence, in the situation of solidarity enactment, there is no separation or hierarchy between the refugees, asylum seekers and people who engage in solidarity activities. When there is a situation of tension or crisis (such as

a high number of incoming refugees), convivial solidarity aims to ‘solve’ the situation and show support by means of convivial practices. Crisis situations catalyse people’s engagement in convivial solidarity, which is performed by civil society organisations and citizens, with a normative aim for convivial living.

In our sample, we also paid attention to the scope of the TSOs’ support action. We categorised solidarity actions as (1) within the borders of the nation (e.g. ranging from local and regional to national) or (2) transnational (for instance, European, non-European and global). Table 8.1 shows these different types and scope of solidarity actions.

Among our respondents, the type of solidarity varies largely according to the sector and level of activity. A general finding from our interviews is that the more exclusive an organisation is, the more mutual and nationally focused its form of solidarity is. While most of the disability TSOs and unions offer mutual/in-group help, those who have more transnational activities across borders offer help for others. TSOs in the migration and refugee field lean more towards convivial solidarity. We have also found that it is sometimes difficult to separate giving practical help from having a political agenda. Restrictions in migration laws, relocation of funds and cuts in benefits have put the TSOs in more opposition to the government, and to have a political agenda. In this section, we first

**Table 8.1** Types of solidarity

Types of solidarity	Level of action	Domestic/national (DK)	Transnational
<b>Mutual/in-group</b>		Solidarity among those in need/self-support: people in need support each other domestically	Solidarity among those in need/self-support: people in need support each other across borders
<b>Helping others/ altruistic</b>		Providing services and/or goods to beneficiaries in need domestically	Providing services and/or goods to beneficiaries in need across borders
<b>Convivial</b>		Contextualised (in-group) justice: secure equality, redistribution and peaceful living together within a group or country	Global justice: embracing a notion of inclusive and non-discriminatory solidarity of humanity

explore the relationship between exclusivity of target groups and types of solidarity. Then we explain the difficulty of categorising/separating TSOs into those that offer political action and those that offer practical help, since in some cases, TSOs offering practical help showed some political engagement, for instance, by taking a pro-refugee stand against the anti-immigrant rhetoric of the government.

For instance, in our unemployment and disability sample, at the national level, the small trade unions and the patient organisations we interviewed offer mostly mutual solidarity and have exclusive target groups and beneficiaries, who mainly live in Denmark. The mutual solidarity actions of the small trade unions among our respondents focus mostly on supporting their members, who belong to one professional group. They protect the rights of the workers, negotiate agreements between employees and employers, provide courses to advance professions and create networks to help members find jobs. They also collaborate with *a-kasse* (an unemployment insurance fund), where most of the workers sign up and pay a monthly fee. In addition to the practical help in the form of mutual solidarity to members (e.g., networking to find jobs, training and legal aid), they also raise broader political issues of social justice and redistribution, mainly at the national level, and are policy-oriented. Hence, there is often no clear separation between practical help and political mobilisation in the case of trade unions and labour organisations.

In the field of disability and health, the focus is also clearly on mutual solidarity at domestic/national level, and convivial forms of solidarity are left to bigger established organisations, who work transnationally. Patient organisations (voluntary, non-profit organisations) have a clearly defined group of disabled people. The target group is narrowly defined and solidarity action is in-group specific and aimed at improving their living conditions and those of their close peers, comprising a few hundred people. At the domestic/national level, the beneficiaries are mainly defined as patients with a certain disability and their relatives in Denmark. The TSOs facilitate 'informal networks of citizens acting through ad-hoc entities or new social media' (Boje 2015: 33). Mainly, this entails face-to-face meetings (such as annual meetings and educational events) and digital communication on Facebook. A key aspect is also that of fundraising,

mainly through national state funds such as the aforementioned Activity and Disability Fund and private funds. Finally, these organisations play a vital role in helping members access public help and funds at local (municipal), regional and national levels. These actions are all rather established and formalised among the interviewed organisations. Sometimes, the definition of their beneficiaries stretches outside Denmark, and when it does, it is typically linked to that of Scandinavian or Nordic countries such as Iceland, the Faroe Islands or Greenland. These groups in the disability and health field do not recognise themselves as social movements with a political agenda. Their mobilising potential is low and mainly restricted to their in-group members who rely on volunteering under conditions of restricted budgets. Thus, political activism and convivial solidarity in the form of welfare services is left to bigger societies or foundations, such as The Danish Cancer Society and the AIDS Foundation. Nonetheless, we have also found out that TSOs in the disability and health fields, who engage in transnational solidarity across borders (such as in Sierra Leone, Senegal, Gambia, Uganda and Ghana) and provide goods and health services, have a hidden political agenda. For instance, they aim to improve the educational system, offer micro-loans and self-help to the disabled and challenge the system in these developing countries.

The migrant and refugee organisations in Denmark generally go beyond mutual and altruistic solidarity action and define their beneficiaries in broader terms: ‘refugees and asylum seekers’, ‘migrants’, ‘women’ and ‘migrant women’. Many of them embrace the notion of convivial solidarity that is combined with political action. Among our respondents, many of the organisations represent practical help organisations at local level providing goods and services to refugees and migrants (for instance, Danish lessons, health classes, legal advice and social hangouts). Nonetheless, it is also common among these groups to raise issues of convivial solidarity (social justice), being politically active in opposing the Danish government’s restrictive asylum policies, aiming to improve the living conditions of asylum seekers in Denmark and raising awareness among the Danish population concerning these issues.

Many TSOs in the field of migration embrace the notion of domestically contextualised convivial solidarity. Their aim is to support the

integration of immigrants into Danish society and to prevent ethnic segregation and marginalisation. For instance, a Muslim youth organisation, active at the national level, at first sight seems to provide only mutual support for members of the Muslim community (e.g., by aiming to build the confidence of young Muslims and encouraging them to lead their lives according to Islam). However, when we look more closely at their activities, they also support convivial solidarity and engage, for instance, in actions to promote dialogue and a better understanding between ethnic Danes and Muslim Danes. These organisations are neither multiculturalist nor assimilationist. Their secondary aim is to establish a more tolerant and open society where people from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds can live together and support each other. One inter-religious support group said the main aim of the organisation is:

To create harmony between different religions, to show the average people that we are not enemies, that the strong ethics in one religion applies also to the others, because there is so much hate speech in Denmark, especially towards Muslims. (Migr8 09/2016)

The beneficiary of their support action would not only be migrants and refugees but the Danish society as a whole. They aim to be inclusive of anyone who is a newcomer and see the Danes, migrants and refugees as forming a unified community, where helping one person means helping the whole society.

## **What Is Lacking? Let's Find a Solution and Reach More People**

We sought to explore innovative practices and/or new ways of approaching the challenges that the TSOs' target groups/beneficiaries face regarding the cuts and restrictions in the three fields. In order to do this, we asked our informants whether they applied any innovative solutions. Some of our interviewees did not perceive their action as innovative in the sense that they have continued working in the same way and have not attempted anything radically different or new in comparison to their own

practices and those of other organisations. For instance, one political social movement that supports asylum seekers stated that what they do is not new, but they prioritised their political fight. For this organisation, being political and challenging the government regarding the restrictive migration rules and conditions of asylum centres is at the forefront, in contrast to other civic initiatives that offer practical help, food and clothes.

In all three fields, those who have considered their action as innovative explained that what they consider as innovative practices were (1) a new tool or approach to compensate for what is lacking in the system (or society), (2) use of digital technology and social media for better communication, and/or to reach more people to create awareness and inform the public, (3) a new way to be inclusive towards the vulnerable, disadvantaged or voiceless groups and if possible to help make these innovations ingrained in the system to ensure its continuity.

These three innovative ways mostly go hand in hand with each other. For instance, once they find what is lacking in the system, they find a new technological tool or use the internet and/or the most appropriate digital platform that may ensure a wider reach. In the field of migration and refugee support, for example, one innovation was to form an online archive for the refugees, for asylum seekers and also for people who work in this field, such as journalists, academics and politicians, in order to understand the Danish system of migration, asylum and citizenship rules. This online archive addresses a specific deficit (people do not understand the asylum system in Denmark) and finds a digital solution (online archive) with the aim to reach a wider target group (asylum seekers, refugees who want to come to Denmark, those who are already in Denmark and the general public). The founder said:

I quickly found out that most refugees and asylum seekers, and even Danes, don't understand the system at all. It is really complicated and it is made complicated on purpose actually, I think. It could be much easier to understand, and it could be used much more simply; it is so complicated that nobody understands it. Actually I found out that only a few lawyers really understand it, (laughs) not even the politicians understand what they vote for or against sometimes, so I just decided to find out how things were



working, to understand the system. I am not a lawyer so I want to do it from the outside. I managed! As I found it on my own, it was easier for me to explain it to other people. [...] I try to inform the Danish public about how complex the situation is, trying to make them understand that our laws are very cynical and not working as they should in many ways, and also trying to make the public understand that the refugees are not here for fun. It is not a choice they made, it is not something they do to make something out of it. They are just desperate and it is their only option. So I am trying to spread information to refugees themselves about their own situation, to help them out and I'm trying to make things more understandable for the public, and among the people who work with this in many ways, like politicians and journalists, to make them understand that it is not working as it should, and we could make it much better and things are really not fair as they are. (Migr3 08/2016)

In the field of disability and health, we mention the example of a 'Conversation Tool' developed by a patient organisation in response to a demand for improving communication between the patient groups and the health system. The tool is meant to be used at hospitals all over Denmark—and for all kinds of people with different disabilities:

During the past two years, we have developed a conversation tool. This helps patients and their relatives to talk about emotionally difficult subjects. [...] And we have tested it with health care professionals, as well. We believe it can be used by everyone who has been affected by a serious disease. (Disab1 08/2016)

Once the TSOs find out what is lacking and create a solution, they then aim for it to be integrated into the system and to secure its continuity. In the disability and health sector, such innovations can range from building and operating a hospital and providing health education to providing charity and raising awareness, providing vaccines, bikes and electronic equipment, as well as help-to-self-help—more specifically, micro-loans—to small farmers. Innovative action typically originates from within the organisation. It can encompass one-time initiatives and events, such as study trips and fundraising campaigns, but can also demand the development of long-term tools and permanent innovations. As an example of

the latter, one organisation decided that the obvious lack of native health personnel (experienced first-hand by volunteers working in Sierra Leone) demanded that they moved on from 'just' building and operating a hospital to founding a school with three different educational programmes.

Another new approach from the TSOs includes the aim of reaching a wider audience, which includes the use of social media and the internet to help their aims. One union launched a campaign to fight for higher salaries for the workers in the private sector, who are paid less than public sector workers, reaching 2 million hits on Facebook in support of their cause. These projects and campaigns are perceived as providing new solutions to their ongoing issues, bringing a new outlook and reaching a wider audience. Besides the unions, we found one social movement among our respondents that claimed to be a fundamentally new initiative. They do not target companies, supermarkets or institutions in the form of boycotts; instead, they aim to educate the general public about how to avoid food waste. They aim not only for a sustainable environment but also to fight world famine:

Due to our work within the last five years, the national waste in Denmark has been reduced by 25%. [...] We are not an organisation that point fingers. Lots of environmental organisations go against the industry, against the supermarkets, they point fingers. Our approach is collaboration. [...] We inspire the industry, and supermarkets, and restaurants, and canteens and consumers to stop wasting food. (Unemp9 09/2016)

The final way of being innovative is trying to be more inclusive of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups as target groups and beneficiaries. Below, we describe examples from all the three fields to show which kinds of new targets they include in their actions and how. One union in the arts' sector has launched a diversity project to reach a more diverse audience and be inclusive towards the lower class, the unemployed and migrants. The informant from the union wrote and directed a play about the residents of a building in a poor area of Copenhagen, where people from different classes and sociocultural backgrounds tell their stories. In the field of migration, a solidarity group for female artists and musicians expanded their beneficiaries to reach out to any women (not only musicians and

artists) who live in deprived areas. They help them to open their own business in Denmark and abroad. According to them, women have not been given the space and opportunity to have their voices heard; hence the organisation has provided these opportunities to its beneficiaries. Another inter-religious harmony group states that existing groups who encourage dialogue between religions are usually bi-communal such as Muslims-Christians or Jewish-Muslims. They distinguish themselves therefore as the only group that brings five religions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and Sikhism) together, with all five represented on the board. According to its representative, solidarity was confined to two groups/religious communities before they were founded. Thus, they have aimed for better inclusion and have opened up a dialogue between people of different religions. This helps them to fight the anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim rhetoric embedded in the political rhetoric.

## **National and Transnational Cooperation, Links and Networks**

Most of the small organisations we interviewed would find it desirable to engage in transnational action but lack the means and the opportunities to do so. The idea of transnational solidarity is generally supported ideologically, for instance, by opposing military action all over the world. A good example of this combination between local and transnational action is an artist and musician solidarity initiative, which also aims to provide financial security and secure human rights for deprived women both in Denmark and in third-world countries. They do this by helping them to make a living (for instance, by opening their own shops), as well as supporting their artistic freedom (such as supporting female performing artists in various parts of the world). In all three fields, national cooperation takes priority. Transnational cooperation takes place either in the form of being a member of a transnational umbrella organisation (e.g., EU or Nordic), by having beneficiaries residing across borders, or having informal links to other countries and exchanging ideas. Nordic and

Scandinavian cooperation is seen to be one of the most common transnational linkages and networks.

While cooperation and networking at the domestic level is often stronger and institutionalised for migration organisations, the existing transnational solidarity cooperation is more informal, in the form of exchange of information and sharing ideas. For example, a Muslim youth organisation is also in touch with other Muslim organisations in the UK and the US. This enables them to learn about best practices in other countries and find solutions to the challenges that Muslim communities face. Another refugee organisation follows changes in the German and Swedish laws regarding asylum, and how refugee/asylum organisations cope with these. If similar law changes occur in Denmark, they can make note of how German and Swedish refugee organisations dealt with these changes and can get better prepared when they face similar challenges in Denmark.

For the organisations that mainly support those living in Denmark (a patient organisation, a small trade union), transnational cooperation has an optional and secondary function and they mostly collaborate with Nordic partners. National cooperation includes related sister organisations and larger umbrella organisations. The small unions we interviewed also prioritise domestic cooperation with other unions and are members of Danish umbrella organisations. However, most of them are also members of a Nordic network or umbrella organisation. After national cooperation, Nordic cooperation is the most important. Some are also members of an EU professional umbrella organisation and some, of an international umbrella. In most cases, they value this international connection as inspirational in terms of exchanging ideas, keeping up to date with what others are doing and taking good practice back home to Denmark. They do so in yearly or bi-annual meetings, where they visit partner or umbrella organisations abroad. Unlike migrant and refugee organisations, almost all the beneficiaries of trade union solidarity live in Denmark. Some provide assistance to Danish foreign workers in other Nordic countries and workers from the Nordic Region who come to work in Denmark, and very few offer services to workers of the same profession in developing countries outside of Europe (e.g., running an education programme for workers in Kirgizstan).

For organisations whose beneficiaries live abroad (building a hospital in an African country, a labour organisation that fights for better conditions of workers in developing countries), transnational cooperation becomes a mandatory and primary function. At the transnational level, the collaborators are often organisations that work in the same geographical area. This can be both one-person grassroots or larger charity organisations. However, the main collaborator is typically an NGO located in the area where their solidarity work is carried out. According to one of our informants, this cooperation is necessary and creates invaluable friendships and strong bonds. However, it can also be very challenging, for instance, when Danish activists are confronted with problems of local corruption, which might result in fraud, theft and a variety of irregularities. For example, one informant mentions this as a structural problem in many parts of Africa, where the system is seen as corrupt. Still, the main point is that the transnational work in this category is embedded in the very purpose of the organisations: to help challenged people outside Denmark. Thus, transnationalism must be viewed as a defining factor here and a matter of principle, rather than a secondary addition.

In all three fields, when it comes to EU collaboration, TSO informants complained that the complicated access to EU funding is a major hindrance. One disability organisation representative said:

We have not applied for EU funds. Partly because we haven't even discussed it, but also due to the fact that it is something that demands a high degree of expertise. To be able to get it, we would have to employ a professional fundraiser. (Disab9 09/2016)

Some union representatives and migration TSOs also mentioned that it is very hard to get EU funding. And even though you might get it, there are many obligations in terms of how to use the funding and what to deliver in return. Nonetheless, most of the unions recognise that the EU legal and institutional framework is very important for the protection of workers' rights, even though the EU has very little significance in their daily work.

For the disability sector, the level of involvement in European transnational networks can be said to be rather formalised and—in most

cases—to be of high importance for the TSOs. It takes different forms in that they are often members of both a trans-Scandinavian, trans-European (typically EURORDIS, a European umbrella for rare diseases) and a global cooperation. For example, one patient organisation has entered both an informal cooperation with a Swedish sister association and a formalised cooperation with a European umbrella organisation. The purpose of being part of the latter is described as following:

We compare ourselves and exchange knowledge with associations in other EU countries [...] What to do—and not do. (Disab2 09/2016)

Thus, this kind of cooperation provides the organisation with the possibility of knowledge and experience-sharing across borders, and it also functions as a European lobbyist organisation. Being a member of this umbrella organisation has provided the organisation quoted above with the possibility of meeting face to face with EU legislatives in workshops and discussions in Brussels.

A general finding of our interviews is that if the small TSOs are not politically active or cannot expand their actions across borders due to limited funds, then they leave the social justice agenda, political initiatives and transnational linkages and collaboration to higher-level (Nordic, European or International) umbrella organisations, of which they are members.

## Conclusion

How were the Danish civil society sector and grassroots solidarity mobilisation affected by the economic recession in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis and by the welfare retrenchment in Denmark? Our interviews with the small TSOs confirmed that the effects of the financial crisis, austerity measures and the so-called refugee crisis are not easy to separate from the structural changes and welfare retrenchment in the Danish system. Many of our informants articulated that the challenges faced were due to the neoliberal restructuring of the labour market, the structural reform, and the anti-migrant rhetoric of the current

government rather than to external factors, such as the financial crisis in 2008. These recent changes in the welfare state have nevertheless been experienced as dramatic as they have loosened the traditionally close ties between Danish civil society and municipalities in providing welfare services, especially in the disability sector, but partially in other sectors, too. The voluntary sector has in this sense become more political, not only providing services to affected groups but increasingly seeking to defend their social rights, and entering into conflict with the government.

In terms of solidarity actions, we have come across three types of solidarity (1) mutual/in-group, (2) helping others and (3) convivial solidarity. The more exclusive the TSOs are (in terms of target groups), the more they tend to lean towards mutual and in-group solidarity. Facing the challenges of the restructuring of the Danish welfare state as described above, many of these small TSOs feel the need to expand solidarity action beyond their narrowly defined target groups, but they often lack the resources and capacities to do so. While most of the disability and unions offer mutual/in-group help, those who engage in more transnational activities across borders offer help for others. TSOs in the migration and refugee fields lean more towards convivial solidarity. It was also difficult in some cases to separate the TSOs into those who offer practical help and those who define themselves more in terms of a political movement. For instance, small trade unions offered practical help and had a political agenda. Those TSOs that primarily focused on providing mutual assistance and welfare services could still have hidden political agendas or ideologies in their own way to promote social justice and redistribution across borders. Examples of such hidden political messages could be found, in particular, in the refugee help sector with a focus on providing local services that cannot be detached from commenting on the political situation at national or European/transnational levels. Other examples refer to engagement in international aid by disability and health organisations that provided humanitarian assistance across borders (hospital construction in developing countries) and became, at the same time, involved in the formulation of developmental policies. We thus observe that the divide between service and policy orientation within the civil society sector (Baglioni 2001; Giugni 2001) has been weakened in Denmark in recent years.

All in all, the TSOs wanted to expand their reach, whether by targeting beneficiaries across borders or by having a transnational impact when it comes to political activism. However, due to limited funding (as they are small scale), in many cases their solidarity action was performed inside the Danish borders. In these cases, a division of work applies within the civil society solidarity sector: Danish TSOs might prefer to focus on local solidarity activism, but they still maintain formal and informal links to Nordic, European and/or international umbrellas. Convivial solidarity might in this sense not be practised directly, but it is still embraced in the way more political and transnational forms of solidarity are delegated to these transnational umbrellas.

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