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SOLIDARITY, CARE AND DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

PATHWAYS TO
DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION AND
DECISION-MAKING



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Solidarity, care and deliberative democracy: Pathways to democratic participation and decision-making

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1

INTRODUCTION

We live in a world that is markedly characterised by increasing polarisation, economic inequality and a growing sense of disillusionment with the traditional or ‘classical’ institutions of representative democracies (Elstub & McLaverty, 2014, p. 1). Communities across virtually the entire world are facing complex problems, ranging from climate change to widening wealth gaps and the (in)accessibility of social measures intended for the most vulnerable individuals and communities. The political environments of liberal democracies often neglect, or under the dictates of capital struggle to provide, inclusive solutions and decision-making processes. All this calls for a rethinking of how, within these current constellations, to conceive of cooperation, mutual solidarity and mutual care at the individual level, and how, as communities of varying scales and at different levels, we can actually reach certain decisions through deliberation that will have greater legitimacy than those emerging from the dominant political processes of contemporary liberal regimes.

As we suggest in the first paragraph, in this textbook we wish to focus on three interrelated concepts, namely solidarity, care and deliberative democracy. In the context of the situation just described, which calls for a re-examination of the political foundations and forms of cooperation and decision-making, the aim of this work is, for the most part, modest: our starting point is that, through insight and critical reflection on these central concepts, we respond to the

specific need to consider pathways and practices of cooperation within social relations and circumstances in which social and political rifts, divergences and divisions are becoming increasingly evident. In doing so, we fundamentally wish to frame the textbook as a specific dialogue between theoretical considerations and practices; yet, in a theoretical sense, we do not proceed from a single perspective; rather, we aim to offer an insight into and integration of the multiple intellectual traditions that have addressed the central themes of this work. The aim is to illustrate and examine what solutions, practices, mechanisms and modes of collective action emerge, or what potential they hold, insofar as we conceive of solidarity, care and deliberative democracy through their mutual (productive) relationship. In a certain sense, this textbook is an attempt to subvert existing dominant approaches in political science to the question of participation, as, through three central concepts, it seeks ways of specifically conceptualising participation not as a procedural and mechanical (*policy*) matter, but also aims to open up a reflection on the practical implications of everyday forms and acts of solidarity and care-oriented actions for the collective. When such an ethic, at the level of the individual and the collective, is linked to well-conceived and planned deliberative practices, this framework opens up possibilities for alternative considerations and materialisations of participation and collective decision-making, which is also one of the key broad thematic areas in political science (Congleton et al., 2018; Hodgkinson & Starbuck, 2008).

This raises the question of how political science approaches solidarity, care and deliberative democracy. The latter, in particular, has long been the subject of intensive reflection (Bächtiger et al., 2018); however, on the other hand, it can be argued that the practical dimension of these concepts must necessarily be addressed critically on an ongoing basis; this is both meaningful and necessary because, through the relationship between experience (the level of practice) and reflection, we can also understand the relationships, the ‘connections’ between people in contemporary democracies, through the prism of

power relations and relations of authority (Mansbridge, 2014, p. 117). Furthermore, the textbook is intended specifically for students of political science courses that deal with participation and (collective) decision-making processes, including through practical dimensions; therefore, the articulation of concepts is designed to strengthen an understanding of the interconnectedness and interweaving of ideas and their implementation through collective projects. We thus follow the idea of reflecting on conceptual debates and defining key concepts and their direct manifestations through mechanisms, tools and practices, where we encounter diverse interests, limited resources and (often) conflicting values. Although the primary focus of reflection throughout the work is, of course, primarily on political science, we nevertheless seek connections with other disciplines, as all concepts (solidarity, care, deliberative democracy) are always articulated within various fields of knowledge/scientific disciplines (see Curato et al., 2018), whilst at the same time, as supporting literature for more practically oriented study modules, the textbook necessarily draws upon or stems from inter/multidisciplinarity (see Kim, 2020).

One of the central reasons for this work is also the relatively clear need for reflection on existing and potential political cultures of cooperation, political communication and decision-making. By referring to 'potential', we indicate the specific normativity of our approach, which is not in itself problematic within the sciences. As Appadurai states (in Curato et al., 2018, p. 25), deliberative democracy, for example, is normative at its very core; it is a political aspiration, and this is meaningful because it serves as a guiding ideal, through which we can reflect on where and in what ways existing democracies are deficient and what possible alternatives exist. It thus serves a navigational purpose, as aspirations provide citizens with a basis for reflection on the direction in which they can collectively plan their future. In this context, the textbook also sets out to establish an analytical framework for reflecting on approaches that emphasise solidarity, care and deliberative practices as diverse yet often interconnected or intertwined ways of fostering

greater trust in collective processes and enabling citizens to influence policies more effectively and concretely. In doing so, we aim to address such perspectives, which do not all presuppose (complete) harmony or broad consensus within the political sphere, but rather recognise conflicts and disagreements as an integral part of plural societies (Mouffe, 1999; Saward, 2018). Deliberative structures that incorporate elements of empathy and mutual respect can, for example, help to reframe contentious issues as a basis for shared thinking, exploration and problem-solving.

In this work, one of the central guiding questions that helps us understand the roles of solidarity and care in various political communities is; we reiterate that both concepts are not merely abstract virtues, but also possess performative power – in other words, they influence and determine how individuals and groups perceive their mutual relationships and responsibilities. In political communities, these concepts shape everyday interactions, which can range from local initiatives to broader political debates relevant in a specific local context, at the national level, or even at the supranational level (Fischer, 2003). At the same time, we do not wish merely to explore the contemporary components of solidarity and care, but to offer a (brief) insight into historical interpretations of both concepts, as these provide us with an understanding of how they emerged within various cultural, social, philosophical and/or scientific contexts. In this sense, we also raise questions about how changing economic systems, social norms and institutional frameworks have, over time, reshaped solidarity and care.

The next broad question, which serves as the starting point for this work, is how deliberative democracy, as a theoretical field and as a set of heterogeneous practices, transforms political processes in decision-making contexts. Deliberative democracy fundamentally assumes that the legitimacy of political decisions does not stem solely from the conduct of classical (conventional) political processes and the exercise of the right to vote, but also through the search for solutions to various socio-political problems, namely through discussion, where

all parties can express their vision, their perspective, interests and solutions. At its very core, therefore, deliberative democracy aims to involve all those whom the decisions actually affect, and to ensure that different viewpoints are weighed up and examined against common criteria of justice, empathy and practicality (Curato et al., 2017). In practice, mechanisms such as citizens' assemblies, participatory budgeting and public forums offer concrete ways of implementing deliberation (Curato et al., 2021). Of course, this does not mean that deliberative practices, in their implementation, actually fully enable the realisation of, for example, transparency and justice, which is also one of the central criticisms that must be recognised (Mouffe, 1999; Hauptmann, 2001; Mansbridge, 2007). Our focus will therefore be on demonstrating at least certain elements of how deliberative processes can stimulate the functioning and engagement of local communities, the civil society sphere, etc., reduce polarisation and increase people's trust in democratic practices themselves. Deliberative democracy, as we noted in the introduction, is not without its challenges – logistical, methodological and political – but it represents an alternative to models that are rooted in and support antagonisms (Fedorchenko-Kutuev & Kiryukhin, 2023) and structurally perpetuate inequalities (Vázquez-Arroyo, 2008).

Now that we have clarified the key issues that will be the subject of our reflection, we turn our attention to outlining our approach to solidarity, care and deliberative democracy. Although we will address different dimensions in individual chapters, here we offer a general outline not so much of our understanding (which would limit the scope for broader reflection), but rather of our approach to these interrelated concepts. Our analysis will, at least implicitly, but also quite directly, focus on questions of power dynamics that determine how solidarity is expressed, how care is articulated and materialised, and how democratic deliberation develops in various contexts.

Essentially, we will consider solidarity in the broadest sense as a concept denoting unity and mutual support that binds individuals or groups together. This involves considering how and in what way

this connection (usually) stems from shared interests, shared values or collective goals, which form the basis for cooperative empathy and action (Hunt-Hendrix & Taylor, 2024). Of course, it is essential to consider how solidarity is shaped by its historical dynamics. Historically speaking, the concept of solidarity has become significant in social movements and philosophical traditions that have championed common goals, such as workers' rights, civil liberties or certain moral imperatives (Stjernø, 2005; Hunt-Hendrix & Taylor, 2024). Its manifestation, application and form are not limited to a single level; it operates at various levels, ranging from interpersonal relationships in small communities to broader alliances formed at the national or even global level, which highlights its significance in diverse social and political contexts (Wilde, 2013; Wildt, 1999). Although solidarity frequently appears in public and academic discourse, as we shall demonstrate, it is not a monolithic concept. Its meaning can vary significantly depending on the context; even at first glance, we can see that, for example, for some it is primarily a specific form of collective emotion, whilst for others it may represent a much more explicit strategic basis for action, thereby taking on a more active, political dimension linked to collective practices, often focused on and aimed at addressing social inequalities and injustices. Above all, this aspect of solidarity's openness as a foundation for cooperation and the search for solutions in terms of addressing existing perceived and actual problems will be one of the key orientations of our approach.

Much like solidarity, the same can be said of the concept of care. Care is strongly linked to an individual's identity, which manifests itself in social interactions and relationships; it significantly determines how individuals perceive themselves and are perceived in the private and public spheres (Phillips, 2007, p. 1). At the same time, care is often described as an ambiguous and somewhat 'vague' concept, which we frequently take for granted in everyday life (Phillips, 2007, p. 1). Furthermore, we can highlight that ways of understanding and experiencing care are not seen as static, but as conditioned by time and space; they evolve over time (Weicht, 2015), whilst at the

same time varying significantly depending on factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, health, social status and the cultural context of all those involved in caregiving practices and relationships (Bowlby et al., 2010).

Within the framework of our approach, we will consider care in much broader terms than merely personality traits and attitudes towards others, or as specific forms of kindness and ‘duties’ towards the family, although it can encompass these aspects as well. As Phillips (2007, p. 16) writes, care must also be understood as a fundamental relational stance at the individual and collective levels, which focuses on prioritising the well-being of others, not necessarily just people. In this way, care co-determines and constitutes our positions as subjects, which are, for example, grounded both in the ideas of empathy and compassion, and simultaneously in structures at the institutional level, manifested in procedural forms such as social services and social welfare programmes. This dual nature will also be at the heart of our approach to the concept, as the dichotomies (e.g. formal and informal care, individual and collective care, non-institutionalised, institutionalised, paid and unpaid) are what we will examine in relation to this concept, whilst also seeking its political dimensions in terms of forms of social and political participation. Although care is often associated with the private sphere, it has crucial implications for the organisation of society as a whole. In this context, for example, (social) policies that are not at least partly grounded in the ethics of care can be identified as those in which there is a risk and a tendency to marginalise vulnerable population groups and to reinforce systemic injustices. Conversely, decision-making based on care principles can potentially influence, for example, (better) working conditions and community interventions, thereby actively promoting social inclusion and equality. In short, in this handbook we will reflect on care as a fundamental concept which, particularly when ‘aligned’ with solidarity, transform community bonds and go beyond mechanistic political approaches centred and grounded almost exclusively on the interplay or negotiation of interests and economic logic.

Let us now turn to our conceptual approach to deliberative democracy. Deliberative democracy is an important concept in contemporary political theory, which has been the subject of much debate in recent decades (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). Its central normative premise is that collective decision-making processes should, in essence, be ‘conversation-oriented’ and should therefore focus on reasoned public discussion, rather than exclusively on ‘voting’ mechanisms that aggregate pre-existing preferences: ‘Collective decisions should not be a mere aggregation of individuals’ preferences, but should emerge from informed public discussion and debate’ (Elstub & McLaverty, 2014, p. 2). At its core, deliberation stems from an orientation towards enabling the realisation of collective decisions by those bound by them, through the use of reasoned arguments. To begin with, we will consider deliberative democracy through some key characteristics that define or characterise this model of the democratic search for political legitimacy (of adopted decisions and actions). Deliberative democracy involves (more or less strictly) a requirement to present arguments for a particular opinion or substantive position, whereby the justifications for decisions ideally refer to principles that can be mutually accepted by individuals striving for fair conditions of participation. At the same time, these solutions and measures must be designed in a way that is accessible and, above all, of course, for the benefit of the citizens to whom they apply. In this context, deliberation is conceived as a dynamic and iterative process that enables ongoing dialogue, a critical re-evaluation of previous decisions, and the possibility of revision based on this critique (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004, pp. 3–7). At the same time, it is crucial to emphasise that, whilst recognising these characteristics and the theoretical merits of deliberative ideals, the approach in this handbook maintains a critical and reflective stance. We do not accept deliberative democracy uncritically; rather, our main aim is to weigh up, assess and question its premises and practical functioning, particularly with regard to entrenched power relations and potential exclusions (e.g. of different sections of society, subjectivities, etc.). The key aim is to understand its possibilities and limitations, particularly

in the context of discussion and in connection with the concepts of solidarity and care, whilst seeking to conceive of it as a specific instance and form of political (co-)decision-making.

With the conceptual framework outlined above, we have indicated that the central aim of this textbook is not merely to examine the concepts of solidarity, care and deliberative democracy in isolation, but also to demonstrate the extent to which they are intertwined and interconnected. A key premise is that the concepts (and their forms of materialisation) of solidarity and care significantly influence deliberative democracy, as they can potentially shape the nature and quality of the deliberative process itself. In this sense, we assume that when participants engage in debate on the basis of commitments to mutual support (as a form of solidarity) and concern for the well-being of others (in the sense of care), debates may be grounded to a greater extent in empathy and mutual understanding: ‘While cognitive aspects of empathy pertain to the process of gaining knowledge about others’ positions as well as preferences and values related to them, the emotional aspect of empathy refers to affections related to those positions’ (Grönlund et al., 2017, p. 460). This approach represents a shift from entirely opposing viewpoints towards active listening, greater consideration of different viewpoints, and a stronger focus on collaborative problem-solving aimed at finding solutions to shared dilemmas and challenges. In this context, deliberative processes provide a structured environment in which these ethical dispositions can be expressed and potentially translated into practical outcomes. We will initially frame the interplay of solidarity, care and deliberation as a potential for mutual reinforcement, a synergistic relationship in which they can mutually strengthen and, consequently, reinforce each other’s functions.

To conclude this introduction, we outline how this work is structured and organised. The following chapter examines the concept of solidarity as a complex and semantically heterogeneous idea that plays a key role in responding to today’s social, political and environmental challenges. We begin by focusing on the everyday use of solidarity,

seeking to reveal how it is employed in various narratives, for example as emotional support, collective action, ethical alignment and global responsibility. The chapter then presents the historical development of this concept, from its origins in Roman law and Christian ethics to its central role in revolutionary movements, early socialism and classical sociology. We examine contemporary theoretical approaches that emphasise the significance and functioning of solidarity through ethical, legal, political and moral frameworks. Finally, building on the preceding reflections, the chapter outlines the dimensions of solidarity, whilst at the same time, precisely in considering these dimensions, it recognises and seeks to emphasise its contextual contingency.

In the following chapter, we focus on the concept of care, which differs from solidarity whilst, in some respects, complementing it. In this light, we begin the chapter by identifying and reflecting on how care functions in everyday discourses and across various practical fields; furthermore, we reflect on a highly significant finding by *The Care Collective* (2025), a group of critical intellectuals founded in 2017, who, having observed that we are increasingly sliding into a 'careless' society, wrote a manifesto on how to resist this (The Care Collective, 2020). In the historical section of the chapter, we trace the development of the concept of care and show how – much like solidarity – it appeared, in a certain sense, as early as in antiquity and in early Christian teachings and practices within the pastoral tradition. Later, the concept was significantly shaped by feminist thought, which, at the intersection of theory and practice, highlighted the broader societal neglect of various care practices carried out by women. On this basis, we turn to a consideration of contemporary interpretations, which have expanded the concept of care from interpersonal relationships to institutional and global dimensions; at the same time, care as an idea and *a praxis* has faced counter-reactions, counter-currents and counter-trends, particularly in the form of neoliberalism and its associated policies (White, 2020). We highlight this development right at the outset, as care offers a concrete basis

for a vision of the transformation of economic and political systems that currently undervalue and undermine community-oriented and care-based practices.

In the fourth chapter, we move from the concepts of solidarity and care to deliberative democracy, which we understand as a process through which solidarity and care can be collectively defined, materialised and realised. In this chapter, we explain the characteristic features of deliberative democracy, including an emphasis on reasoned debate, broad participation and the formation of collective will. We also examine deliberative democracy from a historical perspective. In this context, we describe some, though not all, of the origins of deliberative democratic thought and related practices. We then turn to a more contemporary understanding of deliberative democracy, where, for example, we examine Habermas's conception and more recent systemic approaches. This chapter highlights various ideas about deliberative democracy and their critiques, thereby seeking to demonstrate how heterogeneous this theoretical field is. This diversity of views contributes, at least in part, to current developments, in which we see the practical versatility of deliberative democracy across different cultural and institutional contexts. This is explored in more detail and illustrated using the specific example of the deliberative mechanism of the citizens' assembly, with particular attention paid to how such a mechanism can be implemented in local contexts. In doing so, we aim to highlight the potential of deliberative processes as a political form of participation to support more inclusive and responsive forms of democratic participation. In conclusion, we attempt a kind of synthesis: we examine the essential, yet often under-theorised, relationships between deliberation, solidarity and care. We reflect on how solidarity and caring relationships can create the conditions necessary for meaningful political dialogue and debate, and how, conversely, deliberative processes can foster stronger bonds of solidarity and contribute to the institutionalisation of a political ethics of care.

To conclude this introduction, let us emphasise once again that throughout this work we address key themes and concepts whilst

taking their practical dimensions into account. This is particularly evident in the chapter on deliberative democracy, where the discussion focuses on practical guidelines for collective action in a rapidly changing world in which young people – including students – not only have a role to play, but must also recognise and assert their position as political actors. At the same time, we proceed from the assumption that concepts, themes and mechanisms cannot be meaningfully transferred and implemented in practice without a clear understanding of their significance. This textbook therefore serves as a bridge between the clarification of concepts, the exploration of interconnections between key ideas about them, and their practical application.

2

SOLIDARITY

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- In contemporary discourse, solidarity functions as a polysemic concept and appears in various contexts, such as during (natural) disasters and the activities of social movements; it also frequently serves as an expression of emotional support and material aid.
- Solidarity expresses interconnectedness, whilst at the same time highlighting differences between groups and serving as a framework for addressing contemporary crises, including environmental challenges and rising inequalities.
- The concept has various historical roots, including Roman law and Christian theological interpretations of charity and brotherhood; during the French Revolution, solidarity was transformed into a political principle of citizenship and national unity, linked to ideals of emancipation.
- Early socialist thinkers, such as Saint-Simon, Proudhon, Fourier and Leroux, reflected on solidarity as a potential response to industrial capitalism, envisaging alternative forms of (co-)operation based on reciprocity, mutual support and collective organisation against capitalist exploitation.
- Solidarity operates across multiple levels and dimensions, from the local to the global, and encompasses unity in collective action, compassion for marginalised communities, and broader concepts that, through ecological and climate solidarity, extend responsibility to humanity and the natural world.

As modern societies face a wide range of challenges, including inequality and climate change, various actors often invoke solidarity and present it as a solution. As Gaztambide-Fernández et al. (2022, p. 251) state: ‘Solidarity is in vogue’. Although the term is frequently used in speeches, policies and everyday debates, its diverse meanings are rarely addressed. Indeed, it all too often appears as a simple slogan, as a hastily proposed option, rather than as a concept with potential concrete (material) consequences. Precisely because of the ambiguity in its use and because it is at the same time so very important, in this chapter we wish to examine solidarity as a fundamental concept for addressing social and global challenges, starting by outlining how solidarity manifests itself in everyday life (e.g. through shared values, shared endeavours and a sense of collective duty). On this basis, we will then present some of its historical origins in practices, philosophy, law and social movements. The discussion will draw on various theoretical perspectives, whilst also seeking to demonstrate how the meanings of solidarity depend on and adapt to different contexts, ranging from local initiatives to international cooperation. At the end of the chapter, we highlight the significance of solidarity primarily as a specific collective framework for political cooperation, which often assumes the function of a unifying force upon which more just arrangements and the overcoming of the existing *status quo* are actually conceived.

Solidarity has emerged as a relevant concept throughout various historical periods because it is situated, and at the same time derives its own position, from the point between the individual (their freedom) and the responsibility we have towards our fellow human beings, towards one another. As Laitinen (2022) argues, although this concept has multiple meanings, it is generally considered to be compatible with individual rights and freedoms. At the same time, Kozłowska (2024, p. 34) offers an important initial insight: when people use this word, they are not thinking of the same thing; rather, numerous definitions, approaches and uses revolve around the relationships between individuals and groups. Essentially, solidarity

is about articulating interconnectedness, whilst simultaneously recognising (and often justifying) differences within the context of various groups with their specific identities. Clarifying the meaning of solidarity across different historical periods and contexts, as well as in contemporary circumstances, enables us to conceive of potential new, different, alternative forms of collective (co-)operation in the context of current crises and the challenges associated with them. As we mentioned in the introduction, our societies are facing not only an environmental and climate crisis but also a deepening of economic and social inequalities. In these contexts, the significance of solidarity is often recognised primarily in terms of the ability to respond to these crises and socio-political and economic processes; in this sense, it therefore serves as a guiding principle and framework for shaping fairer and more sustainable communities in a globally interconnected world where there are currently numerous conflicts, political divisions and inequalities.

In the next section of this chapter, we focus on everyday discourses of solidarity, as this will serve as a starting point for understanding how this concept manifests itself, is applied and functions in specific life situations. In doing so, we aim to begin by exploring the prevailing ways in which solidarity is articulated and the meanings attributed to it by various actors, ranging from social movements and organisations to its application in the context of individual relationships.

2.1 EVERYDAY USAGE: THE PLAY OF POLYSEMY

Right from the outset, we can point out that in everyday discourse, solidarity most frequently appears as an expression of support and assistance for those facing difficulties, a particular predicament or a (personal) crisis. For example, in the wake of natural disasters, political leaders and citizens call for ‘solidarity with the victims’. In such cases, solidarity usually refers to emotional support, though perhaps even more frequently it refers to material aid. This usage (problematically) narrowly frames solidarity as a response to the

suffering of individuals, groups or communities, where those in a better position (can) offer help to those in need (Tabar, 2016). In situations where the term solidarity is used in these contexts, it carries a certain moral weight and even implies an obligation for individuals, as it suggests that offering help is not merely 'voluntary' charity, but something we must do because of our shared humanity. In this regard, calls for solidarity with victims are not necessarily limited to a specific region or national context; rather, such usage is frequently seen in international responses to earthquakes, floods or humanitarian crises. In these cases, the narrative of solidarity serves as an impetus for action across national borders and emphasises our interconnectedness despite, say, geographical distance.

Another prevalent use of the term solidarity relates to and focuses on unity and collective action, linked as it is to the context of a specific social or political struggle. For example, we can highlight that in labour movements, 'solidarity' functions as a call to unite on the basis of a 'common goal', whilst at the same time serving as a tactical principle (Bulmer, 2016; Lee, 2011; Morgan & Pulignano, 2020, pp. 25–26). This use of solidarity in such narratives emphasises that a particular group or class gains power and can achieve something if they stand together, rather than relying on or pursuing individual interests and goals. In other words, solidarity signifies the power of cooperation in bringing about change. In this context, the well-known trade union slogan 'an injury to one is an injury to all' highlights the central point of this usage and the understanding of solidarity as mutual protection through a collective commitment (van der Walt, 2019, p. 250). It is important to note that this usage is not limited to labour movements but, on the contrary, extends to various social movements where members demonstrate solidarity by participating in protests, boycotts or other more or less direct actions (Saunders, 2008). In this context, solidarity is both a form of expressed compassion and active participation in a shared struggle, often against a 'common' enemy or an identified counter-pole (Morgan & Pulignano, 2020). Another important point to highlight here is

that this understanding differs from (simple) group behaviour in its emphasis on protecting vulnerable members of the group and subordinating one's immediate self-interest to the collective good.

Furthermore, one of the most common ways in which the term 'solidarity' is used is in the context of compassion and support for communities that are systematically and/or structurally marginalised. Indeed, it often appears as an expression of empathy and understanding towards such groups, which are pushed to the margins of society (Varma, 2023). In such discourses, phrases are frequently used that indicate solidarity 'with' a particular group; this can imply two things: an awareness of the current situation of such a group, and at the same time an awareness of their past difficult experiences, without actually sharing the latter with them. This naturally raises the question of where this use of solidarity is most frequently encountered. Varma (2023), for example, argues that such usage has become particularly pronounced in identity movements, where expressing solidarity entails acknowledging the injustice of the situations and life experiences of 'others'. This articulation of solidarity can, for example, be observed in contemporary discourses on social media, where statements of solidarity often function as public declarations of the ethical stance of the person expressing solidarity, rather than that of those to whom the statement is addressed. In other words, this usage is a way of communicating one's own values and commitments (Varma, 2023, pp. 1880–1881). The proliferation of such expressions raises important questions about the relationship between declared solidarity and actual action, a theme also addressed in numerous conceptual reflections on contemporary 'superficial' forms of solidarity that remain at the declarative level (Alharbi, 2018; Scholz, 2008).

Fourthly, in its broadest everyday usage, solidarity also appears as a moral and ethical duty that extends beyond immediate communities to encompass all of humanity and, increasingly, the natural non-human world (Wilde, 2013). In this context of the use of solidarity narratives, environmental movements, for example, refer to 'ecological solidarity' or 'climate solidarity', thereby seeking to emphasise humanity's

embeddedness in natural systems and its responsibility towards them: '[...] climate change has created a new global interdependence that requires a new form of global solidarity capable of prioritizing the needs of "others"—namely, the population of developing countries and future generations' (Bazzani, 2023, p. 356). What we can observe is the intertwining and recognition of numerous elements when addressing global challenges such as poverty or climate change, which is why, in the context of resolving the climate crisis, calls for 'solidarity' with groups deprived of certain rights (e.g. to drinking water) (Extinction Rebellion, 2025). International organisations, too, formulate development goals in terms of solidarity between nations and generations (Brundtland, 1985). Thus, we can observe the so-called expansive conception of solidarity, which is framed as stemming from the recognition of fundamental interdependence at the global level and in relation to the natural environment as a whole (Moyano-Fernández, 2022). In such a discourse centred on solidarity, we can identify an emphasis on the necessity of taking into account the structural interconnectedness of the socio-political order and the natural environment, which simultaneously implies that this usage is based on the idea that we act in solidarity not merely because we feel compassion, but because we recognise our entanglement in systems that connect our lives with those of distant human and non-human beings.

This brief overview of the various uses of the concept of solidarity shows, among other things, that in contemporary discourse it functions as a polysemic concept. We can see that it connects various aspects of our actions and behaviour as individuals and, necessarily, as a collective. If anything, this overview of the predominant forms of solidarity and the meanings attributed to it suggests that it involves an intertwining of emotional, ethical and political dimensions of (inter)connectedness. In this sense, reflecting on the everyday use of the term solidarity certainly tells us something; on the other hand, it is precisely because of the concept's versatility that further analytical reflection is warranted.

The frequent conflation of solidarity with related concepts such as charity, alliance, empathy and collective action is what might be described as conceptual confusion. In this context, we can also speak of solidarity as an all-encompassing concept which, precisely because it takes on multiple meanings, also calls for reflection on where different understandings stem from, how to conceive of its characteristics, including in relation to forms of (political) cooperation and power relations between individuals and collectives. Therefore, in the following section, we focus on a more systematic review of the historical development and theoretical foundations of solidarity.

2.2 THE HISTORY OF THE CONCEPT AND CONTEMPORARY DEFINITIONS

Early meanings

First, let us turn our attention to the etymological origins of the term ‘solidarity’. As noted by numerous authors (Sangiovanni & Viehoff, 2023; Schmitt, 2022), the concept is linked to the Latin term *solidus*, meaning firm, whole or undivided. In Roman law, the concept was used and articulated as a specific formal obligation, *obligatio in solidum*. This is a legal principle that referred to a joint obligation, whereby each member of a group was liable for the entire debt of all members and not merely for their own share. This early legal construct framed solidarity in terms of collective responsibility, thereby significantly articulating its (early) meaning, namely that obligations were not merely individual but linked to broader networks of interdependence (Elliott, 2018, p. 21; Hunt-Hendrix & Taylor, 2024). Although it is important to recognise the early form of solidarity as a formal legal concept, this does not mean that, even in the early period, it did not also relate to and extend into the realms of moral and ethical considerations regarding life in the community. In early Christian thought, the principle of shared responsibility was embedded in theological interpretations of charity and brotherhood (Elliott,

2018, p. 23), at the same time, in this context, the Church teachings of that era emphasised the moral duty of the faithful to support one another, particularly the poor and vulnerable. In doing so, they reinforced the idea that social cohesion depends on mutual care and assistance (Stjernø, 2005, pp. 25–26). In this context, the 13th-century Christian thinker and philosopher Thomas Aquinas made a significant contribution to linking Aristotelian ethics (the idea of the highest good as the common happiness and well-being – *bonum commune*) with Christian doctrine, and in this context articulated a vision of society in which individuals are bound not only by formal legal relationships but also by moral obligations rooted not so much in natural law as in divine justice (Hoipkémier, 2016). Among other things, for Aquinas such an obligation is *charity*; at the same time, it is crucial for him that man is a social being and, as such, is always part of society. The latter also means that, for Aquinas, charity is not an individual act; in order to ensure justice, a person must always give of themselves to others. Through this perspective, Aquinas emphasises the interconnectedness of human actions and the responsibility to preserve the common good (Clark, 2014, pp. 29–30). As Stjernø (2005, p. 63) points out: ‘This concern about social integration may be seen as being one of the origins of Catholic ideas of solidarity’.

The French Revolution and early modern concepts

With the advent of modernity, the concept of solidarity underwent a profound transformation, with processes linked to the decline of feudal structures, the emergence of centralised nation states and, at the same time, the rise of new political philosophies and ideas contributing to its transformation in the broadest sense. However, these processes were by no means sudden. In 16th-century France, the term solidarity (fr. *solidarité*) was still linked to the Roman legal concept: it referred to the responsibility of each member of the community for the debts of the entire group (Hayward, 1959,

p. 270). This legalistic conception was also preserved in Napoleon's famous legal document, the Civil Code, of 1804.

However, this does not mean that, alongside the existence of this form of understanding solidarity, there were no attempts to redefine it. Stjernø (2005, p. 27) notes that the transformation of the legal concept of solidarity into a political concept began in the second half of the 18th century. In this context, revolutionary leaders such as Mirabeau and Danton occasionally used the term solidarity in a sense that went beyond its (narrow) legal meaning. However, the key context for the broader transformation of the concept and its meaning was the French Revolution (1789). The revolutionary ideals of the time and the associated slogans, such as *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, established solidarity as a political principle linked to citizenship, collective struggle and national unity (Stjernø, 2005, p. 27). This point is crucial to our discussion: in revolutionary discourse, fraternity, which was (at the time) an analogue of solidarity, became one of the key and thus fundamental principles of political life, representing the idea of the union and cooperation of individuals in the pursuit of a just and egalitarian society. During this period, solidarity emerged as an emancipatory force and a tool for national unity, as revolutionary leaders sought to unite diverse social groups against the monarchy, the aristocracy and privilege. While solidarity is, in this sense, a unifying concept, it is, as we can see, also exclusionary. This reveals a certain tension within the concept itself: whilst solidarity referred to means and practices of inclusion and collective empowerment, it was simultaneously used as an instrument of exclusion in the name of social unity (de Miranda, 2015, pp. 6–7). Furthermore, revolutionary processes laid the foundations for the modern understanding of social solidarity as a key element of national identity and state formation, and influenced subsequent debates on citizenship, democracy and social rights (Sangiovanni & Viehoff, 2023).

Pre-Marxist visions of solidarity, early socialist critiques of industrial capitalism and the foundations of cooperativism: Saint-Simon, Proudhon, Fourier, Blanc and Leroux

Early socialist movements in the 19th century, or rather the thinkers within those movements, in fact even before Marx's work and the subsequent emergence of Marxism, developed the concept of solidarity as a response to rapid industrialisation and the capitalist exploitation of the working class, both of which were part of the consolidation of the capitalist mode of production (Sangiovanni & Viehoff, 2023). One such early socialist thinker was Henri de Saint-Simon (1760–1825), who reflected on the question of collective association and cooperation in terms of solidarity (although he did not directly use the concept) and positioned it as essential to the organisation of industrial society. An important starting point in this context is that economic and technological progress must be directed towards the common good and not towards the enrichment of the individual (Rousseliere, 2010). Saint-Simon proposed a specific form of social organisation or cooperation, in which he saw the role of various segments of society, united in a productive class (industrial workers, farmers, artisans, engineers, scientists, businesspeople), as contributing to development (Andrews, 2025). At the same time, he highlighted the unproductive role of the so-called inactive class (the nobility, the clergy and the military elite), which he assumed would eventually disappear because it contributed nothing to progress (Soliani, 2009). One could say that one of Saint-Simon's central arguments was the development of society towards a good life for all: by emphasising the specific contributions that each class makes to the broader endeavour of social harmony, the goal was, for the most part, clear: to satisfy the material needs of all people (Bowie, 2023; Rousseliere, 2010).

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–1865), another early socialist thinker, viewed what we now call solidarity through an anarchist lens, as he advocated for decentralised, voluntary associations that would operate beyond the reach of the state and simultaneously act

as a counterpoint to capitalist individualism. Particularly in his works *What is Property?* (1840) and *The System of Economic Contradictions* (1846), Proudhon emphasised the principle of mutuality on the basis of a critical reflection on property and on authority founded on social hierarchy. By mutuality, he meant above all a structure in which individuals and communities participate in economic relations based on mutual agreement. For Proudhon, collective force (as a form of what we would today call solidarity) was not a doctrine imposed from outside, but a specific arrangement. It is a society structured precisely by mutuality as collective action, characterised by interdependence and close relationships among the individuals who make it up. At the same time, this society is founded on reciprocity as a specific form of obligation that binds people to their fellow human beings, and in which the power of the individual lies in association (Noland, 1967, p. 322).

Another prominent and pivotal figure in the pre-Marxist tradition was Charles Fourier (1772–1837), whose political ideas had a significant influence on subsequent debates on solidarity. Crucial to our discussion is that Fourier (1822) reflected on the foundations of a harmonious and utopian social organisation as a kind of alternative to the competitive and alienated nature of capitalist society, in which, among other things, he viewed the logic of trade as extremely problematic: ‘Trade makes possible the triumph of deceit and plunder, creates an atmosphere of distrust which hinders the development of economic relations and requires costly precautions’ (Fourier, 1972, p. 114). As an alternative form of cooperation and organisation of relations, he proposed the system of ‘phalanstères’, which is based on the idea of self-sufficient, cooperative communities in which individuals would live and work together in accordance with their passions and inclinations (Fourier, 1822). Fourier’s vision was at once a critique of the atomisation and exploitation caused by industrial capitalism, and was based on the idea that true social cohesion could only be achieved by transforming human relations on the basis of the principles of cooperation and mutual support. Fourier

repeatedly distanced himself from the egalitarian communism that characterised utopian thought in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Although by almost all accounts he belongs to the socialist tradition, his writings also show that in his ideal community he left room for numerous distinctly capitalist economic institutions: the payment of interest on invested capital, inheritance rights, certain forms of private property, etc. (Beecher & Bienvenu in Fourier, 1972, p. 249). One of the foundations of his utopian socialism is Harmony as a form of solidarity that must be integrated into everyday life, so that it becomes a fundamental organisational principle (Stjernø, 2011, p. 1). In Fourier's system of Harmony, as he conceived it, all creative activity, including industry, craftsmanship, agriculture, etc., was to spring from liberated passion. Fourier sexualises work itself – life in the phalanstery is a ceaseless orgy of intense emotion, thought and activity, a society of lovers and wild enthusiasts (Bey, 1991).

In this context, we should also mention Pierre Leroux (1797–1871), a contemporary of Fourier, who played a key role in explicitly theorising solidarity as a fundamental social principle (Stjernø, 2005, p. 1). In this context, he is recognised as one of the first thinkers to have used the term *solidarité* in a systematic philosophical and political sense. What are the key features of his insights regarding solidarity?

In 1863, Leroux pointed out that he was 'the first to borrow the term solidarity from the jurists and to introduce it into philosophy', which he himself understood as a rearticulation of solidarity 'into Religion', aiming at replacing 'Christian charity with human solidarity' (Leroux in Knetsch, 2014). Leroux's starting point was thus a critique of two assumptions or understandings of solidarity, namely solidarity as a form of Christian charity and the idea of the social contract as the foundation of society. He criticised Christian charity on the grounds that it cannot reconcile an individual's love of self with love for others, and that within the framework of Christian charity, love for others is an obligation rather than the result of a genuine interest in community with others. Furthermore, he believed that there is no equality in Christian charity. He sought to replace the concept of charity with solidarity, arguing that the idea of solidarity

would be more suitable for the struggle for a justly organised society (Stjernø, 2011). Leroux rejected both the extreme individualism of liberalism and the rigid collectivism of certain socialist doctrines, advocating instead a model of social organisation that requires ‘the fundamental unity and interdependence of the members of the social order’ (Leff, 2002, p. 45). He understood solidarity as an organic and reciprocal relationship between people and argued that all members of society are responsible for one another’s well-being. As we can see, Leroux’s vision of solidarity certainly went beyond existing practices of economic cooperation and incorporated political and cultural dimensions, as he advocated democratic participation and the moral development of individuals as essential components of a just and cohesive society (Bakunin, 1976, p. 459).

To conclude this section of the chapter, we can say that these early theorists of alternative forms of socio-political organisation and cooperation certainly had a significant influence on subsequent philosophical currents and trends in political thought regarding solidarity, and it is essential to recognise the fundamental elements of their contributions, particularly in terms of their critique of existing systems of production of relations between people and classes, or specific collectives, in emerging capitalist and liberal environments. From this perspective, their ideas influenced the rise of trade unions, cooperative movements and workers’ struggles in the 19th and 20th centuries. Their ideas helped to establish solidarity not only as an ethical principle, but also as a concrete mechanism for organising economic and political life, which formed the basis for later socialist, anarchist and social democratic traditions.

The foundations of the concept of solidarity in early sociological thought

Auguste Comte and articulations of solidarity in early sociological thought

Although the idea of solidarity had, of course, been circulating and articulated in various ways even before the emergence of sociology as

a specific scientific discipline, Auguste Comte (1798–1857), a disciple of the aforementioned Saint-Simon, was (at least indirectly) among the first to incorporate it into a systematic sociological framework. Comte, who is regarded as one of the founders of (positivist) sociology (Sica, 2014), did not directly refer to the concept of solidarity, but he did reflect on the question of social cohesion in contemporary societies. In this light, the question of how to ensure and realise a ‘ruly complete and stable society’ (Comte in Ter Meulen, 2017, p. 53) interested him in the context of what he recognised as one of the central problems of the society of his time. For him, this problem was primarily the proliferation of individualism and the egoism associated with it: ‘each individual gradually becomes the centre of the great social relations, and since in all this moral chaos only the notion of private interest remains absolutely clear, pure egoism naturally becomes the only motive that has sufficient energy to direct active existence’ (Comte in Ter Meulen, 2017, p. 53).

In this context, we must also understand his conception of sociology as a framework for reflecting on two key elements: social statics, through which he focused on social order, and social dynamics, through which he considered the question of change and development (Kang, 2009). Within the framework of social statics, he identified continuity (intergenerational ties) and solidarity (cooperation among contemporaries) as the key forces binding society together. Whilst Comte prioritised continuity due to its role in the accumulation of knowledge and resources across generations, he also emphasised solidarity as essential for functional interdependence (Stjernø, 2005). Continuity, that is, solidarity across time (and not merely in space among contemporaries), is central to Comte’s theory of society. In Comte’s view, humanity is unique in its ability to transmit collective experiences and resources from one generation to the next (Oosterlynck & Van Bouchaute, 2013, p. 8). However, this does not mean that he neglected solidarity within a single generation. He saw the division of labour in industrial societies as one of the causes of individualisation (and selfishness). Due to the increasingly complex division of labour, people within the same generation became

dependent on one another for the goods and services they needed to survive. On the one hand, it is precisely this division of labour that leads to individualisation; on the other hand, it necessitates mutual dependence, which is why Comte sought to consider how social cohesion and cooperation might be achieved within this interdependence: 'The greatest possible social perfection would eventually be achieved when individuals throughout the system perform the specific functions for which they are best suited' (Comte in Ter Meulen, 2017, p. 54). As Ter Meulen (2017, p. 52) states, Comte was convinced that the development of positive knowledge was the only way to achieve spiritual unity in society, which is a prerequisite for establishing political unity. A truly perfect and stable society can only exist if both conditions (spiritual and political unity) are fulfilled simultaneously, at least to a certain extent. Because of its contribution to spiritual unity (and social harmony), Comte regarded positivism as a new secular religion, in which the worship of humanity had replaced the worship of the Christian God. In this context, Comte therefore proposed a secular 'religion of humanity', which, in his view, could unite individuals by promoting shared moral values and emotional bonds, and replace traditional religious frameworks with a focus on the human being (Kang, 2009). As Comte states (in Ter Meulen, 2017, p. 54):

Whence, therefore, the need for special action to develop the natural morality in man, to reduce as far as possible the impulses of each individual to the scale required by the harmony of the whole, by making people accustomed from childhood to the voluntary subordination of private interest to the common interest, and by never ceasing to reproduce consideration of the social point of view in active life, with all the necessary emphasis.

Comte's theory had certain limitations. Among other things, his ideas were criticised because he did not consider them in a comprehensive and interconnected manner, and because he relied on unconventional concepts, such as the aforementioned religion of humanity. The latter was particularly criticised as being extremely utopian. On the

other hand, however, his reflection on a harmonious society and cooperation, which is only possible through the renunciation of individuals' egoistic tendencies, guided further reflections on solidarity (Kang, 2009). It was developed in particular by Émile Durkheim in his work in the 1890s.

Émile Durkheim: From mechanical to organic solidarity

Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) is regarded as the sociologist who actually offered a truly comprehensive and extensive discussion or reflection on solidarity as a specific social phenomenon. In his discussion of solidarity, Durkheim drew heavily on Comte's ideas, but, as mentioned, developed them into a more systematic theory of solidarity. Particularly in his work *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893), he sought to reflect on the question of the development of societies and also on what exactly happens to cohesion in rapidly industrialising societies, regarding which he primarily observed that the division of labour intensifies: 'The division of labour varies in direct proportion to the scale and density of society, and if it is constantly evolving in social development, it is because societies are becoming denser and more extensive in general' (Durkheim, 1960, p. 262).

In this context, he operationalises the very concept of solidarity and introduces what is now a classic distinction between two forms of solidarity: mechanical and organic (Borger, 2020, p. 45). Mechanical solidarity is characteristic of pre-modern societies, where individuals are bound together by shared traditions, customs and a collective consciousness. In such societies, individuals are largely similar in their roles and responsibilities, and social cohesion is maintained through strong collective norms (Borger, 2020, p. 45). In the event of violations of these norms, they are sanctioned with repressive forms of punishment, the aim of which is to strengthen social cohesion through moral condemnation (Borger, 2020, p. 45).

According to Durkheim, however, cohesion in industrial societies is different precisely because of the intensified division of labour. Organic solidarity, by contrast, emerges in modern industrial societies,

where the division of labour creates differentiation between individuals. Rather than being bound by equality, people integrate into society through their differences and interdependence. As individuals specialise in different roles, they rely on others for goods, services and knowledge, thereby forming a network of interdependence (Borger, 2020, pp. 46–47). By emphasising the relationship between increasing specialisation and interdependence, Durkheim demonstrated how solidarity and individualism can go hand in hand. Thus, in a way, the transition from traditional to modern societies, according to Durkheim, paradoxically expands the role of the state whilst simultaneously increasing the degree of individualism in society. However, for him, individualism does not necessarily imply something negative, nor does it constitute the basis of moral decline in societies (Kretchmar, 2021): because individuals are interdependent, this creates a strong sense of solidarity among members. Unlike mechanical solidarity, which depends on rigid collective norms, organic solidarity allows for greater individual freedom whilst maintaining social cohesion. Durkheim even argued that societies' shared belief in the dignity of the individual would become a secular religion and replace traditional religions such as Christianity (Kretchmar, 2021). However, this does not mean that he was uncritical of the transition to organic solidarity. He warned that rapid industrialisation and unchecked individualism could lead to anomie, a state of normlessness in which traditional moral structures break down and individuals remain alienated from society. Therefore, in order to prevent such negative processes, he advocated the need to cultivate moral individualism – a balance between personal autonomy and social responsibility (Kang, 2009, p. 7).

Bourgeois's dual framework of solidarity

Although Durkheim's conception of solidarity, as outlined above, is far better known today, particularly in academic discourse, the reflection on solidarity developed by Léon Bourgeois at the time had a much greater impact (Sangiovanni & Viehoff, 2023). The latter, who was also Prime Minister of France between 1895 and 1896,

presented his reflections on solidarity in the context of establishing a specific foundation for the emerging solidarity movement (Hayward, 1961). Like Durkheim, Bourgeois also saw the internal division of labour as one of the key components of modern societies; the latter provides a framework that conditions people's interdependence, which he terms natural solidarity (Blais, 2014; Sangiovanni & Viehoff, 2023). *Solidarité naturelle* describes the inherent interdependence of individuals in society, much like the parts of an organism depend on one another for survival (Saracino, 2024, p. 1102). However, natural solidarity does not operate according to natural laws, and the latter are not sufficient to ensure that the various parts of society complement and coordinate with one another. In this sense, socio-political coordination is essential, which for Bourgeois means social solidarity, a normative moral principle that requires joint efforts to eliminate systemic injustices through legal measures and political reforms: 'Moral solidarity therefore requires that citizens identify among themselves as co-responsible for the social product and that they are willing to pay the social debt through common institutions designed to insure people against unemployment, sickness and old age, to keep jobs open to talent, and to support the public education system' (Sangiovanni & Viehoff, 2023). However, for solidarity to be effectively realised, he emphasised that it must transcend abstract moral imperatives and materialise through enforceable norms that transform interdependence into realisable rights and duties (Saracino, 2024, p. 1102). The influence of solidarism went beyond theorisation and conceptualisation, as in the early 20th century it also provided the direct basis for the formulation of French policies in areas such as public education and labour protection, where there was at least an attempt to strengthen social equality (Hayward, 1961).

Karl Marx and Marxism: class struggle and the limits of solidarity

Viewed through the lens of history, Karl Marx (1818–1883) was active before Durkheim (the latter having 'matured' intellectually after Marx's time) and Bourgeois, the thinker on solidarity mentioned above. And although Marx did not explicitly reflect on or

conceptualise the concept of solidarity, he is nonetheless significant in terms of understanding the functioning of capitalist society, its elements and the processes that enable the reproduction of relations of production, as well as alternatives to capitalism. In this regard, Karl Marx viewed solidarity through the prism of idealistic visions of a future communist society, whilst at the same time conceptualising the conditions for the mobilisation of the working class (Stjernø, 2005, p. 42). As mentioned, although he rarely used the term ‘solidarity’ explicitly, it is possible to detect two intertwined dimensions in his works: ideal solidarity, rooted in the liberation of individuals, and instrumental solidarity, whose aim is to unite workers against capitalist exploitation. In his early works, such as *The German Ideology*, Marx envisaged communism as a social formation in which true solidarity arises from freely associated individuals and enables personal and collective development (Oosterlynck and Van Bouchaute, 2013). He contrasted this with the ‘false’ communal bonds in feudal or capitalist societies, which he saw as extremely violent, oppressive structures that subjugate individuals, including by alienating people from one another. According to Marx, solidarity, as a product of workers’ political practices, is expressed through class consciousness; this means, among other things, that through political practices of joining the common struggle, workers who share common objective economic interests (‘class-in-itself’) become aware of their common class interests and develop relations of class solidarity (‘class-for-itself’). Marx argued that whilst capitalism destroys traditional social bonds, it creates the material conditions (urbanisation, factory work, common class interests) that enable workers to organise: specific conditions were necessary for the development of class consciousness, which Marx articulated, among other things, in his work *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Oosterlynck & Van Bouchaute, 2013, p. 16). What are these conditions? The answer lies in the fact that capitalism breaks down old social ties, whilst at the same time eliminating differences in skills among workers, homogenising the proletariat and concentrating it in ever-larger factories. The capitalist mode of production thus represents a prerequisite for the

homogenisation and unity of the working class, which ultimately leads to a transformation of relations and the socio-economic order. In Marx's view, true solidarity in the sense of unification and a common political struggle could only be realised in a classless society, in which economic alienation is abolished and relations are re-established in their 'human' form, one not determined by exploitation (Stjernø, 2005, p. 45; Kang, 2009).

Marx's ideas on solidarity, in the sense of the articulation of class consciousness and class struggle, laid the foundations for various Marxist interpretations. His ideal of solidarity as a characteristic of communist society influenced thinkers such as Karl Kautsky and György Lukács, who theorised collective action in capitalist societies as a prerequisite for emancipation. In this light, Kautsky argued that the goal of social democracy is to transform society in such a way that the economy is based on solidarity. He used and conceived of solidarity as a concept with a dual meaning: firstly, it encompasses and denotes the primary sense of 'being together', whilst at the same time denoting the sense of collectivity that develops amongst workers when they recognise their common interests. Kautsky's interpretation of Marxism was particularly innovative in two respects that influenced the concept of solidarity. Firstly, he integrated the concept into Marxist theory, and secondly, he extended solidarity to groups not tied to the idea of the working class (Stjernø, 2005, pp. 47–48).

We should also mention another Marxist thinker who engaged more intensively with the concept of solidarity, namely György Lukács, who developed the Leninist idea of solidarity in his book *History and Class Consciousness*. Lukács discussed the relationship between individual freedom and solidarity and criticised freedom in capitalist society. In his view, the latter involves a specific type or form of freedom, namely that possessed by the isolated individual, through which they can reify private property, whilst at the same time always perceiving this freedom as competing with the freedom of other individuals, which enables and drives selfishness and the

pursuit of private interests. For Lukács, in capitalist society, the ideas of solidarity and interdependence are, at best, useless ‘normative ideas’ (Stjernø, 2005, p. 54). In this sense, the Leninist idea of solidarity is a further development of Marx’s assertion that true solidarity is not possible in capitalist society. To achieve genuine solidarity and genuine freedom, individual freedom must be temporarily sacrificed. From a normative perspective, the individual must not only forgo personal freedom but must also submit to the collective will of the Communist Party. If the latter were to operate solely on the principle of bourgeois freedom and through it, it would merely become a loose collection of separate individuals and prevent them from developing an effective collective will. Therefore, according to Lukács, the individual’s submission to the party is necessary so that, through collective action, they may help realise its goal – a new society in which freedom and solidarity are united in the relationship between free individuals who feel mutual solidarity (Stjernø, 2005, p. 54).

In this brief overview of Marx’s and later Marxist ideas on solidarity, we have sought above all to show that a significant part of the thinking on solidarity has emerged from a critique of capitalism and capitalist relations. If we are to understand solidarity and its elements, it is essential to bear in mind that it is precisely these Marxist reflections – from the classical to the Leninist to the more social-democratic – that have determined, or at least significantly articulated, and contributed to contemporary understandings of solidarity. Among other things, for example, the very field of critique is of key importance, as it reveals that the capitalist mode of production conceals processes of mutual alienation, individualisation and the like, which is often the central critique and target of solidarity actions by various contemporary groups, movements, civil society organisations, parties, etc.

From the perspective of our central question of political participation as an ever-present form of social action, the early debates on solidarity

just presented are relevant primarily in terms of highlighting the growing complexity of societies at that time and the role of industrialisation and radical social transformations resulting from the establishment of the capitalist mode of production.

Various pre-Marxist and early sociological conceptualisations of solidarity demonstrate how political cooperation emerged as a specific response to the atomising effects of industrial capitalism. From Saint-Simon, with his idea of a productive class alliance, to Proudhon and his decentralised mutual associations, these thinkers understood political cooperation in at least two ways: as more or less voluntary, yet at the same time as a necessary structural reorganisation of social relations. Their visions of solidarity represented attempts to institutionalise cooperation through new forms of collective organisation (e.g. Fourier's system of phalansteries, Leroux's systematic human solidarity). These conceptualisations reveal that political cooperation, when understood through the prism of solidarity, requires both a critique of existing power structures and the construction of alternative institutional arrangements capable of sustaining collective action beyond individual interests. Indeed, this very point is the subject of reflection in Durkheim's work, and even more sharply and of course in a different way in Marx's understanding of collective action based on class. It is certainly crucial that these insights shed light on how political participation adapts to changing material conditions whilst retaining its transformative potential. Durkheim's organic solidarity suggests that political participation in complex societies must operate through interdependence rather than homogeneity, which requires institutional mechanisms capable of coordinating diverse yet complementary social functions. Marx's analysis, which is otherwise sceptical of solidarity under capitalism, shows how political cooperation emerges and materialises through a common struggle against oppression, with class consciousness serving as the foundation of collective political action.

Some contemporary theorisations and approaches

Rorty's pragmatic vision of solidarity

One of the most prominent contemporary thinkers on solidarity is Richard Rorty, a representative of the tradition of American pragmatism, the foundations of which were laid, among others, by authors such as John Dewey (2011). Although Rorty is also classified among the authors of liberal political thought (he described himself as a postmodern bourgeois liberal), he also grounded his ideas in a critique of the hegemonic search for objective truth, certainty and universal foundations of knowledge, morality and politics in Western philosophy. Instead, he advocated an 'anti-foundationalist' position, according to which we should abandon the search for absolute justifications and instead focus on the practical utility (in which he is a pragmatist) of beliefs and vocabularies within specific historical and cultural contexts. According to Rorty, our language, our understanding of ourselves and the values of the community are fundamentally contingent – they are the product of historical contingencies and the socio-political relations and circumstances of the moment, rather than something universal (Ramberg & Dieleman, 2024).

The starting points of Rorty's ideas just outlined also significantly shape his conception of solidarity, which he essentially views as something that replaces the very classical (foundationalist) goal of seeking objectivity (Rorty, 2011). If we cannot ground our moral obligations in universal truths or a common human essence that could be discovered through reason, how then are we to foster ethical communities and care for others? Rorty's answer lies in solidarity: the ability to recognise and address individuals or groups who are (usually) excluded, pushed to the margins of society, marginalised. In this context, these 'others' are part of 'us' (Wilde, 2013). In doing so, he offered the perspective that solidarity should be understood as something we build together through empathy, rather than as

something that exists objectively. He believed that solidarity stems from our ability to 'see strangers as fellow human beings who are suffering' (Rorty in Wilde, 2013, p. 70). Therefore, according to Rorty, we achieve moral progress when we recognise shared vulnerabilities amidst all our differences. This is not a matter of identifying common, objective characteristics (such as rationality or inalienable rights), but rather of cultivating a sense of shared identity, loyalty and empathy through imagination, conversation and shared experiences: 'Solidarity is the result of a gradual and contingent expansion of the scope of the 'we'; it is created through the hard work of training our sympathies, rather than through the acknowledgement of a priori criteria that define what we have in common' (Ramberg & Dieleman, 2024). We could therefore say that, for Rorty, solidarity is our emotional and practical capacity to see strangers as fellow human beings and potential collaborators. Of course, solidarity-oriented narratives, literature and democratic discourse help us in this, or rather, they shape our attitude towards others.

Consequently, according to Rorty, moral progress is not linked to the discovery of pre-existing moral facts, but to the expansion of the scope of 'us'. This involves a continuous process of re-describing ourselves and others in ways that broaden the circle of our identification and reduce cruelty. Rorty thus, through a combination of rejecting the positivist perspective in science, 'certainty' in science on the one hand, and a commitment to democracy and self-realisation (as proposed by the pragmatist John Dewey) on the other, advocates the construction of a utopia of human solidarity as 'an infinite, expanding realization of Freedom, not an approximation to an already existing truth' (Rorty, 1989, p. xvi). Rorty's contribution, therefore, lies in his understanding of solidarity not as an objective universal norm or value, but as something that must in fact be actively built and is thus politically constructed through (co)operation (Wilde, 2013).

Solidarity in social theory: Political legitimacy and interpersonal recognition in the works of Habermas and Honneth

Another contemporary author who has made a significant contribution to the reflection on solidarity and practices of solidarity is

Jürgen Habermas, best known for his work on communication, the public sphere and deliberative democracy (which we will, of course, discuss later), all of which can be situated within or linked to his social theory, the theory of moral discourse (or ‘discourse ethics’) and the theory of the discourse of law and democracy (Finlayson & Rees, 2023; Habermas, 1996). In his works, he explores ‘theory of communicative action, which emphasizes the role of interpersonal speech acts in rationality, countering traditional views that locate rationality in nature or individual cognition’ (Jules, 2024). From our perspective, a key and central part of his project (Habermas, 1984) is understanding how, in increasingly complex and diverse societies, mutual cooperation and understanding can be achieved through reasoned discourse.

In Habermas’s thought, solidarity emerges as a key concept that operates primarily in two interrelated ways: normatively and descriptively. Normatively, solidarity is presented as a key achievement of ‘healthy’ social life, rooted in the everyday communicative practices of what Habermas calls the ‘lifeworld’ – shared cultural frameworks (corpora of knowledge, interpretations and meanings), social norms and personal identities (Finlayson & Rees, 2023). Solidarity is the necessary opposite of justice; whilst justice emphasises equal rights and individual autonomy, solidarity emphasises mutual recognition, empathy and shared responsibility, which bind individuals together as members of a community (Pensky, 2019). Why is normative solidarity important, and in what sense? Normative solidarity enables modern, diverse societies to maintain social cohesion whilst respecting the unique individuality of each person (Pensky, 2019), as such, it stems from the fundamental human capacity for communicative action: the ability to understand others, accept their viewpoints, and coordinate actions through reasoned arguments and mutual agreement.

From this normative perspective on solidarity, grounded in communicative reason, Habermas derives or extends it into the realm of morality and politics. In this context, according to Habermas, solidarity in the moral sense complements abstract principles of justice, as it emphasises our inclusion in a universal community in

which the uniqueness of each person is valued as part of their equal right to respect (Pensky, 2019, pp. 427–428). Political solidarity, however, articulates the revolutionary ideal of ‘brotherhood’ not merely as an emotional bond, but as a rational achievement of democratic life; this achievement consists in the establishment of the structures and practices of political institutions from the resources conveyed to the political system by citizens’ everyday communicative achievements. The latter ‘[...] practice civic or political solidarity in their capacity to see their democratic political obligations and privileges as expressions of an underlying shared recognition of mutually ascribed belonging to a single, ongoing democratic project [...]’ (Pensky, 2019, p. 428). At the same time, this understanding and recognition ‘under favorable conditions able to offset the largely atomizing effects of market economies and communicatively evacuated forms of modern complex political bureaucracy’ (Pensky, 2019, p. 428). In other words, Habermas views solidarity as a politically oriented act within legally structured frameworks, emphasising its role in challenging and legitimising political orders through joint efforts to achieve common goals, including short-term ones (Wilde, 2013, pp. 80–92).

As Pensky (2019) points out, however, Habermas also uses solidarity in a descriptive, sociological sense, drawing on thinkers such as Durkheim. In this sense, solidarity refers to the actual degree of social integration within society – social cohesion created by shared values and practices, and functioning as a source of social stability and reproduction. Through this descriptive understanding of solidarity, Habermas underpins his own critical social theory. In this context, he argues that contemporary societies face crises when the instrumental logic of economic and administrative systems encroaches upon the communicative interactions of the ‘lifeworld’ (‘colonisation’) and hinders them, thereby eroding the social solidarity necessary for the proper functioning of society and the resolution of its problems (Pensky, 2019). Thus, solidarity links Habermas’s diagnosis of contemporary social problems with his normative vision

of a more rational and democratic society, sustained primarily by communicative practices and mutual recognition among citizens.

Author, who has largely developed his view of solidarity through Habermas's theory and reflections, and is regarded as a significant theorist of solidarity, is Axel Honneth, generally situated within the framework of critical social theory (Ibsen, 2023). He focuses primarily on the theorisation of recognition – that is, the idea that the recognition of others is of key importance for the development of the individual as well as the collective. Recognition is important or essential for the formation of individual and group identity and self-understanding. It assumes that people have a fundamental need for others to recognise and affirm their existence, identity, rights or achievements (Iser, 2019). This focus on the theorisation of recognition stems from a critique of Habermas's description of the lifeworld, in which he is primarily accused of disregarding the question of power and simultaneously tending towards the abandonment of systems theory and the development of a monistic social theory, which understands power relations as a struggle for recognition in the lifeworld, where an individual's moral consciousness and identity are shaped in the heat of social conflict (Ibsen, 2023).

Honneth (1996) anchors his understanding of solidarity firmly within his broader theory of recognition: in his work *The Struggle for Recognition*, he argues, as indicated above, that an individual's identity and social integration are fundamentally dependent on receiving recognition from others in various spheres. He identifies three main forms, or frameworks or spheres, in which recognition takes place and is established: love/care in intimate relationships, which strengthens self-esteem; rights in the legal and political spheres, which strengthen self-respect; and solidarity/social respect within communities, which supports self-respect. For Honneth, solidarity is therefore not an abstract ideal, but manifests itself as a crucial third dimension of recognition, which is specifically linked to the social valuation of

individuals on the basis of their unique characteristics, abilities and contributions to shared ways of life or collective goals.

Honneth's approach defines solidarity as a form of mutual and symmetrical respect practised and experienced by members of a group or community who share a common set of values and practices. It involves respecting others not merely as abstract bearers of rights, but for their specific qualities and contributions, which are deemed valuable within a particular social context or 'lifeworld'. In this context, we must understand solidarity, according to Honneth, as part of the process of actively affirming the value of the individual as a participant who contributes, at least to some extent, to collective endeavours. Therefore, the denial of this form of recognition (for example, in the form of experiencing contempt, insult or the devaluation of one's abilities or cultural expressions) leads to damaged self-esteem and can trigger social struggles or conflicts aimed at achieving appropriate social recognition or affirmation. According to Honneth, solidarity is therefore essential for individuals to feel socially valued and integrated, which provides the basis for a strong sense of self-worth stemming from their cooperation with others in a shared social environment.

We can see that the point of convergence between Honneth and Habermas is their agreement that solidarity is absolutely essential for strengthening and accelerating the achievement of the common good. However, this by no means implies that their theories are entirely similar or that no differences can be found. As we have shown, cooperation is also a key domain of solidarity, and the difference between the two authors lies precisely in the emphasis placed on this cooperation: whilst Habermas gives priority to its political-institutional dimensions, Honneth explicitly links solidarity primarily to the ideas of interpersonal relations, mutual recognition and social evaluation. It is precisely through this difference that we can highlight that solidarity, as a specific form of political cooperation, can be conceived on multiple levels, namely as a structural mechanism of political legitimacy and a relational practice of mutual respect (Saracino, 2024).

2.3 SOLIDARITY: CONTEMPORARY CHARACTERISTICS

As we have shown in the previous sub-sections, the concept of solidarity is extremely complex in terms of its meanings and the practices associated with it. At its core, solidarity refers to a sense of unity or mutual support (and interdependence), but it makes sense, also in light of the discussion so far, to consider what some of the key characteristics are that define solidarity today. Is it driven and determined by emotions or primarily by self-interest? Is it a blend of emotional response and rational thought and action? Can it exist only in closely knit communities, or also at broader levels that go beyond 'conventional' boundaries (state, symbolic, ethical, linguistic, etc.)? As we have seen, there are arguments that solidarity is based on mutual social bonds, whilst others view it as a phenomenon within hierarchical relationships, involving, for example, helping those in a vulnerable position without expecting anything in return. Furthermore, questions arise as to whether solidarity can be enforced through laws and formal legal institutional arrangements, or whether it must always stem from 'genuine', voluntary intentions.

It is precisely in the context of these questions that, in the remainder of this chapter, drawing heavily on Forst's (2024), we shall first outline the essential characteristics of solidarity. As Forst argues, these are significant dimensions and must be regarded in this light as defining features of solidarity. These dimensions include a shared purpose, collective responsibility and a commitment to the welfare of others. However, it must be emphasised that these characteristics are also highly dependent on socio-political, economic, cultural and other circumstances. This means that the meaning of solidarity varies depending on the context. Therefore, right at the outset of this sub-chapter, we acknowledge that there is no universal definition of solidarity; however, in order to deepen our understanding of solidarity, we will reflect in more detail on its general characteristics.

Dimensions of solidarity as a concept

Solidarity is a key concept upon which collective action, mutual support and social cohesion are very often based or legitimised. It is essential to understand it beyond the idea of a personal willingness to help; it is a specific practical attitude that individuals adopt towards one another and is based on shared connections. Let us examine these dimensions in more detail.

Solidarity as a practical stance

At its core, solidarity manifests itself as a particular practical attitude and it is, therefore, the embodiment of solidarity as a specific mode of action or practice, within which individuals orient themselves and commit to a relationship with others within a particular group or in relation to a specific goal. This relationship manifests itself in a concrete commitment, a form of ‘support’ for one another. It signifies a willingness to offer support and to connect with others on the basis of a perceived bond. It is precisely the concept of a bond that is key in this context, as it represents a symbolic foundation, a framework, a form that underpins the willingness of individuals or groups to connect, which is of central importance. Connection exists and is maintained as long as the individual perceives the connecting bond as important and normatively binding, even before any concrete action is taken (Forst, 2024, pp. 39–41).

Normative bonds as a foundation

We have already highlighted in the previous section that solidarity is not arbitrary, but is grounded in a specific bond. This bond is normative and serves to connect individuals and communities. As Forst (2024, pp. 41–42) states, ‘the concept of solidarity is normatively dependent, which means that normative conceptions of solidarity must be interpretively complemented by other normative principles (such as justice) or values (such as national well-being or the service of God’s honour)’. At the same time, Forst identifies two primary sources of this bond. Firstly, solidarity can arise from a shared goal,

when individuals unite around a collective project, ideology or struggle they deem important, such as advocating for certain rights, striving for social change or resisting shared oppression, as we have also seen in early and later Marxist conceptions of solidarity. It is essential to recognise that solidarity based on a specific cause or impulse can transcend particular identity markers. To illustrate this with a concrete example: in order to recognise the hardships and problems of the working class and workers in specific industrial sectors, one does not need to be a worker oneself to show solidarity with the working class. In such cases, a shared commitment to the cause is in itself the primary basis of the community. Secondly, connectedness can stem from a shared identity, whereby the connection arises from belonging to the same group, defined by common characteristics, history, culture, social status or experiences. Such identities include, for example, national identity, an ethnic group or a local community. However, as Forst (2024) states, it is important to bear in mind at all times that these two sources are in fact intertwined and, in this sense, are often almost inseparably linked.

Motivation: affirming collective bonds

The next key element, or driving force, of solidarity is the willingness to act with others and for the sake of others. This element is based on the explicit motive of affirming collective bonds; regardless of whether solidarity-based action is rooted in a common goal, a shared identity, or both, the purpose of such action is to strengthen, maintain and give practical meaning to this connection. Forst (2024, p. 38) points out in this context that ‘Solidarity as a practical attitude exists as long as this bond is perceived as important and binding, and is realised when it is felt that appropriate action is needed’.

Activation: responding to needs

In the previous section, we highlighted in a quotation that solidarity comes into play when ‘it seems that action is needed’. From this, we can see that although an attitude of solidarity among individuals or groups may be continuous, it is most often ‘visible’ at those specific

times and in those specific situations when the expression and realisation of solidarity is conceived and articulated as necessary. Solidarity is realised particularly in the face of threats or specific challenges faced by a group and its members, or through the goal that defines that group. In this regard, it is essential to emphasise that threats, challenges or problems are not objectively ‘given’, but are also articulated for specific political purposes (which brings us to the realm of contexts and their role in the construction of solidarity – more on this below). Solidarity is therefore often a so-called responsive practice that emerges when it is ‘necessary’, that is, in situations where action is required to affirm or defend a shared project or the integrity of the group. This distinction is important: readiness (attitude) is a prerequisite, but visible action is often triggered by specific circumstances that require the demonstration of this commitment (Forst, 2024).

The nature of solidarity action: a voluntary and costly commitment

Now that we have previously highlighted that activation is a key element of solidarity, that is, the deliberate transition to the practical realisation of solidarity, it makes sense to further demonstrate that solidarity measures (actions) have several key characteristics. Very often, indeed we might even say usually, acts of solidarity are voluntary and stem from an inner conviction of the importance of connection and the necessity of ‘doing something’. Although this inner motivation (in the individual) is of central importance, solidarity is, of course, by no means isolated and thus immune to socio-political dynamics. Among other things, this also involves high expectations within the group that one must act in a way that is loyal to the group, which in turn can significantly influence solidarity-based action and sometimes creates a sense that a person has ‘no choice but to show solidarity’ (Forst, 2024, pp. 38–39). Typically, solidarity is often expected and demonstrated precisely when it is (costly) for the individual actor, perhaps involving the sacrifice of time, resources, personal risk, or requiring action contrary to one’s narrow self-interest. It is precisely in these situations that ‘deeper’ reasons, rooted in collective bonds, emerge as powerful justifying and motivating forces that override

the self-interest of individuals and/or the collective. Although acts of solidarity are often costly, such acts may also be ‘demanded’ as part of reciprocal, symmetrical duties within the collective, where members expect support from one another, and this support is a constitutive part of the community bond (Forst, 2024, p. 39).

Contextual nature: there is no universal metric

And finally, a key element that effectively leads us into a further discussion of the contexts that (co-)determine solidarity. It is essential to recognise that the concept of solidarity does not have a specific universal criterion or assessment through which it would be possible to precisely determine what a solidarity measure or action means in a given context. Consequently, this also means that the specific requirements and expressions of solidarity are heavily dependent on the various conceptions of collective bonds on which individual cases are based. What solidarity means and entails is shaped by the specific context, the nature of the group, their shared understanding of connectedness, and the challenges they face. Furthermore, individuals usually belong to various overlapping, yet at the same time conflicting, contexts of solidarity (e.g. family, profession, nation, political goal) (Forst, 2024, p. 39).

How contexts influence what we understand by the concept of solidarity

As we emphasised at the beginning of this sub-chapter, solidarity takes different forms depending on the context in which it operates. Rather than a single universal definition, solidarity must always be understood contextually, with each context attributing specific meanings to it. This contextual approach provides us with important insights into how solidarity operates in different spheres of social life, whilst retaining its essential character as a form of mutual recognition and commitment to shared principles or causes of specific action. As in the previous chapter, we rely heavily also here on Forst’s (2024) insights.

Ethical contexts

Solidarity in various ethical contexts stems from specific community bonds, within which shared and mutual benefits and well-being are often emphasised. These contexts encompass and include, for example, family relationships, intimate partnerships, friendships and communities, where solidarity is linked to an individual's ethical and personal identity. When acting in solidarity within specific ethical environments, individuals always affirm their own identity, whilst also affirming the identity of the group or community (such as the family) that they perceive as part of themselves. This self-understanding through the group motivates solidarity-based action, whereby personal involvement and engagement vary according to the individual's sense of identity and belonging. Ethical contexts of solidarity are characterised by their specificity or particularity; commitments, required actions and the scope of the solidarity community depend on specific identity contexts. It is essential to recognise that an individual usually belongs to several ethical contexts simultaneously, which can lead to certain questions or conflicts regarding priorities – for example, between loyalty to one's family and religious community or to a friend in need of support. This also means that no single ethical impulse, on the basis of which an individual decides to act in solidarity, has an inherent priority; ethical justification always requires the individual to judge who they are and what they 'owe' to others with whom they share (strong) community bonds.

Legal contexts

Contemporary social systems incorporate institutionally mediated forms of solidarity in which individuals contribute something without expecting a direct return. Social security systems are an example of this 'institutionalised solidarity'. These arrangements represent a broader commitment to mutual support or establish a specific framework in which solidarity is institutionalised through formal legal frameworks. Such 'arrangements' of solidarity have specific historical origins; among others, the thinker Leibniz is significant,

having advocated for institutionalised insurance programmes to protect against misfortune. Formal legal contexts of solidarity include, for example, social welfare systems, healthcare programmes and insurance schemes, in which some people receive more benefits than others on the basis of need (Forst, 2024, pp. 46–47).

In this regard, there are some concerns that legally established solidarity is not ‘true’ solidarity, and that the institutionalisation of solidarity through social policies, measures and formal arrangements, in a certain sense, undermines ‘true’ solidarity, which is based on voluntary action. It should be emphasised here that legal forms of solidarity do not preclude solidarity in other senses and forms. Citizens in democratic societies must accept such solidarity systems not because of the threat of sanctions, but because of the legitimacy and function of such solidarity measures: ‘The institutionalization of a system of social solidarity can and should be a political act of solidarity, as well as its maintenance and improvement; and its neoliberal dismantling can rightly be criticized with good reasons as an act of de-solidarization.’ (Forst, 2024, p. 49).

Political contexts

We have already indicated in the previous section that formal legal codifications and contexts overlap with political ones; the latter, in this sense, bring about and enable multiple conceptions (and practices) of solidarity. The ethical-political form relates to national ties and a shared history, which sometimes manifests as nationalism. Although such communities and their history may be ‘imagined’ (Anderson, 2003), this motivational basis remains present and significant. Furthermore, as a political context, we can highlight the political-social frameworks and forms that exist where a ‘common cause’ encourages people to act in solidarity, for example in class struggle, the struggle for democracy or ecological transformation (Forst, 2024). These movements often strive to establish a just society and eliminate inequalities based on gender, race or class. Concepts of solidarity grounded in justice take two forms: those that call for

solidarity to establish a just order, and those that call for solidarity to maintain it. The former fight against injustice, whilst the latter adhere to already established principles of justice.

Moral contexts

Finally, let us consider what Forst (2024, pp. 53–54) refers to as moral contexts. Within these frameworks, solidarity is grounded in the idea of our shared humanity and ranges from morally obligatory assistance to supererogatory acts that go beyond the assumptions of reciprocity. This form of solidarity recognises others as potentially vulnerable beings for whom we must ‘stand up’, based on the simple yet crucial fact that, as human beings, we are always fragile and vulnerable. Solidarity through and across moral contexts represents a perspective that stems from our shared human condition: morality itself is a form of care for others, even if we do not share spaces with them, be they physical, symbolic, collective, or specific identities. Respect for the uniqueness and vulnerability of the ‘concrete other’, whereby everyone is treated as an equal, is precisely what morality demands. In this regard, we can argue that acts of solidarity are always concrete acts, but the justifications for their implementation may stem from the same or similar moral frameworks (Forst, 2024).

Solidarity, if understood as a specific practical stance, is always embedded in normative ideas (ideals) and the collective bonds associated with them. In this sense alone, it transcends the private and emotional sphere; in other words, it manifests as a political phenomenon, and in this light, practices of solidarity, which are often assumed to be apolitical or confined to intimate or ethical contexts, also be understood as political action, in which it is always relational and, as such, always a form of cooperation. This form of political engagement becomes all the more evident when solidarity-based cooperation is not carried out as charity or a duty, but as a commitment to a common goal or collective well-being. Such commitments are not neutral; they

are situated within socio-political struggles and are often determined by ideas and manifestations of justice, responsibility and identity.

The spaces within which solidarity materialises (whether local, national, regional, global), are constitutive of political subjectivities and forms of solidarity-based cooperation, whereby it is crucial that the latter do not take place in a vacuum, but are shaped and acquire specific elements within particular socio-political contexts. The local level, for example, is not merely a space for personal practices of solidarity, but also a platform where political cooperation, based on mutual aid and interdependence, can raise the issue of, and potentially address, broader systemic inequalities. Similarly, solidarity at the national or state level functions as a form of political cooperation, as it can be established through various frameworks and programmes within the context of specific legal codifications and political institutions, which thereby shape and mediate solidarity – sometimes as a means of inclusion, sometimes as a mechanism of exclusion.

As we have shown, practices of solidarity can be both voluntary political acts and, at the same time, grounded in commitments that may constitute ‘soft’ forms of coercion. In this regard, we can emphasise that solidarity is certainly a form of willingness to prioritise collective bonds over one’s own interests, often in environments marked by structural injustice. These characteristics cannot be reduced merely to emotional responsiveness; rather, they involve a moral and political judgement regarding whom we recognise as worthy of solidarity and potential cooperation with others. In this respect, it is a form of political decision-making, particularly in situations where it requires confronting prevailing interests (such as in the fight for the climate or global solidarity). The willingness to act for others, even in the absence of reciprocity, is never merely a personal virtue, but is in fact a form or element of democratic life. This form of political solidarity also challenges the prevailing neoliberal logic of our time, which privatises acts of solidarity and depoliticises social relations.

Finally, we might also point out that the contextual variability of solidarity and its roots in collective action suggest that it is, in fact, a

practice of political participation. Regardless of whether solidarity is mobilised in response to the climate crisis and related environmental injustices, or socio-economic insecurity/injustice, we can speak of its political nature, which involves a connection between ethical positions and political relations and actions, a connection between private solidarity and public struggle, and a connection between individual commitments and collective transformations. Solidarity, which we must necessarily understand as a mode of relationship and action, positions the materialisation of solidarity as a political force also in the sense that it opens up possibilities for cultivating spaces and practices in which mutual aid and advocacy are not pushed to the margins, but are recognised as central to the formation of democratic communities.

3

CARE

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- Care is a complex and controversial concept that appears in dominant discourses as both an individual responsibility and a collective practice, revealing tensions between neoliberal narratives of self-care and progressive visions of mutual support and shared responsibility.
- Contemporary society is marked by a 'crisis of care', in which neoliberal capitalism systematically undermines care practices by prioritising profit over people, leading to the commodification, fragmentation and devaluation of care work.
- Care has diverse historical origins, ranging from ancient mythological and religious traditions through philanthropic practices to modern welfare states, with the meanings of care reflecting the prevailing power dynamics and political ideologies of particular historical periods and (geopolitical) spaces.
- In the broadest sense, care differs from solidarity in scope and application: care is typically manifested in direct, interpersonal contexts focused on immediate needs, whilst solidarity operates at broader collective levels, focused on structural changes and systemic transformations.

- Care represents a potential foundation for democratic participation, as it challenges liberal-individualistic frameworks and offers an alternative political vision based on interdependence, mutual responsibility and collective well-being as the foundations for the transformation of social and political relations.

Why talk about 'care'? The term 'care' is increasingly invoked as one of the major 'languages' for recasting community and sociality (others include trust, respect, and responsibility). Care is invoked because it is concerned with the character of connections between people—the issue of moral responsibility for others—in the modern world (Beasley & Bacchi, 2005, p. 49).

Care is certainly a concept we hear very often, perhaps now more than ever before. In an era marked by various crises, perceived threats and widespread uncertainty, calls for 'care' are present in interpersonal conversations, on media front pages and in political debates at various levels. As Beasley and Bacchi (2005) note, care is an extremely widespread concept that is deeply embedded in the modern world. However, this seemingly simple call to 'take care of oneself and others' reveals a specific complexity, as we might immediately ask what this actually means. Caring 'for oneself' takes various forms; on the one hand, particularly in current neoliberal societies, this often means an emphasis on individual responsibility – the idea that each person must take care of their own well-being and welfare, whilst self-sufficiency is encouraged, meaning that everyone depends primarily on themselves (Gilbert, 2002; Ilcan & Basok, 2004). On the other hand, we are simultaneously witnessing processes in which numerous movements and civil society organisations are actively advocating for care at the collective level, for mutual support, community well-being and shared responsibility.

We may mention another relevant introductory consideration, namely that care is not inherently 'positive'. Care narratives can also be exclusionary. In this context, for example, we might point out that when 'caring for oneself and one's own' becomes the main

goal, it can implicitly or explicitly draw boundaries and determine that certain individuals or groups do not belong within the circle of those for whom care is intended or given, that they do not deserve it, or that they are unwelcome. On the other hand, for progressive actors, the very concept of care serves as an ideological foundation or a radically inclusive principle – a foundation that demands that everyone, without exception, is worthy of care and support.

This brings us to the central dilemma. The concept of care is deeply woven into the fabric of our everyday lives and influences countless interactions and practices; we are talking, among other things, about caring for ourselves, for one another, or for the (natural) environment. Despite its ubiquity, however, care as a concept often remains surprisingly unreflected upon, its deeper meanings and consequences largely unaddressed. In the context of this conceptual heterogeneity and the continuously produced ambiguities, which are simultaneously significant in the articulation and production of our social and political life, we wish to delve deeper into this issue in this chapter. As in the previous chapter, we shall begin this reflection by examining the everyday manifestations of care and the discourses surrounding it. From this vantage point, we will then broaden our perspective and critically examine the current social context, which, as we have already highlighted, is often characterised by individualisation, selfishness and competitiveness, traits typical of the dominant capitalist mode of production. This raises an important dilemma: despite the prevailing discourse on care, do we in fact live in a society that is becoming less and less caring?

Following this analysis of the present, we will briefly turn to the historical contexts of the development of care, and then, at the end of the chapter, we will focus on understanding the complex relationship between care and solidarity. By comparing these concepts and reflecting on their intertwining, we aim to shed light on the key dimensions of care and caring practices. In particular, we will focus on reflecting on the key role of care as a potential starting point, foundation, and perhaps even a prerequisite for the formation of effective and sustainable forms of social and political cooperation.

3.1 EVERYDAY USAGE: HEGEMONIC NARRATIVES

Why does it make sense to begin by identifying how care is used in everyday language? Because by reflecting on the various forms and meanings of care in everyday life, we can uncover the multi-layered nature of this idea (and the practices associated with it). This gives us a clearer view of the broad scope of care; of how it functions as the foundation for shaping the attitudes and practices of individuals and communities. Ultimately, by exploring its everyday manifestations, we lay the groundwork for the deeper understanding and reflection that will follow later in this chapter.

We can begin with the most common use of the term ‘care’, which is (unsurprisingly) linked to the generally prevailing (neo)liberal logic of individualism. In this context, and in relation to this logic, care today is based on self-responsibility (Ward, 2015). This narrative, often expressed in the phrase ‘self-care’, relates to the idea that each individual is responsible for themselves and must look after their own well-being, which is articulated to a significant extent through narratives such as self-help, personal growth, a healthy lifestyle and individual resilience. Ward (2015), however, emphasises that contemporary discourses on self-responsibility and self-care have been co-opted by neoliberalism with a specific aim, namely (among other things) to reduce the costs of care and to shift responsibility from the (welfare) state onto the shoulders of individuals. This individualisation of care is therefore, in this sense, consistent with neoliberal ideology, which promotes personal responsibility whilst simultaneously dismantling social safety nets.

Another prevalent understanding of care in contemporary society is linked to specific demographic groups categorised as ‘vulnerable’ or dependent – primarily children, older adults and individuals facing a particular (long-term or difficult-to-treat) illness. We often conceive of and apply this understanding through the lens of care, and it usually manifests itself in institutionalised care settings such as nurseries, care homes and hospitals. Although these institutionalised forms

of care play an irreplaceable role today, they are also an example of the problematic trend of commodification and the fragmentation of care (Farris & Marchetti, 2017; Ungerson, 1997). Indeed, the current fragmentation of care into institutionalised services for ‘vulnerable population groups’ can be understood as a symptom of our society’s indifference. By restricting care to specialised settings, the idea that care is a separate activity is perpetuated; in a neoliberal context, this amounts to the withdrawal of care from the wider social fabric, and consequently the creation of an ‘artificial’ divide between ‘caregivers’ and ‘care recipients’, which, from the perspective of the ethics of care, obscures care as the fundamental interdependence that defines humanity (Tronto, 2013).

Such fragmentation serves capitalist interests, as it transforms care into services subject to economic supply and demand, whilst rendering the constant networks and forms of care provision on which we all depend virtually invisible. At the same time, we can also recognise that a disproportionately large share of care work falls within the domain of women, migrants and marginalised communities; this is exploited labour that sustains our existence, yet remains systematically devalued and underpaid. We need not look abroad for an example; we can observe such an arrangement in Slovenia as well. For instance, migrants from India are employed as a lower-skilled and lower-paid workforce in care homes for the elderly (Polanc, 2025). This arrangement is not coincidental, as it constitutes care extractivism, which involves the exploitation of the compassion and labour of already marginalised groups, whilst privileged groups enjoy the benefits of care without being aware of their dependence or mutual obligations (Folbre, 2021).

The third dominant discourse, linked to the concept of care, is framed as emotional care, where the psychologisation of relationships is particularly prominent. This discourse emphasises, for example, the importance of promoting mental health, offering emotional support and ensuring psychological well-being. At first glance, such an arrangement of caring relationships beyond physical bodies seems

unproblematic; however, this form of emotional support is highly ambivalent in its dominant form. It is often framed by the logic of individualism, which defines emotional suffering and mental health issues as a private matter and separates them from the broader material, relational and political contexts in which they arise. Therapeutic services, so-called *wellness* interventions and psychological support, are often geared towards helping individuals adapt to a 'toxic' environment, whilst the structural aspect or structural conditions, which are a significant cause of individuals' psychological states in contemporary societies, are neglected (Gilligan, 1993; The Care Collective, 2020).

If we take this critique further, it is essential to emphasise that emotional care is often abstracted from its socio-material embeddedness. In this context, the emotional dimension and the psychologisation of care are linked to the neoliberalisation of societies (Ariaans & Reibling, 2023), though this is not an entirely modern phenomenon or trend. Hochschild (1983) had already pointed out that emotional care is often subject to commercialisation, leading to alienation from one's own emotional life, particularly in feminised professions. Claassen (2011) similarly criticises the commodification of emotional care and warns that this undermines the relational and moral essence of care practices themselves. The point, then, is that this psychologised and professionalised care industry often reproduces the very conditions of alienation and inequality that it is supposed to cure.

Let us consider another way in which the concept of care is used in contemporary societies, namely within the discourse on environmental and climate care, which is becoming increasingly prevalent in public and political narratives. Whilst care for the environment and climate is essential in light of climate change and the excessive strain on the planet, this discourse is often limited to a narrow emphasis on individual responsibility and individual actions, such as recycling, reducing one's personal carbon footprint and buying sustainable products. Although these practices may be sensible, the emphasis on lifestyle adjustments completely silences and obscures the systemic

or structural nature of the environmental crisis. Such framing is consistent with the logic of a neoliberal careless society, in which care is privatised and responsibility for green measures is shifted onto individuals. Crucially, the burden of 'planetary survival' is shifted onto individuals, whilst corporate and state actors remain less recognised as key bearers of responsibility (Cripps, 2013). The regulation and shifting of environmental care primarily onto individuals is what we might call the pushing of environmentalism into the private sphere, where the moral and practical responsibility for saving the planet is individualised and depoliticised. This diverts attention from the urgent structural transformations needed to address climate injustice, halt further environmental degradation and curb the expansion of extractive capitalism. It also reinforces a neoliberal moral economy in which care for the environment becomes a form of consumer choice, governed by market availability and the individual's 'appropriate', 'suitable and good' orientation.

3.2 A CARELESS SOCIETY?

The Care Collective's diagnosis of the contemporary situation reveals a multidimensional crisis of care that pervades globalised society at various interconnected levels. This crisis has, at its core, intensified over the last forty years, as neoliberal capitalism has come to dominate virtually everywhere, placing profit at the heart of the organisation and regulation of life. This transformation has systematically prioritised the interests and flows of financial capital, whilst simultaneously undermining the welfare state and democratic processes and institutions to a great extent (Cahill & Konings, 2017). The consequences are clear: care services have been severely cut back and have become inaccessible to many, whilst the ideas of social security and community have been sidelined and replaced by individualised notions of resilience, well-being and self-care. Care has been reduced to something we are expected to provide for ourselves and purchase through the increasingly widespread 'self-help' industry (The Care

Collective, 2020). Despite the growing debate on care and caring, *The Care Collective* (2020, p. 3) notes that ‘carelessness still prevails’.

However, the erosion of care work is not merely a consequence of the dominance of neoliberalism. The undermining and devaluation of care work and practices have a much longer history, as they have been largely devalued due to their association with women, femininity and occupations considered ‘unproductive’ (The Care Collective, 2020, p. 4). Consequently, care work is still often less well paid and less valued in society. According to a group of intellectuals, the dominant neoliberal model has ‘merely’ exploited and reinforced this long history of the devaluation of care. The archetypal neoliberal subject is the entrepreneurial individual whose sole relationship with other people is through competition to improve their own position: ‘the dominant model of social organisation that has emerged is one of competition rather than co-operation’ (The Care Collective, 2020, p. 4). The result is what *The Care Collective* (2020, p. 5) defines as an omnipresent, normalised indifference: ‘To appropriate a term famously used by Hannah Arendt, a systemic level of banality permeates our everyday carelessness’. Hearing about catastrophes such as wars and genocides, mass drownings of refugees or the spread of homelessness has become routine, with most expressions of indifference occurring unconsciously, without reflection (The Care Collective, 2020).

This indifference manifests itself on several interrelated levels. At the global level, where neoliberal policies have prevailed, the careless notion of ‘economic growth’ has taken precedence over ensuring the well-being of citizens. In these circumstances, multinational corporations (currently mainly technology companies) thrive, implementing agendas whose central aim is to enrich a minority at the expense of the majority. At the same time, right-wing populist governments have tightened borders to keep out ‘undesirable’ people (migrants), whilst allowing the relatively unhindered flow of goods. *The Care Collective* (2020, p. 9) points out that ‘deep-seated indifference at the global level has created a world that is itself in crisis’, partly because the idea of constant, continuous economic growth is fundamentally

incompatible with environmental constraints and the preservation of the planet's living space.

At the level of trade, neoliberalism undermines virtually all forms of care practices that do not serve its goal or agenda of profit-making. Within this economic order, the focus on profit, growth and international competitiveness is central; meanwhile, the ever-increasing income inequality is not accidental, but a key structural feature of neoliberal capitalism that is growing exponentially – neoliberalism is, as *The Care Collective* (2020, p. 10) argues, 'uncaring by design'. The rise of platform markets for everyday care needs undermines community care resources, as it introduces market logic into formerly non-market sectors such as healthcare and education.

Nation states have become instruments of this indifference. Since the 1980s, leaders such as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan have persistently promoted and defended the belief that caring for others is a matter of private choice for each individual, and that these individuals are the backbone of competitive markets and lean states. In line with this logic, the 'ideal' citizen 'under neoliberalism is autonomous, entrepreneurial, and endlessly resilient, a self-sufficient figure whose active promotion helped to justify the dismantling of the welfare state and the unravelling of democratic institutions and civic engagement' (The Care Collective, 2020, pp. 12–13). The exponential growth of the irresponsible private sector has had catastrophic consequences both for the potential of collective care practices and for the possibilities of civic participation and engagement within democratic states.

Furthermore, we can also recognise that entire states have been transformed and rearticulated in the context of the dominance of carelessness. The systematic withdrawal of state care for public welfare, replaced by global corporations, has created desensitised and individualised environments in which care is supposed to be practised. Nowhere is this phenomenon more evident than in the field of social care, where the corporate takeover (in the sense of privatisation) of care homes has led to the neglect of people who should be receiving

care within their own communities. 'The capacities of those employed to provide care are severely diminished through ongoing exploitation, understaffing, poor pay, time constraints, inadequate or non-existent job security and a lack of training and support' (The Care Collective, 2020, p. 15). As community resources become increasingly limited and the prevailing culture prioritises profit over people, the development of interpersonal bonds that would strengthen democracy has become extremely difficult. This creates fertile ground for communities devoid of empathy, as 'carelessness takes hold in so many domains of life, and as community ties are profoundly weakened' (The Care Collective, 2020, pp. 16–17).

Family ties, too, have been radically transformed by neoliberal carelessness. The traditional nuclear family remains the ideal prototype of a space for the expression of care and modern family relationships, stemming from the myth of the 'maternal bond'. *The Care Collective* (2020, p. 17) observes that our circles of care have not expanded, but rather, on the contrary, have become 'painfully narrow'. Such forms of care practices prove to be unreliable and problematic, not least because care relationships are eroding even within nuclear families, whilst market mechanisms also shift care onto 'others'. The neoliberal hegemonic paradigm of 'caring only for oneself' and one's closest relatives creates a paranoid form of 'caring only for one's own', which globally fuels the rise of far-right populism (The Care Collective, 2020), as it excludes, often very violently, 'others'. In this context, however, it is precisely through this point that the functioning of carelessness at the micro-levels (at the level of the individual, the family) has a reciprocal effect on other levels of the perpetuation of carelessness: namely, in this context, the global 'lack' of care and the return to the traditional family are intertwined and demonstrate how closely connected and inextricably intertwined the various levels of care are.

3.3 A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CONCEPT OF CARE

The concept of care certainly has extremely diverse historical origins, which have shaped its semantic frameworks in various ways, a factor that has also contributed to care being a heterogeneous concept today. Although, as we have already shown, it is often taken for granted and interpreted in a hegemonic manner as a universal human phenomenon, it is essential to recognise from the outset that its meanings and uses have changed over time. Reich (1995), for example, argues that early mythologies, religious traditions and philosophical discourses placed ‘care’ at the very heart of what it means to be human. Later, during the modern era, specialised professions, state interventions and new organisational models emerged, developed and became more or less institutionalised, transforming care from a predominantly private or charitable endeavour into public (state) systems (Symonds, 1998). In this context, it is also necessary to recognise, for example, the transformations from the idea of community care practices in the 19th century, which at that time primarily meant specific voluntary activities, to care regimes and programmes within state frameworks in the mid-20th century (Symonds, 1998), and later, of course, into neoliberal regimes of regulating and implementing care in the manifold spheres of socio-political life.

Ancient roots and the tradition of the Roman goddess Cura

One of the significant ancient sources of a specific understanding of care appears in Greco-Roman sources, particularly in the myth of *Cura* (Latin for care, attention). This refers to the Roman goddess who shapes humanity from clay and then insists on ‘accompanying’ humans throughout their lives (Reich, 1995). In this myth, ‘care’ (*cura*) has a dual meaning. It can be burdensome care, which pushes people into distress (i.e. in the sense of anxiety), or it can be nurturing care, a concern that uplifts and unites humanity; this perspective on care is also the one articulated by the philosopher Seneca. The Stoic philosophy associated with him, however, also saw in care the process

of human becoming: 'care was the key to becoming truly human. For Seneca, the word care meant diligence; it also had connotations of attention, conscientiousness and devotion' (Reich, 1995).

This ancient ambiguity (as we can see, 'care' has multiple meanings, ranging from a burden to benevolence and the human condition) can in fact be understood as the prehistory and backdrop to the long philosophical and religious history of 'care' as a concept, in which *cura animarum* or 'care for souls' became a central phrase. We should not, however, treat or understand these ancient and medieval meanings as the direct source of contemporary conceptions of care; rather, we can understand them as the sediment upon which new meanings emerged: not merely practical, but moral and existential understandings of care (Reich, 1995).

Care for souls: religious and pastoral tradition

An important historical context for the development of the meaning of care was the rise of Christianity and its extensive theological (knowledge-based) framework. In this complex environment, 'care' spread, among other things, as the responsibility of priests and monks in the 'care of souls'. This pastoral tradition encompassed the healing, comforting and guiding of ('troubled') individuals towards spiritual (and often also physical) health (Reich, 1995). In medieval Europe, monastic orders institutionalised care in hospitals and lazarettos, thereby bringing spiritual and physical healing under one roof. As Saldaña (2006) argues, although this aspect is usually overlooked, women played an important role in these contexts, particularly as 'consecrated women' living in convents. Although usually without material remuneration, they cared for the sick and the poor through their practice. Over time, some orders, particularly in the Middle Ages, institutionalised these endeavours in a more formal manner, contributing to a process in which, as already mentioned, spiritual devotion and service to the community became, in a sense, intertwined.

The roots of modern perceptions and meanings of care date back to the 19th century

The 19th century was a period of exceptional importance for the modern formation of concepts of care, care practices and institutionalised forms of care provision (e.g. for specific sections of the population), following the consolidation of the state as the dominant form of political organisation of the community and the rise of industry and capitalism. In the 19th century, for example in Great Britain, ‘community care’ was largely the domain and sphere of philanthropic endeavours or the efforts of (wealthier) families, and to a certain extent was also framed within the emerging social form of the nuclear family (Symonds, 1998). Private charitable organisations, religious organisations and wealthy donors provided certain services and filled the gaps created by minimal state involvement; however, it is essential to note that these were not systemic solutions, but rather actions based on paternalism, which merely perpetuated existing inequalities and exploitation. In this context, however, women from the middle and upper classes often acted as ‘visitors’ to poorer households. This charitable model was, however, distinctly hierarchical and highly moralistic, as it reflected the prevailing view of the time that poverty stemmed from personal ‘failings’ rather than structural factors (Symonds, 1998). Furthermore, it can be argued that another significant historical factor in the development of welfare was widespread urban poverty (which came with industrialisation, urbanisation and capitalism in general), namely public health threats such as epidemics, which spurred diverse searches for answers to these ‘problems’. Scientifically grounded arguments also emerged (e.g. Charles Booth, Seebohm Rowntree) that existing working and living conditions and other structural causes significantly contributed to the poor health of the population, particularly the working class, which naturally also disrupted the processes of reproduction of capitalist relations of production. Consequently, public health legislation, local health boards and basic social programmes began to emerge and develop. These measures, however, served a dual function, as

they were established and implemented as radical political and community changes that increasingly emphasised human relations and sustainability, whilst simultaneously forming part of society's social and regulatory functions, a form of soft policing in capitalist society (Parker, 2023). Foucault (2001) also emphasised in his lectures in Rio that (social) medicine had become a framework within which healthcare for individuals and the population at large had gained significance with the aim of ensuring the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production.

The professionalisation of care practices

As early as the 18th and 19th centuries, and also at the beginning of the 20th century, precisely because of the aforementioned processes linked to the capitalist mode of production and the state's role as a locus of power, the need for control, management and direction of care in a wide variety of areas of human life. These included, amongst others, the fields of sexuality (Foucault, 1978), general education and training, and health. In the latter field, as Symonds (1998, p. 23) points out, state interventions gradually took the form of professionalisation, specifically in three forms: 'public health care for the whole community, the professionalisation of care in and for the community, and finally the measure of social security and access to professional health care for particular groups. The first measures cover the period from the end of the nineteenth century to the interwar period.'

The focus on children's health (and care), for example, led to the provision of school meals and the establishment of a school health service, which subsequently introduced the role of school nurse as a distinct profession. Community nursing, home visits and the emerging field of social work developed into distinct professions, primarily due to formal training requirements for those performing such care tasks (Symonds, 1998). These roles, previously performed by charitable 'ladies' or more or less qualified 'visiting' practitioners of care, were given systematic educational programmes. In this

context, for example, nursing (as a form of care practice) became a state-registered (professional) activity (Saldaña, 2006, pp. 10–12). Although these new roles responded to very real and visible social needs, they also reflected deeply entrenched gender norms that linked ‘nursing’ and ‘care’ to women’s work.

The central role of women and the importance of basic domestic care

As we have already indicated on several occasions, and as is also evident from the conclusion of the previous section on the professionalisation of care or care practices, it is essential in our discussion of historical transformation to take into account and pay particular attention to the position and role of women. In the Middle Ages and the early modern period, care work acquired moral and religious significance, whilst in many societies women became the primary performers of caregiving roles, both informally in the home and formally in the expanding roles of nursing and midwifery, a trend that was particularly evident at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries (Saldaña, 2006; Symonds, 1998). Particularly in the modern era, women were thus increasingly regarded as the primary agents expected to perform tasks crucial to ‘sustaining life’, including hygiene, feeding, childbirth and end-of-life rituals (Richard, 2024). In the context of the increasing direct and indirect institutionalisation of care at local and national levels, and the reinforcement of hierarchical gender relations that further cemented the dominant position of men, scientific and state interventions, including in the field of public health, have over the centuries diminished women’s autonomy as carers and placed them in markedly unequal relationships dominated by men (Symonds, 1998). At the same time, it must be emphasised that the knowledge women possessed and acquired through practice remained indispensable, as was demonstrated during the First and Second World Wars in the sense that their caregiving abilities were highlighted – whether as volunteer nurses, midwives or, later, as recognised experts in various fields related to care (Saldaña, 2006).

Not least, this is also confirmed by the role of women in treating partisans during the Second World War in Slovenian towns, and it is no wonder that partisan hospitals were also named after women. The best known is, of course, the Franja Hospital; less well-known, though equally important, was the Pavla Hospital, which operated at several locations in the Trnovo Forest Plateau.

Furthermore, after the Second World War, 'motherhood' remained a specific field of governance: 'This return of the person of the mother to the centre of attention was the result of a number of discourses from psychology, criminology and social citizenship' (Symonds, 1998, p. 36). Just as the state had become the provider of a 'a basic minimum of support, bypassing the husband and the father, so mothers were now called upon to perform their role in social citizenship. Whereas men acquired this identity through work and their contributions to the social system, women were to be given access to benefits based on their contribution - their contribution to the care of society' (Symonds, 1998, p. 36).

This historical transformation of women's roles in the context of notions of care and care practices reveals specific implications for the formation of a regime of power based on gender, but above all, it shows how care has become the primary social function of women and the basis for an entrenched hegemonic belief that the sphere of care is the primary way in which women 'fulfil' their civic role. With the increasing institutionalisation of care practices in terms of provision, women were incorporated into hierarchical frameworks dominated by men, which simultaneously relied on their experience, knowledge and skills. At the same time, it must be recognised that the political order in this sense was structured on the basis of gendered responsibilities, which placed women in roles crucial to social reproduction, thereby reinforcing gender asymmetry and dependence on patriarchal state structures. This regime incorporated women's caregiving roles into the system of governance and welfare and created various forms of citizenship based on gender criteria - men acquired citizenship primarily through formal work contributions, whilst women's social

and political identity was largely shaped through their care work. Such divisions reinforced gender inequalities and shaped gendered political participation in the regulation of social issues, problems and spheres.

From philanthropy to the welfare state and the neoliberal regime: contemporary transformations

We cannot, however, present the full scope of contemporary transformations from the welfare state to the modern neoliberal regime of careless living, as these encompass different periods in which various epistemological frameworks, political processes at the global level, and the specificities of national contexts have prevailed across different decades. These are socio-political and economic processes, such as post-war reconstruction, the Cold War and decolonisation, the establishment of new economic regimes at the global level in the context of crises (e.g. the oil crisis), accelerated globalisation, etc. The interwar period and the post-World War II era revealed, among other things, the shortcomings of fragmented philanthropic systems, which had prevailed as the framework for the establishment and implementation of welfare in a wide variety of fields (Symonds, 1998). Economic instability, mass unemployment and the victims of war heightened the perceived and actual need for comprehensive social programmes, within which care roles and practices were, of course, specifically defined and established. 'National efficiency' and 'planning' became important means by which services managed by state authorities were delivered more systematically, also in the name of welfare (Symonds, 1998). Generally speaking, it can be argued that by the mid-20th century, the provision of a basic level of care and welfare had become a recognised responsibility of state authorities, although non-governmental organisations and private institutions continued to play an important role. At the heart of the contemporary organisation, institutionalisation and socio-political regulation of care and care practices lies the professionalisation of women's care work, which was previously unpaid and taken for

granted, but is now at least partially recognised. However, as we have already shown, regardless of the ‘recognition’ of its relevance, the whole issue still revolved around questions of justice and the valuation of work (Saldaña, 2006).

In the second half of the 20th century, particularly from the 1970s and even more so from the 1980s onwards, however, even in the context of care practices and arrangements, including, for example, education, medical care, care for the elderly, etc., in many parts of the world, and particularly in the West, the neoliberal logic of privatising various such services has prevailed; at the same time, the logic of individual responsibility for one’s own health and well-being has become dominant, as we have already discussed in detail in the second chapter.

In tracing the history of care and care practices, we have sought to move beyond, at least in part, simplistic (ahistorical) understandings of care and care practices, whilst also addressing their political dimensions. As we have shown, the meanings attributed to care, the practices associated with it, and the institutional structures governing its provision have never been static or universal. From ancient mythological and philosophical roots, through its incorporation into religious frameworks, its transformation into philanthropic models, and its subsequent integration into state systems of public health and social welfare, care has been shaped by specific contexts and has reflected the prevailing dynamics of power, economic logic and political ideologies that prevailed in a specific historical period. If anything, this historical analysis reveals that perceptions of care and the organisation of care – decisions regarding who provides it, who receives it, under what conditions and with what resources – function as one of the key mechanisms of governance and social organisation.

We can highlight one further point, namely that, through a historical perspective, we have been able to see that care practices represent an important, though often overlooked, form of political participation,

though by no means always in the same way, with the same emphases and the same conception of what we are actually doing when we act with care or in a caring manner. The development of professionalised care roles, community initiatives and extensive state systems requires specific coordination and, in this sense, the coordinated action of various actors, structured and regulated by political frameworks. As highlighted in this chapter, this cooperation is often organised on the basis of deeply rooted inequalities, particularly gender inequalities. The persistent linking of care work to women, which is also framed as their social contribution and even active citizenship through caregiving roles, points to the formation of a distinctly gendered political regime. This regime does not merely assign (in each instance) responsibilities, but actively shapes political engagement and political participation, reinforces structural asymmetries, and incorporates women's labour into the state structure, its agencies, organisations, and other institutionalised forms of care practices, often without adequate recognition or remuneration. It is therefore essential that we understand care and its associated manifestations in the form of care practices not merely as a private, emotion-based commitment and activity within private spaces, but as a historically conditioned and politically 'charged' sphere. How society conceives, organises and values care and caring as a series of practices is indicative of the political commitments built around it, power structures, and visions of social cooperation and justice.

3.4 CARE: CONCEPTUAL DIMENSIONS AND MEANINGS

Concepts of care in certain academic disciplines

Given the historical transformations, it is hardly surprising that care, as a concept, is understood in extremely diverse ways and, as such, always eludes a (final) definition: 'research on care [...] is characterised by the use of different definitions of care. [...] One

of the major problems for all care theorists is the definition of the concept [...] because the concept of care is ambiguous and contested; part of the problem is that it is used in so many different ways' (José, 2016). One of the reasons for the diverse understandings and definitions is also that different fields of knowledge focus on specific contexts where care takes on a particular function and, through this, institutions, activities, operations, and the positions of subjects, etc., are materialised. Let us therefore take a brief look at how care is understood and addressed in various academic disciplines.

Broadly speaking, sociological reflections (see José, 2016; Leira, 1994) do not treat care merely as an individual act of benevolence, but as something interwoven with social structures, economic systems and historical development. These perspectives often emphasise the dimensions of care as work, obligation, social organisation and community support. In sociological interpretations, care is often treated as diverse specific forms of work or jobs, which may also exist in the private sphere (Šori, 2018). In this context, for example, we recognise the term '*care work*', which refers to the care of individuals and encompasses not only physical tasks but also a great deal of mental and emotional labour, which is often unevenly distributed within society (Malhotra & Misra, 2015). The concept itself suggests that care and caregiving practices are not merely a natural and simple response to those in need.

In the past, the responsibility for care and care work has also changed significantly, particularly with the development of the welfare state, as we have already demonstrated. Here, we merely highlight that various sociological insights prompt reflections (including through a historical lens) on the changing relationship between private and public spaces of care and care practices, where, amongst other things, we can observe the rearticulation of care and provision as (un)paid work (Leira, 1994, pp. 87–88), and an understanding of care as an activity embedded within a normative framework of duties and responsibilities. This means that societies set expectations and duties related to the provision of care, which influences how individuals

and institutions approach caregiving roles. Furthermore, certain sociological perspectives address the establishment of care practices as essential elements of social organisation (Thelen, 2015). Another concept that features in sociological debates, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world, is *community care*, essentially understood as a system that provides support and assistance to individuals in local communities, particularly those who are vulnerable or in distress (Baldock & Ungerson, 1996).

Sociological insights thus enable an understanding of care at the macro level, taking into account social effects and not focusing solely on the motivation or actions of individuals, but emphasising the political and economic dimensions of care and exploring how social structures and policies significantly influence access to care and its provision.

As a scientific discipline, psychology, in contrast to sociology's emphasis on broader social structures in the study of care, focuses primarily on the individual level, examining the characteristics, motivation and developmental aspects associated with it (Hall, 1990). In psychology, the concept of care is often linked to moral development (Govrin, 2014). It is precisely within the framework of moral psychology that the feminist author Carol Gilligan published her critique of mainstream psychology in the book *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Gilligan, 1993). In this work, her central argument is that girls have different patterns of moral development, based on relationships and feelings of care and responsibility for others. Her work (soon) inspired and underpinned a feminist-oriented movement in the philosophy of ethics, known as the ethics of care or care ethics.

The moral theory known as the ethics of care emphasises the importance of relationships and interdependence in human life. At the normative level, it strives to, or is directed towards, maintaining relationships by taking context into account and promoting the well-being of both those who provide care and those who receive it within the framework of diverse social relationships (Sander-Staudt,

2025). Care is most often understood as a practice or virtue rather than a theory in the narrower sense, as it involves striving to maintain a just world and to meet the needs of others and ourselves. It is based on the idea of the importance of providing care for vulnerable and care-dependent individuals. One of the early contributions to the ethics of care is Milton Mayeroff's work (1971) *On Caring*, but the establishment of this theory as an independent approach is often attributed to the aforementioned psychologist Carol Gilligan and philosopher Nel Noddings (1984) from the mid-1980s. Both authors criticised traditional moral theories for their male bias and offered the 'voice of care' as a legitimate alternative to the 'perspective of justice' characteristic of liberal theories of human rights. Significant contributions to the further development of the ethics of care were made by Virginia Held, Eva Feder Kittay, Sara Ruddick and Joan Tronto (Sander-Staudt, 2025).

Care ethics is often presented as the antithesis of deontological (Kantian) and consequentialist (utilitarian) approaches to ethics, and is closely aligned with certain other moral traditions, such as Confucian ethics (Sander-Staudt, 2025). Essentially, this means that the ethics of care focuses on the importance of relationships, empathy and responsibility towards others, rather than relying on established (informal but widely accepted) rules (deontological ethics) or passing judgement on specific actions based on the effects they produce (consequentialism). As already mentioned, it can be argued that quite a few parallels can be drawn between the ethics of care and traditional moral traditions, such as Confucian ethics, which emphasises roles, harmony and moral development in social relations.

Based on the sociological considerations already presented and the developing theorisations within the framework of the ethics of care, diverse conceptualisations of care have also emerged in other, more specialised academic fields. For example, within the field of healthcare, the concept of care is central to the theorisation of practices, with care often defined as a fundamental human quality, a moral imperative that guides professional conduct, interpersonal interaction between carers

and care recipients, and a form of therapeutic intervention aimed at promoting healing and well-being (Stroehlein, 2016). Various definitions of care in nursing emphasise the need to understand this concept as an interpersonal, yet also transpersonal, process that encompasses and stems from qualities such as honesty, the ability to connect with patients, and professional competence. A review of the healthcare literature identifies five key characteristics of care: it is a human trait, a moral imperative, affect, interpersonal interaction and therapeutic intervention' (Dyson, 1996).

Dimensions of the concept of care

Once again, we can conclude that the concept of care is extremely complex, as evidenced by its treatment and interpretation within various expert and scientific frameworks; in short, its meaning is often the subject of debate and differing perspectives, which is why it is understood inconsistently across different contexts and disciplines. This complexity means that there are numerous ways to define and explain its characteristics. Bearing in mind these initial issues, we will nevertheless attempt in this subchapter to outline its key characteristics, drawing on the approach developed by José de São José (2016) in his conceptual review: the author's aim was to present the concept of care in a clear manner, namely through the presentation of various dimensions, each of which is defined in more detail by specific elements or components.

The 'nature' of care

The first dimension of care is its 'nature', which is, of course, neither immutable nor unambiguous, but is fundamentally characterised above all by its diversity; this diversity is conditioned by subjective attitudes towards care, whilst at the same time always being shaped by social, political, economic, cultural and other contexts. This fact is linked to the element of disposition, that is, the manner in which care is 'positioned', how it is situated within a particular relationship. The dispositional aspect encompasses cognitive and affective elements; for

example, it includes thinking about the person in need of care and feeling for or with them. The next component of this dimension is the activity component, which relates to the behavioural aspect – the actual ‘performance’ of care, which involves not only physical labour but also the mental effort of organising and planning, as well as emotional labour, which involves managing emotions and reactions in a way that is supportive and appropriate. Care is relational in nature, as it requires interaction between two or more individuals, whilst at the same time always unfolding as a process involving various phases: recognising a need (caring about), taking responsibility (caring for), carrying out the necessary actions (care practices) and the recipient’s response to the care provided (receiving care). It is important to note that care is usually directed towards the ‘other’, be it a person or a collective, the environment, etc. (José, 2016).

Contexts of care

Contexts are undoubtedly an extremely important dimension of care and care practices. Care relationships are embedded in broader contexts that strongly shape the experiences, practices and outcomes of care in various settings, including education, healthcare, the family and community care. Social contexts encompass the immediate and wider social networks surrounding those who receive care and those who provide it. In educational settings, for example, these include classroom communities, school cultures, peer relationships, and networks of parents and teachers. Social contexts also include the community’s attitude towards various care needs, such as those related to learning difficulties, disability or health conditions. Cultural contexts refer to the beliefs, values, traditions and practices associated with the provision of care within different cultural groups. Cultural factors shape expectations regarding who should provide care, appropriate approaches to care, and attitudes towards formal and informal care.

Economic contexts include the financial resources available for the implementation of care practices. They encompass economic policies that influence the provision of care and broader economic conditions

that affect care options. At the societal level, economic contexts include labour market conditions affecting professional carers, the economic valuation of care work, and the resources allocated to various care systems.

Furthermore, we can also speak of political contexts, which include power relations in the broadest sense, as well as specific policies, laws and regulatory frameworks that structure the possibilities for care practices and the provision of care. These include, among other things, education policies, healthcare systems, family support programmes and the organisation of care services across various sectors. Policy priorities determine a vast number of factors regarding how care is provided in a given community or country, including, for example, the funding of different types of care, the recognition of carers' rights and needs, and the balance of responsibilities between individuals, families, the market and the state. Political contexts create different conditions for care across geographical boundaries and institutional environments, influencing everything from access to healthcare to family policies (José, 2016).

Foundations of care support

The foundations of care support relate to the fundamental reasons and motivations that drive the provision of care support in various contexts and shape its understanding, experience and implementation. José (2016) highlights that the first such element is love, which involves providing care in a way that is grounded in emotional connection and genuine concern. The next fundamental element can be identified as duty, which refers to care arising from perceived obligations associated with specific roles or positions. For lecturers, for example, this involves upholding professional duties towards all students, regardless of how well they know or understand one another. Care based on duty ensures consistency and reliability in various contexts, but other, so-called complementary motivations are also actually necessary to ensure that care does not become superficial or 'automatic'. In addition to duty, the next element is

responsibility. Responsibility, as a foundation, involves recognising one's own ability to respond appropriately to the needs of another. Furthermore, reciprocity can also be identified as a specific element of care. It involves providing care with an awareness of mutual exchange and relationship, thereby taking into account the dynamic, evolving nature of caring relationships in various circumstances and stages of life. José (2016) highlights that this fundamental element transcends personal relationships and links individual care practices to broader issues of social justice, which is particularly important for understanding the responsibilities of institutional care and the development of comprehensive care systems across different sectors. However, it is essential to emphasise that the foundations of care and caregiving practices are by no means mutually exclusive; most caregiving relationships involve multiple overlapping motives that may vary across different circumstances, relationships and time.

The social identity of the person acting in a caring capacity

The next, fourth key dimension of care relates to the identity of the person who expresses and acts in a caring manner, provides care, and who significantly influences the dynamics of care. This dimension includes the socio-demographic characteristics of the carer, such as their gender, age, ethnicity and social class. These characteristics influence how carers approach caregiving, what resources they have access to, and how society views their caregiving role. Social roles may relate to the carer's position within the family and society, for example as a spouse, adult child, sibling, friend or professional carer. These roles entail different expectations, obligations and power dynamics that influence the experience of care relationships and the practice of caring (José, 2016).

The social identity of the 'recipient' of care practices

The next dimension is the identity of the person who is actually the recipient of care practices. Here too, the socio-demographic characteristics of this person or community are key dimensions, including age, level of dependency, health status and membership

of a social group (e.g. older adults, children, people with disabilities). These characteristics determine their position within the care relationship and also influence the perception of recipients and the quality or nature of care practices. The social roles of recipients include, for example, their position within family and social structures and roles such as parents, grandparents, spouses or members of a wider community. Again, these roles also shape their self-image and how others perceive them within the care relationship (José, 2016).

The social anchoring of the caring relationship

The foundation upon which a caring relationship is built is called a social anchor, which is the next, sixth dimension of care as a concept. This may be rooted in kinship, where care is provided on the basis of family ties and perceived obligations. Alternatively, it may be anchored in friendship, where care stems from bonds of affection and mutual support outside family or formal structures. Finally, the relationship may be contractual, involving a formal or semi-formal agreement, often incorporating rules, procedures and regulations, for example the relationship between an individual and a professional service or care agency. This type of relationship involves the formally organised, regulated and supervised provision of care (José, 2016).

The social sphere of care

Care activities take place in various social spheres. The classic distinction here is, of course, the differentiation between the private/domestic sphere (often associated with family-based care) and the public sphere (associated with formal services). This dimension, however, implies that care operates within and across multiple spheres: family and friendship networks (informal, private sphere), the state (public provision, often through social services), the voluntary sector (non-profit organisations) and the market. The market sphere alone can be further divided into the formal market (regulated, profit-making or non-profit organisations) and the informal market (unregulated provision of care, often carried out by migrants outside formal frameworks). To understand care activities, one must take into

account their presence and mutual influence across these different sectors (José, 2016).

The location of care provision

The next important dimension of the concept is where it takes place. It can be provided in the recipient's home, which for many is the most suitable setting for family and informal care. It can also take place in specific settings, such as educational institutions or day centres, which provide care practices and support during a specific part of the day but do not offer long-term accommodation. In short, the location significantly influences the form of care, the type of tasks and the overall experience (José, 2016).

The purpose of care practices

The purpose of providing care support relates to the intended objectives, which significantly shape the priorities and approaches to care in various settings, including education, healthcare, the family environment and the (local) community. One such purpose may be, for example, to meet the instrumental needs of the person receiving care, which involves assistance with practical tasks essential for daily functioning. This includes support with a wide range of activities appropriate to the individual's stage of development or circumstances. Another broad aim of care practices may be to meet socio-emotional needs, focusing on psychological, social and emotional well-being. This includes, for example, providing companionship, emotional support, validation and opportunities for meaningful connection. This aspect of care is crucial for individuals who find themselves in circumstances where they may feel marginalised or isolated. Furthermore, another purpose of care practices may be to meet the need for supervision/monitoring, which involves keeping an eye on an individual's condition and environment to ensure safety and appropriate support. This may involve, for example, monitoring well-being, ensuring compliance with necessary safety protocols, preventing potential harm or abuse, and liaising with relevant professionals (José, 2016).

Care tasks

Linked to the previous dimension (the purpose of care practices), the tasks or duties within a specific care activity are carried out to fulfil the purposes of providing care and are divided into instrumental, socio-emotional and supervisory/monitoring tasks in various care settings. Instrumental tasks involve direct assistance with activities necessary for care-related functioning, appropriate to the context. Social-emotional tasks involve activities relating to psychological and social well-being. As an example, we can cite tasks in an educational context, which include creating inclusive classroom communities, providing emotional validation, fostering peer relationships and supporting identity development. Supervisory/monitoring tasks include supervisory activities that ensure safety and appropriate support (José, 2016).

Conditions of care work

These conditions constitute the eleventh dimension of care, namely the specific circumstances in which care is provided. These circumstances have a significant impact on carers and care recipients in various situations, and affect the quality of care, the well-being of those providing care, as well as the very organisation of care provision. Here we have very specific aspects of the practice of care, such as the timetable, which relates to the organisation of care in terms of time – when care is provided, for how long and how often. Another concrete aspect is the question of pay: care work can be paid or unpaid. Paid care takes place within the framework of formal employment relationships with defined responsibilities, boundaries and remuneration. Among others, those who are paid for their care work include teachers, healthcare workers, social workers, childcare providers and other professional carers. Unpaid care work or activities are mostly provided by family members, volunteers, peer mentors and community members who do not receive direct financial compensation for their efforts. The distinction between paid and unpaid work has significant implications for the recognition of

care, the rights of care workers, economic security and professional development (José, 2016).

Approach to care

An approach refers to the manner and style of providing care in different settings, which significantly influences the care recipient's experience and the quality of the relationship within a specific care practice. What approaches to care are there? We distinguish between approaches based on where the focus of care activities lies. It may be task-oriented or person- or community-oriented. For example, in educational settings, a task-oriented approach might emphasise 'covering' the curriculum, meeting assessment requirements and developing skills, whilst a person-centred approach would take into account the whole student, including their interests, background and socio-emotional development. Another element within this dimension is the use of power, which can be directive or supportive. Directive approaches are based on the care provider's professional expertise and can be effective, particularly in cases where immediate guidance is required, or when working with individuals who need a great deal of support. Supportive approaches emphasise the service user's capabilities and their participation in their own care or learning process. Caregivers who use this approach act as partners rather than as authorities, supporting service users in developing skills and making decisions in line with their abilities. However, there are also approaches focused on so-called 'facilitation', which involve promoting the empowerment and self-efficacy of care recipients. It should be emphasised, however, that such approaches usually require more time and, of course, good communication (José, 2016, p. 69).

Consequences of care support

The final, thirteenth dimension of care concerns the consequences of caregiving in various settings. In different circumstances, the provision of care has consequences for both the providers and recipients of care practices, which can be described as positive or negative; however, in complex care settings, they often occur simultaneously. For those

who carry out care work, positive consequences in different settings may include a sense of fulfilment and purpose, satisfaction from supporting the development or well-being of others, strengthening relationships, developing new skills, and personal growth. On the other hand, negative consequences for those engaged in care work may include, amongst other things, emotional exhaustion, compassion fatigue, and an imbalance between work and private life (José, 2016, p. 67). Understanding the full spectrum of the consequences of care work is essential for the development of practices and policies that enhance positive outcomes and mitigate negative impacts across all care work settings, whether in formal or informal settings, and in the public and private spheres.

Some key differences between care and solidarity

Given that we wish to conceptualise both solidarity and care as specific frameworks for political cooperation and the actions of individuals and collectives, it is of the utmost importance that we also recognise and understand their relationship. In this regard, as has been evident from the discussion so far, we can certainly argue that the two concepts are closely linked, that they are similar and, in many respects, share common ground. Among other things, we can, for example, start by recognising that both are relational and that they have a certain normative component in terms of what the relationship with other persons or communities should be like. Precisely for this reason, defining their relationship is always fraught with certain contradictions, imperfections and potential objections and criticisms. In what follows, we will indeed present some possible starting points for distinguishing between them and for specific semantic distinctions, but we must emphasise from the outset that we do not wish to claim definitiveness in this regard. If anything, the following attempt is presented in terms of the prevailing concepts (of differences) of solidarity and care. The aim of this review is thus also to open up space for further potential reflections on the relationship between care and solidarity as political forms of (co-)operation.

Scope and extent of application

The first significant difference lies in the scope and extent of application. We can see that care is usually manifested in a direct, interpersonal context: for example, care typically involves acting to meet someone's immediate needs, offering emotional support, or carrying out practical care tasks. In this sense, care is largely grounded in personal relationships, although it can also be a specific political principle of socio-political organisation (Tronto, 2013). Solidarity, however, refers to broader communities or entire societies; of course, this does not mean that it does not also apply to individuals, but the collective dimension of action and uniting around shared identities or goals is more emphasised. This means that care (at least in prevailing concepts and forms) is often more intimate and localised, whilst solidarity has a broader, sometimes global reach.

Emotional and ideological foundations

Moving on to the next distinction, care is often associated with emotional involvement and engagement; when discussing care, we often speak of compassion and a genuine concern for the well-being and welfare of another (usually an individual, but potentially also a community). Relationships that foster care involve close connection and trust; in contrast, one might say that solidarity stems from a certain ideological consensus, whereby ideologies can vary from conservative to progressive. Solidarity, therefore, often involves the pursuit of shared political interests or a common struggle against perceived injustices. Solidarity involves feelings of camaraderie and is more explicitly linked to collective principles or goals, such as class consciousness or social justice. Care is thus largely based on emotional bonds, whilst solidarity is grounded in a unifying vision or set of (shared collective) beliefs.

Immediate needs versus structural change

The next key difference concerns the effect. In prevailing concepts, care usually refers to responding to the more or less urgent needs of

individuals or groups (such as caring for the sick or comforting the suffering); we therefore speak of care practices as those that address problems at the micro-level. This does not, of course, mean that it is apolitical, but we can argue that it predominantly focuses on and stems from the experiences of individuals (within collectives). On the other hand, we can see that, in connection with collective solidarity, individuals and groups also tackle structural challenges that affect entire communities. By organising collective efforts, solidarity actions and activities are often directed towards working for systemic change, whether through labour movements, civil rights campaigns or civil society activism. Very broadly speaking, we can therefore argue that in this way, care is directed towards ‘urgent’ situations, personal circumstances and needs, whilst solidarity addresses and brings about change in broader (often equally urgent) social issues, problems, challenges and relationships.

Relational norms versus social norms

Furthermore, it is important to understand that care practices and relationships are significantly guided by relational norms linked to ideas of genuine human connection and mutual responsibility. Care principles shape ongoing interpersonal relationships, empathy and reciprocity within environments of close interpersonal connections and/or small groups. In contrast, solidarity-based actions often support social norms that extend beyond (localised) individual relationships: these include, for example, a commitment to equality, justice or collective well-being. These norms stem from shared cultural values, historical struggles or institutional frameworks and operate at the level of wider communities.

Specificity versus universality

We might also consider the relationship between the specificity and a certain universality of care on the one hand, and solidarity on the other. Admittedly, both concepts, particularly in concrete contexts, contain a certain relationship between specificity and universality, but we often encounter the idea that care stems to a greater extent from

the specific circumstances of a person's situation and emphasises the uniqueness of every encounter or relationship. The particularities of an individual's context – their personal history or immediate living conditions – shape the way in which care practices are delivered. Turning to solidarity, however, we can argue that it embodies both a narrower and a broader form of universality. It can be shaped around a particular social class or identity, or it can extend to universal principles of human rights that transcend local differences. Whilst care is often tied to the (micro)context, solidarity can relate to and be articulated through broad ethical or political demands.

Gender roles and dimensions of power

It is particularly important to note how care practices have historically (and continue to) been associated with domestic or female roles, which is why they are (or have been) frequently undervalued. In this context, we may highlight the specific fact that care, when treated as a 'private' matter, can obscure power dynamics that disproportionately burden certain groups, particularly women and other marginalised groups, who are often 'entrusted' with the practice of care in exchange for a certain payment. Solidarity, particularly in social movements, has traditionally been regarded as existing in the 'public' sphere, and was thus more 'the domain' of men. By distinguishing between care (often hidden, everyday work) and solidarity (more visible, collective action), we can better understand how gender and power inequalities influence who performs care work and who significantly determines the form and content of solidarity actions.

Focus on the private and public spheres

In connection with the above, we must point out that care is closely linked to intimate relationships and often operates in private, personal contexts – such as families or circles of friends; of course, as we have already argued, forms of care can also be institutionally organised at the state level. Solidarity, however, is based on public displays of unity or political engagement, examples of which include the formation of specific political alliances or interest groups regarding a particular

issue, or the organisation of protests. This distinction between the public and the private helps to explain why care can be overlooked: it is often relegated to private spaces, to the private sphere, even though, as Tronto (2018), for example, demonstrates, it could be the central political logic of cooperation at the collective level. Meanwhile, solidarity appears as a public, sometimes institutionalised endeavour that gains recognition through alignment with broader social goals.

At the end of this chapter, we may offer a specific reflection on care as a fundamental basis of human action in relation to ‘others’ within communities and the (power) relations inherent in them that condition it. In this sense, care represents an ontological mode of being; at the same time, it is a profound moral commitment grounded in dignity. It is a holistic professional practice, a dynamic interpersonal relationship, and a form of providing emotional and practical support. Through an understanding of the historical transformations of care, academic discourse and the fundamental dimensions of the materialisation of care practices, we must recognise that we cannot simplistically reduce care to emotions or activities based on assigned or prescribed tasks. However, as care touches upon the essence of human existence, its relationship with broader social and political constellations becomes of crucial importance, as it reveals itself as a framework for the emergence of political meanings in terms of collective bonds and cooperation.

If we interpret these dimensions as fundamentally political, we can further reflect that an individual’s relationships at any given moment, through and within care, are not automatic or isolated, but depend on social and political conditions that either enable or hinder such action. The moral commitment to dignity and respect, which is presented as an ethical imperative in contemporary societies, implies a political demand for systems and structures that actively support care as a value and, at least to some extent and in principle, address inequalities and dehumanising practices. On the other hand, however, as the reflection by *The Care Collective* (2020) also shows, we simultaneously

have a dominant (neo)liberal regime that reinforces indifference, individualism and selfishness. In this context, we must therefore also recognise the tension between the implementation of care practices as holistic and empathetic cooperation (which is a political form of engagement), and, on the other hand, (neo-liberal) institutional and governmental pressures that prioritise efficiency and profit, with this tension involving a conflict over social values (Beasley & Bacchi, 2005). Fostering authentic interpersonal relationships based on trust and vulnerability requires supportive social environments shaped by political decisions regarding community resources, work-life balance and social support networks, all of which are important elements of the political form of developing the conditions of possibility for democratic political participation. Therefore, the struggle to establish and maintain conditions in which these fundamental aspects of care can flourish – where human dignity is paramount, where holistic needs are met, and where genuine connection is possible – is, by its very nature, a political endeavour. Such forms of seeking alternatives to the existing order require forms of political participation aimed at structuring society in a way that recognises and preserves our shared human need to care for others and with others, whereby the intimate and ethical dimensions of care are radically shifted into the realm of collective political responsibility.

4

DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY: PARTICIPATION AND DECISION- MAKING

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- Deliberative democracy represents a (theoretical and practical) attempt to transform democracy, as it shifts the focus from conventional mechanisms, such as voting, to the rational exchange of reasoned arguments among deliberating citizens.
- Deliberative democracy has gained popularity as a response to the crisis of legitimacy in representative democracy, with the broad aim of strengthening public debate and citizen participation, which are placed at the heart of democratic legitimacy.
- Theorising on deliberative democracy has evolved through theoretical waves, from idealised normative visions to more 'practically' oriented approaches, and later to the articulation of systemic perspectives that treat deliberation as a potential component of entire political systems.
- There are considerable theoretical differences between the various approaches to deliberation, which is why we speak of a heterogeneous theoretical field.

- Deliberative democracy faces internal debates and 'external' criticisms, including regarding its idealistic nature, potential for exclusion and elitism, and a tendency towards consensus that may stifle essential 'positive' and 'productive' tensions and differences in democratic societies.
- As an idea and a practice, deliberation offers an alternative foundation for democratic legitimacy to the current neoliberal political order, as it enables the democratic structuring of participants' preferences and provides mechanisms for transforming participation into concrete policies and institutional changes.

Strengthening solidarity and care practices in various contexts depends primarily on the effective cooperation of diverse actors – as we demonstrated in the conclusion of the previous chapter. This includes, among other things, fostering partnerships of varying degrees of closeness between individuals, various actors, from grassroots movements to non-governmental organisations, and between local, national and supranational organisations. Although such cooperation is sometimes perceived as merely rhetorical, lacking practical substance, there are nevertheless concrete mechanisms and practices that can be meaningfully applied in various contexts and that actually contribute to the search for consensus and relationships based on care and solidarity. Deliberative practices, which stem from the theorisation of deliberative democracy, are one such mechanism that can help translate cooperation into tangible outcomes, policies and changes in the way institutions – and indeed entire systems – operate.

4.1 WHAT IS DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY?

Before turning to specific deliberative practices, we must, of course, first engage in reflection and thus attempt to gain a broader understanding of what deliberative democracy actually is. In this sub-chapter, we will examine its essential characteristics and

dimensions, drawing primarily on the insights of Ercan (2014) and Elstub, Ercan and Mendonça (2016). Our perspective is that by establishing this theoretical foundation, we can further develop an understanding of how deliberative principles manifest themselves in practical applications, such as citizens' assemblies (a specific form of practising deliberative democracy). We will therefore first provide at least a brief introduction to deliberative democracy, which will serve as a conceptual framework against which various deliberative mechanisms can be assessed and understood. The aim here is to strengthen our recognition of the fundamental values and processes that distinguish effective deliberative approaches from other forms of public engagement, participation and decision-making.

Initial definition and historical origins

Deliberative democracy today represents an important and influential concept within theories of democracy, and as an idea it (still) significantly influences contemporary political practices in various democratic contexts at different levels (Ercan, 2014, p. 213). Its proponents proceed from the assumption that it serves a specific purpose, namely the comprehensive reconceptualisation of democracy, involving a radical shift in emphasis from so-called conventional democratic mechanisms (e.g. voting or the aggregation of preferences) towards the idea of a rational exchange of (reasoned) arguments. At its core, deliberation thus involves a process of mutual justification, in which participants express the reasons for their views, engage attentively by comparing their views with those of others, and demonstrate a willingness to reconsider their original preferences when confronted with new (persuasive) information or arguments:

Deliberative democracy is grounded in an ideal in which people come together, on the basis of equal status and mutual respect, to discuss the political issues they face and, on the basis of those discussions, decide on the policies that will then affect their lives (Bächtiger et al., 2018, p. 2).

At the same time, however, we must point out from the outset that deliberative democracy should not be understood as a concept underpinned by a monolithic theory, but rather as a field encompassing various theoretical perspectives (and practices) that highlight the range of different aspects of deliberative processes and institutional designs, reflecting the heterogeneous intellectual ecosystem that has developed around the principles of deliberative democratic participation (Ercan, 2014).

The fundamental ideas and philosophical origins of deliberative democracy are considerably broader than its contemporary manifestations and can be traced back to earlier traditions of political thought (Novaković & Perović, 2021, p. 34). It is not surprising that deliberative principles find their earliest expression in ancient Athenian democracy. Hegemonic interpretations of Athenian democracy highlight the Athenians engaged in lively debate both within the formal setting of the assembly and outside it (Novaković & Perović, 2021). Furthermore, the concept of the ‘general will’ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who, to put it simply, argued that citizens transcend personal differences when addressing common issues; this concept has strongly influenced leading deliberative theorists, including Joshua Cohen and John Rawls (Chambers, 2018; Floridia, 2018). Although Kant cannot be described in his works as a thinker who particularly believed in the intellectual capacities of ordinary citizens, his reflections nevertheless incorporate certain central deliberative ideas, including the public use of reason and the question of the tension or relationship between freedom and coercion (Chambers, 2018). Many prominent theorists of deliberative democracy acknowledge the significant influence of John Stuart Mill, particularly his commitment to the greatest possible freedom of expression, criticism and argumentation in the public sphere. What is essential for our discussion is, above all, that these historical foundations have, in one way or another, contributed to the contemporary revival of deliberative democracy as an important theoretical approach to democratic participation (Novaković & Perović, 2021).

The question that follows is, of course, why has deliberative democracy, as a theory, gained such prominence in recent decades and remain highly relevant today? Deliberative democracy emerged as a considered response to the increasingly evident challenges to legitimacy faced by representative democratic systems (Ercan, 2014). Although theorists of deliberative democracy differ in the intensity of their criticism of representative democracy, they generally do not conceptualise their approach as a comprehensive alternative to liberal representative structures, but rather as a meaningful extension and enrichment of existing democratic frameworks (Brown, 2018). This perspective recognises that conventional democratic mechanisms – electoral procedures, regular elections and legislative bodies – remain indispensable elements of the exercise of power in contemporary liberal democratic regimes. At the same time, however, this perspective very clearly emphasises the need to strengthen public deliberation among free and equal citizens, and such deliberation is placed at the centre of the legitimisation of collective decisions. This conception of democratic legitimacy is thus based on citizens’ right, capacity and opportunity’ to participate meaningfully in shaping decisions that directly affect them. Scholarly discourse within the framework of deliberative democracy reveals significant theoretical differences, with procedural theorists situating legitimacy in the establishment of fair/impartial consultative processes, whilst content-oriented theorists of democracy argue that the fairness of outcomes is ultimately the key factor in legitimacy. These differences in the theory of deliberative democracy help us to understand the different emphases that practitioners may place when designing participatory forums in real-world settings (Ercan, 2014).

So far, we have argued that theories of deliberative democracy were formulated as a (more or less radical) response to the crisis of liberal representative democracy. However, we must further emphasise that different conceptions of deliberative democracy have emerged in different contexts and socio-political environments. Thus, authors (Bächtiger et al., 2018; Elstub et al., 2016) have shown

that deliberative democracy has developed through successive waves, each of which was characterised by different conceptual priorities and practical problems. The initial wave of theorising on deliberative democracy was predominantly normative and constructed idealised visions of democratic legitimacy based on rational discourse and universal participation, but it often overlooked the complexity of the 'real' world (Elstub et al., 2016). The second wave challenged these idealisations by broadening the scope of legitimate forms of communication and emphasising inclusion, diversity and power asymmetries, thereby making deliberative theory more socially grounded and critically oriented. The third wave, or rather the authors within its framework (Parkinson & Mansbridge, 2012; Bohman et al., 2018) focused on institutional design and empirical analysis, striving to translate deliberative ideals into feasible practices through mechanisms such as mini-publics and participatory institutions, albeit often at the expense of broader systemic integration. The latest wave, characterised by a deliberative-systemic perspective, attempts to link these earlier insights by treating deliberation as a dispersed phenomenon encompassing multiple sites and forms – deliberative and non-deliberative – within the political system as a whole (Elstub et al., 2016).

Theories of deliberative democracy and critiques (a brief overview)

As is evident from the above presentation of the 'waves' of theories of deliberative democracy, there are quite diverse approaches and understandings of what deliberative democracy is. Although there are certain similarities between the views of these theorists, many of them nevertheless stem from different fundamental assumptions regarding political processes and the essential elements of (more) deliberative democratic practices in societies. Deliberative democrats differ on fundamental questions regarding the nature, venue, participants and intended outcomes of democratic deliberations. In this context, two important broad perspectives are highlighted in contemporary debates (though they are by no means the only ones).

The first, associated primarily with the political philosopher John Rawls (1971; Saward, 2018), emphasises that deliberation must be confined to certain fundamental issues, such as rights, freedoms, justice and the fundamental institutions of society. The importance of 'public reason' is emphasised, which presupposes that citizens, as free and equal individuals, participate in the debate on fundamental political issues. According to Rawls, deliberative democracy is based on the idea that political power must derive from reasonable agreements among citizens who hold different worldviews but strive for just conditions of coexistence. It is crucial that the justifications for political decisions are based on commonly accessible reasons, not on private convictions or religious views; from this perspective, deliberation is a means of achieving political legitimacy and stability in a pluralistic society.

On the other hand, Jürgen Habermas (1984, 1996) and some other authors following in his tradition advocate a much broader understanding of deliberation. According to Habermas, deliberation should be inclusive, open to all individuals involved, without rigid restrictions on topics, provided that the discussions involve rational arguments aimed at serving the common interest and achieving rational consensus. Habermas posits that deliberation largely takes place in the public sphere, specifically within the framework of so-called 'subject-less communication'; this involves a broad, collective dialogue outside formal institutions. This view is similarly reflected in the conception of public deliberation as 'anonymous and interlocking conversations', a conceptualisation by Seyla Benhabib (in Ercan, 2014, p. 214), and in John Dryzek's (1990) 'discursive democracy', which emphasises the public, open and inclusive encounter of different discourses. Habermas and those he has influenced emphasise the importance of a vibrant and participatory public sphere, which is essential for identifying social problems and formulating political programmes for formal political institutions or organisations in which decision-making takes place (Ercan, 2014).

In addition to these two general (theoretical) positions, there are other perspectives related to deliberative democracy. Recently, dis-

cussions have focused on the so-called systemic turn, which challenges the idea that deliberation should be understood exclusively in terms of structured forums or general public discourse. Instead, scholars such as Jane Mansbridge (2007; Bohman et al., 2018) advocate for an understanding of deliberation as part of a broader system that encompasses and interconnects multiple, intertwined venues and modes of communication. Mansbridge, in particular, emphasises the importance of recognising informal interactions and ‘everyday conversation’ as legitimate and key components of a comprehensive deliberative system, thereby extending the understanding of deliberation beyond formal institutions and structured conversations to the broader patterns of communication that shape democratic life (Ercan, 2014).

Now that we have familiarised ourselves with at least some of the theoretical strands of deliberative democracy, we can point out that there are not only internal debates and differing viewpoints on deliberative democracy, but also (more or less) radical, so-called external criticisms. Some scholars argue that deliberative democracy is too idealistic and unrealistic, emphasising that politics in the real world often revolves around unequal power relations, strategic manoeuvring and the interests of various actors, which makes genuine deliberation impractical or unattainable. In this regard, Ian Shapiro (1999, p. 28) simply states: ‘Enough of deliberation: Politics is about interests and power’. According to Shapiro, a deliberative approach to politics is not sufficiently sensitive to conflicting interests and influential actors who are not prepared to participate in the deliberative process, but will instead devise their own strategies to realise their interests and, if necessary, resort to coercive means (Bächtiger et al., 2018).

Other critics agree that deliberation can take place, but at the same time point out critically that it often functions as an exclusionary and elitist practice that pays too little attention to entrenched inequalities linked to race, gender and socio-economic status. Agonistic theorists, including Chantal Mouffe (1999), challenge the deliberative drive towards consensus, arguing that it suppresses (often productive)

conflicts and differences, thereby perpetuating oppression. Instead, they emphasise constant political competition and advocate agonism as a more meaningful and productive democratic approach. Critics more sympathetic to deliberation, such as Iris Marion Young (1996), acknowledge its importance but highlight internal tensions within societies or political communities and therefore advocate for a broader understanding of deliberation that would take greater account of social and cultural diversity. Similarly, Nancy Fraser (1990) criticises Habermas's conceptualisation of a singular, unified public sphere as an overly homogeneous and bourgeois construct, and instead proposes a framework that recognises multiple publics, including marginalised or 'subaltern counter-publics', which provide oppressed groups with a space to express their unique perspectives. The essence of the critiques just presented is not that they simply rejected deliberative democracy. As we have also shown, many of these critical insights have influenced and enriched contemporary deliberative democratic theory (Ercan, 2014).

Arguments in favour of deliberation

Now that we have clarified deliberative democracy and its critiques, we can turn to the reflections of deliberation theorists (Curato et al., 2017), who have presented some arguments as to why deliberation works effectively and, as a specific democratic option, has the potential and possibility of application in various societies. Before turning our attention to specific deliberative mechanisms (including citizens' assemblies), let us therefore examine these claims, proceeding from the conviction that a brief presentation of them is worthwhile, as they can serve as direct arguments for the implementation of deliberative mechanisms and methods as forms of practising political participation, on which we shall focus in the following.

Consultation is essential to democracy

The argument is that consultation, as a principle and a practice, ensures the stability and significance of democratic processes. Without

consultation, democracy faces the problems of arbitrariness (on the part of specific groups or individuals) and instability in collective decision-making. Deliberation helps to structure preferences and reduces the manipulation of democratic procedures.

Deliberation is more than just discussion

Deliberation involves procedural elements and dispositional characteristics, such as openness. It requires a 'deliberative attitude', in which participants engage with others as equal subjects in a mutual exchange of arguments, which consequently facilitates attention to the content of interactions.

Deliberative democracy encompasses multiple forms of communication

Whilst early critics viewed deliberative democracy as being overly grounded in reason, contemporary theory incorporates various forms of communication, including greetings, rhetoric, humour, testimonies and storytelling. As a result, deliberation is more inclusive of diverse cultures of speech practices and perspectives.

Deliberation is inclusive, not elitist

Research shows that deliberative processes can reduce, rather than reinforce, the power of elites. Deliberation can help ordinary citizens to recognise political manipulation, whilst enabling traditionally marginalised groups to participate meaningfully in political debates.

Deliberative democracy takes a nuanced view of power

Deliberative democracy is not naive about power; rather, a key aspect of its theoretical and practical applications is the recognition of different types of power: coercive power (which must be limited), empowering/generative power (which is essential) and authoritative power (which is necessary for implementation). A good deliberative design can redress power imbalances.

Productive deliberation is pluralistic, not consensual

Contrary to some criticisms, within the framework of deliberative democracy mechanisms, participants are rarely expected to reach or achieve complete consensus. Instead, deliberative democracy strives for ‘metaconsensus’ – the mutual recognition of different values and perspectives – and may involve voting and negotiation. Deliberation helps to clarify disagreements and strengthen mutual understanding.

Participation and deliberation complement rather than contradict each other

The goals of participatory and deliberative democracy are interconnected. The aim of research into small-scale deliberative forums (mini-publics) is to understand how to scale up high-quality consultation or deliberation, with the aim of expanding or strengthening this form of political participation and engagement.

Deliberative transformation takes time

The substantive reshaping of preferences through deliberation is not instantaneous. Whilst initial changes may occur rapidly, ‘in-depth’ deliberative reflection requires time for participants to determine not only their preferences but also the arguments in their favour.

Deliberation works against unhealthy polarisation of groups

Well-designed deliberative processes can prevent the polarisation or division of individuals, groups, etc., by ensuring that diverse viewpoints are engaged with in a reasoned manner, by providing a structure that facilitates such engagement, and by enabling productive ‘deliberation in confined settings’, which helps marginalised groups find their voice before they engage in wider public debates.

Deliberative democracy can work in deeply divided societies

Evidence suggests that deliberative practices can be successful even in societies divided by religious, national, racial or ethnic conflicts. These processes may not lead to complete consensus, but they can foster

mutual understanding, learning from one another, and agreements that transcend deep differences.

4.2 HOW DELIBERATION WORKS AND A SPECIFIC METHOD: CITIZENS' ASSEMBLIES

We now turn to specific deliberative practices as particular forms of political participation. Among these, citizens' assemblies are one of the most recognised and well-known deliberative mechanisms, existing in numerous variations across different contexts. In other words, this participatory method is not uniform; on the contrary, it can be implemented in diverse ways, depending on local conditions and circumstances, available resources, and the specific goals or purposes for which the deliberative practice is being implemented in the first place. Regardless of this diversity of implementation, however, citizens' assemblies are generally regarded as a highly inclusive democratic alternative to more traditional democratic procedures and, as such, are usually understood as an opportunity for deeper citizen participation and more representative decision-making (Extinction Rebellion, 2025). Below, we will present the fundamental principles and practical guidelines for citizens' assemblies as proposed by European Alternatives (2024), together with the approach advocated by Extinction Rebellion (2025). As an organisation, European Alternatives strives to promote democracy, equality and a culture beyond the nation state, and envisions, demands and implements alternatives for a possible future. On the other hand, Extinction Rebellion is a global and politically non-partisan movement that uses non-violent direct action to persuade governments to act justly in the face of the climate and ecological crises.

As civil society organisations or movements, both reflect a commitment to inclusion, transparency and meaningful public engagement – principles that form the fundamental framework of the legitimacy and effectiveness of any citizens' assembly. In this context, we have decided to draw on both organised civil society and activist

networks, as their approaches to citizens' assemblies are essentially geared towards participatory governance, transnational cooperation and transparent processes. We wish to highlight some possible forms of democratic participation, where a commitment to strengthening mutual understanding and seeking political pathways to resolve specific socio-political issues or dilemmas is essential.

Key characteristics and reflections on historical origins

First, let us turn to a brief general definition of a citizens' assembly. Essentially, a citizens' assembly brings together various groups of 'ordinary' citizens to discuss a public issue, with the aim of achieving a concrete public impact. It is worth noting that whilst most academic discussions use the term 'deliberative mini-publics', the name 'citizens' assembly' is far more widely used and recognisable in non-academic settings. With regard to terminology, it is worth noting that outside academic circles, other terms are also used when discussing these participatory processes, such 'citizens' forum' (Vrydagh, 2023).

We shall not go into detail regarding historical forms of deliberation that bear some resemblance to the modern citizens' assembly; however, it is worth noting that the prevailing narratives treat assemblies as modern Western inventions, drawing a straightforward line of development from the work of Ned Crosby (2005; Crosby et al., 1986), who, was the author of a specific form of deliberation dating back to the 1970s, known as 'citizens' juries', to current practices. It is particularly important to understand that such a perception overlooks older theoretical and practical sources. In this light, it should be emphasised that certain practices existed much earlier and in various contexts, such as the consultative assemblies in ancient Syria and Mesopotamia and the *panchayat raj* system of local self-government in India, which is based on a form of deliberation (Rai, 2007; Vrydagh, 2023). On the other hand, it should be noted that these forms are by no means the direct sources of modern citizens' assemblies, and it would be nonsensical to understand them as such. In this regard, another consideration is important. Namely, it is often observed that

modern citizens' assemblies are understood as deriving from forms of citizens' consultation in ancient Athens (Sintomer, 2023), which is, of course, equally problematic, as this approach overlooks the broader geographical and cultural developments that contributed to the idea of bringing together different groups for inclusive, structured consultation. We must therefore always bear in mind that citizens' assemblies in their various forms must be situated historically within a global context and not be limited, in a Western-centric manner, to the geographical areas of the West.

Three fundamental principles

As a method, the citizens' assembly is significantly shaped by three key principles: deliberation, inclusion and public influence. Let us briefly examine each of these principles.

Firstly, we can emphasise that deliberation, defined as 'mutual communication that involves weighing and reflecting on preferences, values, and interests regarding matters of common concern' (Bächtiger et al., 2018, p. 2), ensures that participants engage with one another in a reasonable and respectful manner. This principle forms the basis for meaningful exchange or political cooperation among citizens involved in deliberation.

Moving on to the next principle, namely inclusion, we can highlight that this involves a requirement to draw upon and take into account diverse perspectives, and to employ recruitment strategies to ensure that marginalised voices have both a place and a voice in the process (Curato et al., 2021). It can be argued that this principle is what distinguishes citizens' assemblies from other forms of public consultation, which may in fact reinforce already dominant voices, viewpoints and processes.

The final fundamental principle, public impact, emphasises that citizens' assemblies are designed to produce tangible outcomes. This can manifest itself either through the formulation of policy decisions or by fostering broader societal debates (Vrydagh, 2023).

These three principles (deliberation, inclusion and public influence) together form the framework against which citizens' assemblies seek to strengthen the legitimacy and inclusiveness of democratic decision-making. It is particularly important to understand how these principles work in concert to create spaces in which ordinary citizens can meaningfully contribute to addressing concrete and often complex social challenges. At the same time, it must be emphasised that, precisely in the context of these three fundamental principles, namely, the intertwining of deliberation as a form of consultation, inclusion and public influence, these are not simply neutral propositions, but in themselves constitute a specific political orientation and the very premise of citizens' assemblies. Among other things, they articulate the idea of a structured consultation process that is embedded in a commitment to diverse representation of voices and oriented towards tangible influence. In this way, if we consider it primarily in the context of political participation, it represents a specific form of participation that requires not merely the aggregation of votes, but a collective engagement with shared problems. Furthermore, it requires participants to overcome differences and jointly chart a way forward. The demand to overcome differences is a political demand, as it touches precisely on power relations and the question of hierarchies; on the other hand, one must always bear in mind that this is a political ideal which, in the context of implementation, must have been backed by concrete mechanisms explicitly focused on matters of common interest and public decision-making, thereby emphasising how citizens' assemblies can function as arenas for constructive political action and foster shared responsibility within the democratic sphere.

Principles for an inclusive citizens' assembly

Citizens' assemblies are an effective mechanism for civil society organisations seeking to strengthen democratic values and involve citizens (sometimes specific groups, but often the widest possible range of people) in the policy-making process. By offering a structured

forum for inclusive, informed and respectful deliberation, these assemblies (at least) in principle enhance the credibility of (potential) final decisions and help ensure that marginalised perspectives are not overlooked. Furthermore, they foster in-depth and diverse dialogues that conventional political processes (such as elections) often fail to facilitate. In doing so, such consultations build trust among participants and strengthen a sense of shared responsibility for public decisions, outcomes, achievements and (more or less) long-term effects.

In line with this perspective, as highlighted by European Alternatives (2024), the *Citizens Takeover Europe* coalition, comprising more than 70 civil society organisations, has proposed ten guiding principles not only for the implementation but also for the evaluation of transnational citizens' assemblies in Europe. These principles emphasise inclusive recruitment (ensuring diverse representation in terms of age, gender and socio-economic status), transparency through public documentation and live streaming, and accountability through the requirement for clear consideration and implementation of the assembly's recommendations. They also emphasise the need for effective and open deliberation, in which participants engage in meaningful dialogue with experts, political figures and one another. Furthermore, the principles highlight the need for transnational cooperation, ensuring that the assembly transcends the framework of the state as a form of political community. Why are these principles also highly important for the implementation of consultative events? Because these guidelines serve as a blueprint for all organisers striving to create inclusive, impactful and engaging assemblies that have the potential to exert real influence in various communities across (national, regional, etc.) borders.

Implementing a citizens' assembly: six phases

Organising a citizens' assembly involves a structured process of (political) participation comprising six key phases, ranging from

fundamental decisions through the actual implementation to impact assessment (European Alternatives, 2024).

1. The first phase involves defining the topic and objective. This requires selecting an appropriate (and attractive or 'pressing') issue suitable for discussion, and identifying the assembly's target audience or the recipients of its recommendations (e.g. public authorities, civil society organisations, businesses). At the same time, the organisers must ensure that the scope (e.g. the issue, topic, etc.) is realistic.
2. The second phase involves assessment and resource identification, which includes reviewing existing financial and other resources (such as volunteers and networks) and determining what additional resources are needed to implement the method.
3. The third phase, designing the assembly, translates the topic, objective and resources into a concrete plan that specifies the format (online, in-person, hybrid), location, duration and frequency, whilst maintaining flexibility for adaptation during the actual process of conducting the deliberation.
4. The fourth phase involves engaging participants, which entails developing an engagement strategy based on the desired number and profile of participants, whilst taking into account timeframes and the need for diverse representation.
5. The fifth phase is the management of the assembly, where, with the help of moderators, the process is overseen by a steering committee, which provides strategic direction and makes the necessary adjustments, whilst also covering essential roles such as interpreting, security, logistics, communications and participant support.
6. The sixth phase, monitoring and ensuring impact, encompasses activities that enable the assembly's work to be translated into tangible results through proactive measures such as setting impact targets, assessing impacts, engaging the media and stakeholders, facilitating participant networking, forming coalitions and linking up with other assemblies, which is a crucial phase that is often overlooked.

Selection of participants

As we have already emphasised, citizens' assemblies strive for diverse and inclusive deliberation (in the sense of consultation, dialogue, and also the search for solutions and the resolution of conflicts regarding a specific issue), which is intended to go beyond ordinary public or political debate. Therefore, the selection of a suitable venue and participants is of key importance. Achieving representativeness involves various methods. Targeted communication about the citizens' assembly event, using inclusive language and visual imagery and disseminated through partner organisations, is essential for recruiting a diverse range of potential participants. Consideration should be given to how partner organisations can meaningfully participate; perhaps representatives of these organisations could act as speakers or formal partners throughout the deliberation process (European Alternatives, 2024).

Stratified random selection ('sorting'), modelled on ancient Athenian practices, is often used to form 'mini-publics', where the central aim is to ensure the participation of citizens who reflect the structure and demographic characteristics of the wider population, such as employment status, level of education or specific identity groups (e.g. LGBTQI+). Civil society organisers must adapt the selection criteria to the specific objectives of the assembly; these may be groups directly affected by the topic (such as migrants in the context of migration policy) or those whose voices are typically marginalised (such as young people in debates on labour rights). Of course, the question arises as to whether it makes sense to include in the assembly people who are not interested in or directly affected by the content or the issue at hand. Precisely because of the 'breadth' and legitimacy of the assembly, this often makes sense. When ensuring gender inclusion, care must be taken with the timetable, the provision of childcare, and the establishment of clear guidelines for a respectful and safe environment. Specific strategies, such as offering tangible benefits to communities or building trust through prior engagement, can help to include hard-to-reach groups (European Alternatives, 2024).

Some key organisational and content-related aspects of a citizens' assembly

In the context of considering deliberation as a mechanism for political decision-making, we can further highlight that the successful implementation of a citizens' assembly is highly dependent on certain factors that influence the creation of a positive atmosphere, which is fundamentally linked to ensuring and fostering trust, as well as inclusive and effective communication among participants. Among other things, this involves deliberately building trust in participatory mechanisms, recognising participants' diverse life experiences, and establishing caring practices and shared responsibility. The incorporation of feminist facilitation techniques further reinforces this by challenging traditional power dynamics, prioritising the inclusion of marginalised voices through empathy and active listening, and striving for collective decision-making based on consensus. To accommodate the diverse ways in which participants think and express their ideas, it is beneficial for assemblies to incorporate creative techniques such as storytelling, art-based thinking or theatrical play, which offer participants alternative ways of engaging that go beyond mere 'classical' debate and foster a deeper shared understanding (European Alternatives, 2024).

Of course, practical communication support is also essential for facilitating participation through the assembly, particularly in multilingual settings where interpretation – whether professional or voluntary – is necessary for equal participation, requiring careful planning and support. In addition to deliberating with participants, the role of experts is crucial in ensuring balanced and accessible information. Experts must be carefully guided to work in line with the assembly's needs, to explain complex topics and present different perspectives without dominating the deliberative process. Ideally, participants have the opportunity to decide on knowledge gaps and the selection of experts, thereby ensuring that the experts' contribution remains a foundation rather than the dominant thematic focus of the deliberation (European Alternatives, 2024).

Results and impact

Citizens' assemblies can achieve, and indeed aim for, a variety of outcomes, ranging from strengthening solidarity to influencing official policy and political measures. In this context, therefore, defining the desired impact at the planning stage is of crucial importance. Due to the uncertainty surrounding political influence (e.g. the question of potential reach), it usually makes sense to adopt a multi-pronged strategy targeting different levels of influence, ranging from easily achievable to highly ambitious and thus more difficult to realise. With regard to the question of policy influence, it is crucial that the assembly's topics are aligned with current *policy* programmes or frameworks and that the recommendations complement, amend, or build upon the latter. Recommendations must be concrete, feasible and achievable within the relevant context, ideally including a description of the steps for implementation (European Alternatives, 2024).

Early engagement of stakeholders, particularly policymakers, through information meetings and invitations to observe, is certainly a strategy that encourages cooperation. Building alliances with advocacy groups and community leaders helps to implement recommendations, whilst effective communication through or with the help of reports, summaries and a strategic media plan (press releases, social media) is also essential. For long-term success, continuous monitoring (so-called *policy* monitoring) is key, including monitoring implementation, publishing progress reports, conducting impact assessments, maintaining dialogue with stakeholders and applying public pressure (European Alternatives, 2024).

The basic coordinates and principles of conducting a citizens' assembly as a deliberative process, as just presented, must of course be considered not only normatively as specific guidelines for implementation, but also as the foundation of actual political practices of participation, which in turn offers us insight into a specific paradox at the heart of contemporary democratic theory. Whilst deliberative citizens'

assemblies, as we have shown, strive to find solutions and even consensus through reasoned arguments, the agonistic perspective (Dean, 2018, p. 181; Mouffe, 1999) directs us towards a critical engagement with the inescapable question that every decision, by its very nature, excludes certain interests, values and identities. However, this tension does not necessitate abandoning consultation as a specific productive democratic practice; rather, we can reconceptualise it as an inherently political phenomenon that both produces and frames the form of political participation.

Deliberation in its concrete form, as exemplified by citizens' assemblies and other approaches to participatory governance, can be understood as political participation in several key ways. Firstly, it represents a conscious agreement among various actors to (at least temporarily) suspend a purely conflict-generating focus on the idea of dominance, and to engage in a reasoned exchange of views or substantive positions. This suspension, as we might call this strategic orientation, does not mean the elimination of power dynamics, but can be understood as a collective articulation of the decision that power can be exercised through various means. Participants collaborate in establishing a limited space in which, whilst remaining aware of the ever-present power relations, they focus on arguments as the central element of the political process, participation and decision-making.

Secondly, deliberative practices can be understood as political participation through the institutionalisation of still-competitive relationships, which, however, contain a certain normative assumption of respect. Whilst the agonistic perspective meaningfully defines politics as fundamentally conflictual, deliberative spaces create structured environments in which this conflict can develop productively (Dean, 2018). Participants do not engage in order to resolve differences, but rather by agreeing to channel them through specific democratic procedures. This represents a form of metapolitical cooperation – an agreement on how to disagree – which is essential to democratic functioning as a form of interdependence (Lowndes & Paxton, 2018).

The political nature of deliberations (in whatever form) becomes even more apparent if we view them not as a transcendence of power, but as a specific configuration of power relations. When citizens participate in deliberation, they do not operate outside politics, outside political relations, but participate in a specific political order that values certain forms of expression and interaction more highly than others, whilst this order is the product of political struggle and reflects specific normative commitments.

5

CONCLUSION: DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY, SOLIDARITY AND CARE – REFLECTIONS ON THE MUTUAL REINFORCEMENT OF DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION AND DECISION-MAKING

Solidarity, care and deliberative democratic practices, such as the citizens' assembly, are – from an explicitly normative perspective – highlighted as mutually complementary elements (at the level of knowledge and practice) of a more inclusive and participatory democratic framework (Calder, 2015; Jennings, 2018; Loughnane et al., 2023). Why? Generally speaking, we can start by noting that solidarity operates primarily at the collective level and in public spaces, beyond the private sphere, and creates a certain collective commitment to addressing shared challenges. At the same time, care and care practices are usually situated at a more immediate, localised and micro-specific level, most often in the private sphere. However, precisely because of its connection to solidarity as a specific principle upon which care is based, it also extends to a broader level and even constitutes the framework for systemic arrangements of

care and support for specific sections of the population. Mutually complementary elements, based on solidarity and a caring relationship, offer a specific starting point for creating the conditions, context and readiness, both at the collective and individual levels, for organising and participating in deliberative processes.

Deliberations are, however, precisely through their normative principles (participation, effectiveness, visibility, attractiveness, inclusivity, openness, transnationality, transparency and accountability), a possible framework for discussion, the search for solutions and the implementation of solidarity and care practices, in which both individuals and collectives can participate (European Alternatives, 2024). Normative principles may appear as certain abstract rules or merely ‘theoretical’ guidelines, but their implementation is an important means of ensuring a structured framework that enables deliberative processes to retain their democratic character whilst providing a basis for addressing real social problems and issues that directly affect participants.

If we regard deliberation as a political process (and we must), then it necessarily follows that it is shaped by power relations; at the same time, it is crucial for us to recognise that these relations always have consequences. Deliberation as an open and inclusive process of participation means being attentive to these effects, which are not necessarily negative, but have the potential to stimulate, invent, create and constitute new relationships and social arrangements that transcend the careless (The Care Collective, 2020) neoliberal regimes we witness in today’s society, where numerous crises are perpetuated. By bringing together diverse voices in structured dialogue, deliberative mechanisms create a space where alternatives to current practices, modes of political action and existence can emerge and gain legitimacy.

In the remainder of this conclusion, we wish to reflect in more detail on how, within the framework of deliberative democracy and specific deliberative practices such as citizens’ assemblies, we might seek to articulate new social orders based on transcending current

constellations and restrictive arrangements. In doing so, we draw on the arguments regarding the potential of deliberative democracy presented in sub-section 4.1 (Curato et al., 2017).

Consultation for solidarity, care and environmental governance as a means of strengthening democracy

When citizens engage in substantive deliberation, they harness the democratic potential of addressing a wide range of issues; this constitutes political democratic participation that goes beyond the mechanistic logic of aggregating individual preferences. In this sense, participation is situated within complex socio-political issues as inherent to the socio-political and economic constellations into which we are thrown and which we simultaneously constitute. By structuring debates and reducing the scope for manipulative and exclusionary influences, citizens' assemblies become a potential framework for the development of collective reflection as a form of participation based on shared concern and solidarity, rather than on narrow self-interest. This transformation and shift in the mode of political action enables a potential transformation of social and economic arrangements that prioritise mutual support and collective well-being: 'the aim is to situate 'deliberative democracy' in the context of a broader reshaping of policymaking itself, i.e. the emergence of new styles and ways of making collectively binding decisions' (Parkinson & Mansbridge, 2012, p. 128).

This democratic core and the intention of deliberation are perhaps particularly relevant in the context of its potential to transcend the conventionally drawn artificial divide between environmental protection and the fight against climate change on the one hand, and human well-being on the other. For our discussion of deliberative processes as a form of political participation, it is essential to recognise that deliberation theorists advocate the idea of a (more or less radical) democratic process which, through an inclusive and dialogical process, enables citizens to gain a comprehensive understanding of our interdependence with nature, which may encourage them to

devise solutions that prioritise long-term ecological balance and collective well-being:

As environmental governance becomes increasingly important in contemporary political agendas, the need for transparent, fair and legitimate solutions to environmental problems is becoming ever more important. Promoting free and fair public communication is both a method and a goal for addressing the challenges of environmental governance in the twenty-first century (Erbaugh et al., 2024, p. 383).

Deliberation for a society of solidarity and care that goes beyond mere discussion

Another aspect of political participation aimed at strengthening a society of solidarity and care can be identified in theories of deliberation, namely the framing of participatory practices in such a way that they tend towards a form that is more than mere debate; it is a transformative practice that enables participants to adopt a 'deliberative stance' and participate as equals in mutual exchange. At least at the normative level, in the context of deliberative practices, we can speak of a focus on relationality and openness:

Although democratic deliberation is primarily a collective process of reasoning, it also involves individual processes of reflection or [...] internal deliberation. Internal deliberation requires people to reflect on their own views and be empathetic to the views of others (Grönlund et al., 2017, p. 457).

In this way, deliberative practices hold the potential for participants to transcend existing paradigms of political action and imagine more caring social arrangements. This process also implies that innovation requires not only rational discourse, but also emotional intelligence and a willingness to consider alternatives, thereby creating space for radically new approaches to social challenges based on solidarity and care.

Harnessing heterogeneous forms of communication: extending deliberation for care and solidarity

The next key aspect that can be highlighted in the context of the concluding reflection on the integration of solidarity, care and deliberative practices is the inclusion of various forms of communication. Indeed, within the framework of deliberative mechanisms, there is a use of heterogeneous modes of communication, such as storytelling, testimonies and rhetorical appeals, which citizens' assemblies can utilise to gain insight into the spectrum of human experiences and knowledge:

If groups resort to story chaining [...] their storytelling can be multivoiced, as they represent the experiences and perspectives of different group members. The common themes that emerge as participants tell and respond to stories can in turn create connections between group members and highlight the tensions between these different voices (Black, 2008, p. 111).

This inclusivity paves the way for creative solutions that respect different ways of knowing and connecting, which is a specific form of collaboration that draws on a range of communicative approaches. In this context, we can recognise that personal narratives about caring responsibilities or experiences of solidarity can, for example, redirect the discussion in a way that purely analytical discussions cannot, reveal overlooked dimensions of social problems and inspire innovative approaches that address both structural challenges and the diverse life realities of individuals, as well as realities at the collective level.

Inclusive debate: Challenging elitism to promote solidarity, care and justice

Deliberative democracy is, by its very nature, conceived as inclusive and thus seeks to overcome elitism in the sense of privileging certain voices, actors or perspectives. By actively involving diverse participants, particularly those from marginalised communities, citizens'

assemblies can raise extremely important contemporary issues that are fundamentally linked to the disappearance of practices of solidarity and care, such as the unequal distribution of care responsibilities and social barriers to solidarity. This inclusive nature ensures that the resulting policies and practices reflect the needs of all community members and do not favour the privileged few who typically dominate conventional decision-making.

Overcoming power relations: Deliberating for a just and caring transformation

In the previous chapter on deliberative democracy and specific deliberative mechanisms, we highlighted that one of the key issues is precisely the question of power relations between participants and actors in deliberative processes. Although there are many different perspectives in this area, it can be argued that the theory of deliberative democracy has become considerably 'clarified' in this regard, and in this sense it can be claimed that power is no longer viewed solely through a negative lens, that is, as repression. Power is recognised and articulated as a force that can be productively harnessed, including to foster solidarity and care across different segments of society. By explicitly acknowledging the differences in power among various actors, citizens' assemblies are a mechanism that, at least in principle, enables a fairer redistribution of responsibilities and resources. Such an understanding of power is also crucial for a critical examination of the political and economic forces and constellations that lead to competitiveness, individualism, selfishness and excessive consumerism. By articulating the collaborative power (solidarity) of humanity and its political potential for care, we can also conceive of deliberative processes through the prism of political participation in the formulation of strategies for establishing new regimes and practices geared towards concrete social measures, policies and new concepts of the human-nature relationship:

Just as the discursively motivated reciprocity between subjects is crucial to the functioning of democratic processes of collective

deliberation, the confluence of autonomy and solidarity is central to successful bonding processes generating empowering dynamics of social integration (Susen, 2017, p. 45).

Embracing plurality: greater diversity as a means of strengthening solidarity and innovation

In connection with the preceding argument regarding the intertwining of solidarity, care and deliberative democracy, we may also point out that democratic mechanisms which go beyond the mechanistic and formal-legal horizon of vote aggregation aim for (epistemic) meta-consensus, which does not mean seeking perfect unanimity, but rather developing the inventive potential of socio-political arrangements that take diversity and, at the same time, solidarity as their starting points. It is therefore a matter of 'consensus on the credibility of claims' within the process and their significance for deliberation, whereby 'pluralists have long pointed to the need to integrate multiple perspectives in political questions. Epistemic meta-consensus means that the collaboration of different perspectives is productive, as opposed to a clash of competing attempts to dispel perceived untruths' (Niemeyer & Dryzek, 2007, p. 504). By recognising and incorporating creative tensions between different viewpoints, these assemblies can develop hybrid solutions that incorporate a broad spectrum of values and approaches.

Consultation as a continuous process: fostering lasting relationships of care and solidarity

Theorists of deliberation also advocate the continuity of processes, whereby the substance of this process is essential, not merely the procedure. If we understand deliberative practices not so much as a procedural mechanism but as a specific political phenomenon with transformative potential, we must also recognise the relevance of the temporal dimension of this form of political participation. In this context, this dimension determines the political constellation among actors or participants at any given time, in which time itself becomes

a dimension for creating spaces where arguments unfold at a pace that allows for a deeper engagement with social complexities. This temporal dimension is political in nature, as it challenges prevailing notions of efficiency and redistributes the power to determine the appropriate timeframe for addressing common problems. The extended temporal orientation of deliberations also manifests as political participation through the creation of new collective subjects. When participants engage in continuous consultative practices that require not only the expression of preferences but also fundamental reflection on a specific content or issue, they gradually form political communities defined not by fixed identities, but by collective action based on mutual care and relationships and practices of solidarity. These emerging political collectives operate beyond traditional divides and establish cooperative relationships, through which new political configurations may also potentially emerge.

Deliberation as a means of countering the polarisation of society: strengthening solidarity and bridging differences

One final point we wish to consider relates to a key issue facing many societies, particularly in the modern world. As Curato et al. (2017) note, deliberation is, at its core, based on the premise that it is essential to include not only the diversity of participants but also the diversity of positions and perspectives, which is, in fact, a requirement for the actual implementation of any deliberative event or process. In this context, deliberation should not be understood as a procedural mechanism, but as a form of political participation that actively changes, shifts and rearticulates the boundaries that typically define political communities and their mutual relations. When deliberative events take place in deeply divided societies (politically, ethically, religiously), they function as a political strategy for overcoming divisions; spaces where established boundaries between groups become porous and permeable; yet they are not erased, but rather create *openness* (Steiner et al., 2017). In this sense, deliberative forums create a political terrain in which participants can engage

across divisions whilst maintaining their specific positions, which is made possible by the inherent nature of the political practice of mutual recognition. When participants express their needs and experiences, they engage in a form of political articulation involving an exchange of views, in which they recognise the legitimacy of the 'other's' positions as equally important as the assertion of their own. This recognition is in itself a political act, as at its very core it involves a redistribution of symbolic (and often actual) power, which at least partly determines the political nature of all subjects participating in the process.

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