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RESEARCH ARTICLE

NOT JUST SOLIDARITY PROVIDERS

Investigating the political dimension of Alternative Action Organisations (AAOs) during the economic crisis in Greece.

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ABSTRACT: The current economic crisis was a turning point, for the worse, in the everyday reality for a huge sector of the Greek population. Austerity-stricken Greece is characterised by the collapse of the welfare state and by increasingly uncovered basic needs. The answer to this humanitarian problem has been given by thousands of formal and informal initiatives and organisations and their solidarity actions, such as barter networks, food banks, consumers-producers networks, soup kitchens, new cooperatives, social economy enterprises and free legal advice. Despite the role of these initiatives and organisations in covering needs, there are also signs that some of them make claims for social and/or political change. Consequently, some of these groups and organisations function in the political arena. This paper aims to map and analyse Alternative Action Organisations (AAOs), which are engaged with solidarity and political actions, as well. It compares 'political AAOs' (engaged in protest, awareness raising and lobbying activities) and 'non-political AAOs' (engaged exclusively in solidarity actions) with respect to some of their main features. Moreover, the paper aims, through explanatory analysis, to uncover the predictors associated with AAOs' engagement in political activities.

KEYWORDS: Alternative action organisations, awareness raising, Greek crisis, political engagement, protest, solidarity activities

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1. Introduction

The years 2007 and 2008 marked the beginning of the global economic crisis which affected all the developed countries of the world. Europe and the Eurozone were impacted by the crisis as well, but it seriously affected countries with weak economies. In Greece, the enforcement of austerity packages led to an increase in government revenues and a decrease in public spending. Some of the imposed measures included cuts in wages, pensions, benefits, increases in taxation (direct and indirect), and cuts in the state budget (including cuts in health, welfare and education spending) (Matsaganis 2013).

Recent studies have shown that people have transformed their practices and adopted new alternatives in order to collectively endure the negative effects of the economic crisis (D'Alisa, Forno, and Maurano 2015; Kousis and Paschou 2017; Castells, Caraça, and Cardoso, 2012). As a result of this transformation in societal practices, Alternative Action Organisations (AAOs) are defined as units of strategic actions in the public sphere which are not operated/fully supported by mainstream economic and political organisations (i.e. corporate, state, or EU-related agencies). An AAO engages in actions aimed at providing citizens/people with alternative ways of enduring day-to-day difficulties and challenges under hard economic times, chiefly related to urgent needs, the environment, communications, the economy, alternative consumption/food sovereignty, self-organised spaces, culture, and others. Moreover, they aim to promote alternative economic and non-economic cultures and to foster new forms of political participation. The acting-organisation can be formal or informal (e.g. citizens' initiatives, NGO's, social movement organisations, local government organisations, etc.). Their actions are framed as cases of solidarity-based exchanges and cooperative structures, such as barter clubs and networks, credit unions, ethical banks, time banks, alternative social currency, cooperatives, citizens' self-help groups, solidarity networks, and social enterprises (LIVEWHAT WP6 Codebook; Loukakis 2016a; Kousis, Giugni, and Lahusen 2016b).

The weakness of the Greek state to meet the increasing needs of its citizens has mobilised formal and informal groups, in order to help those most affected by the crisis. Throughout the years of the crisis, solidarity actions were organised by almost 4,000 AAOs, holding both formal and informal status, (such as citizens' groups, NGOs, the Orthodox Church and Municipal Authorities) (Kousis, Kalogeraki, Papadaki, Loukakis, and Velonaki 2016b). New organisations were founded and already established ones changed their aims and goals in order to provide solutions to this problem, which af-

affected large parts of Greek society (Kousis et al. 2016b; Loukakis 2016a; Loukakis 2017; Simiti 2017).

The dramatic deterioration of the welfare state has negatively affected everyday reality for a considerable part of the Greek population. During the crisis years, low income earners and poor people faced extremely significant problems in covering basic human needs, such as shelter (Arapoglou, Gounis, and Siatitsa 2015), food (Petropoulou 2016; Rakopoulos 2014a; 2014b), clothing and/or even medical care and medicines (Cabot 2016), and educational activities (Kantzara 2014; Theoharis 2016). The rapid rise of non-capitalist practices by collective initiatives which facilitate citizens' survival through reciprocity and networking is clearly evidenced in the recent rise of related studies. These studies have focused on the economic dimension of solidarity actions investigating the new workers' collectives (Kokkinidis 2015), small-scale social economy, exchange actions, and the use of alternative currency (Sotiropoulou 2012). Other studies focus on the relationship between the social economy and social exclusion, and the way that the social economy may help ward off social exclusion (Adam and Papatheodorou 2010), or regional resilience (Psycharis, Kallioras, and Pantazis 2014).

Other studies illustrate the importance of the Greek Orthodox Church as a provider of charity and solidarity (Makris and Bekridakis 2013); thirty-five formal and informal social solidarity organisations in Athens (Sotiropoulos and Bourikos 2014); the relationship between spatiality and solidarity in Athens (Arampatzi 2016) and how social economy relations not only affect people materially, but also emotionally (Petropoulou 2013). Moreover, a systematic analysis of social solidarity initiatives offers fresh data from the island of Crete (Papadaki and Kalogeraki 2017) emphasising the importance of covering basic and urgent needs at the local level.

Despite the potential merits of the above research, there is a growing number of studies which highlights that some solidarity activities in Greece at times of economic crisis not only cover unmet needs, but are also political in character (Simiti 2017). For instance, ethnographic and anthropological works by Rakopoulos (2014a; 2014b) focus on food distribution initiatives and the 'anti-middleman' movement, how these initiatives and politics are closely related, especially with the social movements and the general anti-austerity campaign. The author argues that alternative food networks not only offer a solution to the urgent needs created by the crisis, but that organisations also "...pose a conscious, wider critique to austerity politics" (Rakopoulos 2014a, 313). However, Cabot's (2016) work on the solidarity clinics reveals that some volunteers are sceptical about the political outcome of their activism:

Many volunteers explained that even as they provide urgently needed services, they also buoy up the very systems they seek to resist. Some argued explicitly that in working effectively as a patch, they themselves contribute to the outsourcing of care to venues outside the state – and thus, to neoliberalisation (Cabot 2016, 162-163).

Added to that, Loukakis (2016b) shows that political consumerism and environmental organisations are also key solidarity providers in Greece. These organisations are a form of social movement organisation which changed their repertoire of action, or emerged in a new form, due to the economic crisis in order to help people who faced hardships. Finally, Kokkinidis (2015) argues that working collectives, as a new kind of entrepreneurship, foster new ways of living and co-existing in the city of Athens. He also adds that these initiatives have an innately collective and political character, and “...their practices are inherently politically driven by the members’ desire to create here and now alternative forms of economic and social relations” (Kokkinidis 2015, 432).

The common ground among these works is that they approach solidarity actions as intrinsically political actions, as an attempt by the organisations to change society from below. Thus, solidarity initiatives, among others, act in ways that show society co-opting collectively against the negative effects of the crisis in politically-active ways. Although the studies investigating the political dimension of solidarity initiatives have increased, they tend to be mostly qualitative, geographically limited to the local level, providing few elements about the role of the AAOs as political actors. It should be noted that Cabot’s (2016) work showed that sometimes, even the activists have some doubts about the efficiency of their actions with respect to their political function. Thus, a crucial question is raised: *Is solidarity as political practice enough or should AAOs be engaged in other forms of political participation?* To address this question, the paper offers nationwide empirical data on Greece in the context of the LIVEWHAT¹ project, aiming to investigate the function of AAOs as political actors. More specifically, it compares ‘political AAOs’ (these are the AAOs which are engaged both in solidarity and specific political activities such as protest, awareness raising and lobbying) and ‘non-political AAOs’ (these are the AAOs, engaged exclusively in solidarity actions) with respect to some of their main features. Then, based on explanatory analysis, the paper uncovers the predictors associated with AAOs’ engagement in politics.

¹ Results presented in this paper have been obtained within the project “Living with Hard Times: How Citizens React to Economic Crises and Their Social and Political Consequences” (LIVEWHAT). This project is funded by the European Commission under the 7th Framework Programme (Grant Agreement No. 613237). For more information please visit the project’s website: <http://www.livewhat.unige.ch/>

The structure of the article is as follows: Firstly, the main literature of the solidarity initiatives and solidarity provision as forms of political activism are introduced in the Greece-in-crisis context. Then, the research questions and some hypotheses that help the analysis are presented. Following, the method of research, as well as the techniques of analysis are put forward. The penultimate part presents the descriptive as well as the exploratory and explanatory findings. Finally, the conclusion deals with a discussion of the main findings.

2. Solidarity and Alternative Actions and their political features

In the past five years there has been a rise in empirical works on solidarity initiatives since the recent global economic crisis, especially on Southern Europe, e.g. Italy (Forno and Graziano 2014; Bosi and Zamboni 2015; Andretta and Giudi 2017), Spain (Castells, Caraça, and Cardoso 2012; Cruz, Rubén Martínez, and Blanco 2017), Portugal (Baumgarten 2017) and Greece (Kousis et al. 2016a; Papadaki and Kalogeraki 2017; Loukakis 2016a; 2016b; Sotiropoulou 2016; Simiti 2017). Research has primarily used social movements' literature in order to explain the rise in these initiatives. These studies support the idea that in times of economic crisis, social movement organisations and activists alter the field of actions at the local level in order to achieve social change. They seem to abandon the tactics of large protest events and global uprisings of previous years, and focus on small-scale everyday activities in order to transform society from below. As Forno and Graziano argue:

...it is a fact that even though conditions are not favourable, social movements have continued to expand and promote community-led initiatives for social and economic sustainability. In some cases, these initiatives play a decisive role in the fight against poverty and in guaranteeing human livelihood (Forno and Graziano 2016, 4).

The new social movement organisations, which aim towards economic, social and cultural sustainability of the local communities, have been named by the authors under the term *Sustainable Community Movement Organisations* (SCMOs). According to Forno and Graziano:

...SCMOs can be defined as social movement organisations that have the peculiarity of mobilising citizens primarily via their purchasing power and for which the main 'battle-field' is represented by the market where SCMOs' members are politically concerned consumers (Forno and Graziano 2014, 4).

Similarly, Bosi and Zamponi (2015) call these kinds of actions *Direct Social Actions*, and define them as collective actions that aim to directly change aspects of society without targeting or mediating public authorities or other actors (Bosi and Zamponi 2015, 372). This does not mean that these actions do not have political character; they do, but it is expressed by the action itself not by targeting other actors. Protest actions and claims targeting the state or other actors may appear, but they are not the key point of Bosi and Zamponi's study. Authors seem to primarily focus on the transformative power of the action itself rather than on its capacity to express claims to power holders. Moreover, Bosi and Zamponi (2015) add that these actions are direct in the sense that they are not mediated by other actors, and social in the sense that they address society rather than state actors.

Moreover, Kousis and Paschou (2017) introduced the term of *Alternative Forms of Resilience* which are alternative to the mainstream, economic and non-economic actions and practices through which citizens build up their resilience when faced with hard economic times and austerity that exclude them from welfare services and force them to abandon social rights. The main focus of this approach is on new alternative and collective ways which societies employ in order to meet people's needs, with economic as well as a socio-political transformative capacity.

The common ground among the three approaches is that they study the solidarity and alternative actions as forms of political activism and engagement. But it is important to mention that solidarity initiatives and groups are also active in more traditional forms of political engagement, e.g. protesting (Kousis and Paschou 2017). For Forno and Graziano (2014), the SCMOs are struggling against contemporary capitalism on three levels, including the cultural level, where they try to promote a 'new imaginary'; the economical level, where they facilitate the construction of a sustainable economic model; the political level, which includes actions such as lobbying. Protest activities are also among the groups' and organisations' repertoire, though they are not necessarily their main tactic. For instance, Bosi and Zamponi (2015) mention the participation of Italian groups against the anti-austerity protests, and Andretta and Giudi (2017) describe the participation of *Italian Solidarity Purchase Groups* in protests about agricultural and co-production issues.

Keeping in mind the aforementioned approaches, we can assume that some of the Greek alternative and solidarity groups/organisations frame their activities as political activism, but not all of them. This probably happened because of the high diversity and heterogeneity of the organisations and groups which organise these actions, from Church and municipalities, to anarchist groups (Kousis et al. 2016a; Simiti 2017; Sotiropoulos 2014). Thus, it is safe to assume that some actors, such as municipalities,

frame their activities as social policy, while others, such as churches and charities, list philanthropy as their driving force. Still others, such as informal groups, frame their activities as forms of political engagement. With respect to political activity, what is independent from the label each actor employs to frame its activities, is their actual participation in specific forms of political participation such as protest, awareness raising and lobbying activities. Literature gives us some information by pointing out that regarding lobbying activities, the role of Greek civil society has always been limited since NGOs in Greece have never managed to establish their position as counterparts in policy-making procedures like they did in the rest of Europe (Polyzoidis 2015). Moreover, taking into account that during recent years, the vast majority of Greek legislation about policy issues is predefined by the Memoranda², leaving almost zero interaction room for Greek civil society organisations. Awareness raising activities³ were always in social movements' and NGOs' repertoire of actions (della Porta and Diani 2009, 168-170). Finally, with respect to protest participation, many works have shown interaction between the Greek 'Indignados' and the creation of new organisations (Vogiatzoglou 2017; Theocharis 2015). Additionally, Simiti (2017) mentions that some NGOs participate in collective mobilisations but in general, limited attention has been paid to the solidarity initiatives as protest participants. Thus, the research question that this paper aims to address is, *whether or not the Greek AAOs take part in political activities in addition to solidarity provision. If yes, what are the main features that foster or constrain their engagement in the political arena?*

As is clearly stated in the previous paragraph, not all of the organisations that are engaged in alternative and solidarity actions in Greece are kinds of social movement organisation, or frame their actions as political. Different studies (Loukakis 2016a; Kousis et al., 2016; Vogiatzoglou 2017) mention that in many cases, informal and protest groups are equally active in solidarity provision and in political activities, especially participation in protest events. Moreover, unions and professional associations were among the key actors in the Greek Anti-austerity campaign (Roose, Kousis, Sommer, Scholl, Kanellopoulos, Loukakis and Papanikolopoulos 2018; Diani and Kousis 2014) thus there is a high probability that actors such as informal networks, protest groups and unions are highly engaged in politics. Simiti's (2017) work showed that crisis has

² On the verge of the Greek state bankruptcy Greek Government, European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Forum agreed on three bail-out packages from 2010 to 2015. These rescue packages were combined with agreements for implementation, by the Greek Government, of austerity measures, structural reforms and privatisation of government assets. Each of the signed agreements had the name 'Memorandum of Understanding'.

³ E.g., informational campaigns or events about specific problems.

provided the NGO sector in Greece with the opportunity to flourish as they were very active and the volume of their work increased during the crisis years, thus the majority of the NGOs are expected to be politically active in various forms such as awareness raising, lobbying and protesting. Another AAO type that has been very active in recent years is that of social economy groups. In more detail, many co-working spaces, food networks, alternative coins, barter clubs and time banks and various other projects (Rakopoulos 2014a; Petropoulou 2013; Adam and Papatheodorou 2010) offered alternative ways of consumption. Given the fact that the social economy as a concept has embodied elements of political action (Moulaert and Ailenei 2005) social economy enterprises and groups are predicted to be highly engaged in political activities. Finally, there is no relevant literature supporting that municipalities, churches and charities have participated in any form of protest, awareness raising or lobbying activities. To sum up, given the above, I expect *most of the informal or protest groups, NGOs, unions and associations and social economy groups to be engaged in politics. On the other hand, AAO types such as municipalities, church and charities are not expected to be politically active.*

Another feature that I want to explore is the scope of solidarity activities. Following the resource mobilisation theory (Edwards and McCarthy 2004), actions taken by organisations are the result of available resources. The more resources each organisation has, the more activities it can organise. Moreover, some literature argues that national campaigns and national-level projects require an adequate number of resources (human, material and informational). Taking for granted that AAOs engaged in national scope solidarity activities have more resources than those that are active at the local level, it can be assumed that it is easier to expand their repertoire of action beyond solidarity provision. To sum up, *I expect AAOs that are active at the national level to be more engaged in politics than those AAOs that are active solely at the local level.*

The time dimension is also an aspect that I want to explore. Different studies so far have linked the establishment of new AAOs to the Greek 'Indignados' (Vogiatzoglou 2017; Theocharis 2016; Loukakis 2017). If one takes into consideration a country's socio-political context, coupled with an economic crisis akin to the one in Greece, impacting every level of Greek society, and an ensuing anti-austerity movement that lasted five years (Diani and Kousis 2014; Roose et al. 2018), one might expect that AAOs established during this time to be highly politicised and politically engaged. Thus, *I expect AAOs founded after 2010 to be more active in politics than the AAOs established in the pre-crisis period.*

Another organisational feature that may have an effect regarding the type of activities of AAOs' political participation is the organisational structure. Revisiting the resources mobilisation theory, higher resource levels appear to lead to collective action

and the sustainability of the organisations (Edwards and McCarthy 2004). Organisational and material (especially money) resources are extremely important thus formal organisations are more effective at collecting and mobilising resources. Under such a framework, someone could expect that AAOs with a formal structure (i.e. having a higher number of organisational features like assemblies, board, presidency, written constitution, etc.) will become more easily engaged in politics than less organised AAOs. Thus, *I expect that organisational features (such as board, president, secretary, paid staff, written constitution, treasurer, media representative and working committees) will be more common in politically-active AAOs than those without political engagement. Moreover, I expect that a higher degree of formality will lead to political engagement.*

It is also clear from the literature that, by adopting horizontal decision-making procedures, many AAOs are ruled by open or neighbourhood assemblies (Simiti 2017; Cabot 2016; Loukakis 2016). Most of these groups were active in the Greek anti-austerity campaign and made claims about new forms of political participation, and direct democracy. Consequently, *I expect that AAOs, which have adopted direct democratic forms of decision making such as open or neighbourhood assemblies, will be more active in politics.*

Regarding their aims, the AAOs promote alternative lifestyles, increase civic awareness and democratic competencies, and establish new economic practices based on solidarity (Forno and Graziano 2014; Andretta and Guidi 2017). Similarly in Greece, there are AAOs that mostly aim to create collective identities and a new imaginary alternative to contemporary capitalism (Loukakis 2016; Vogiatzoglou 2017; Simiti 2017). Thus I would expect that these AAOs will be politically active. On the other hand, there are other AAOs, mostly active in service provision, which aim to promote social welfare and to tackle the impact of the crisis by distributing goods and services (Simiti 2017). I expect these aims to be promoted mostly by politically inactive groups. Summing up, an assumption that needs to be explored is: *AAOs have a greater likelihood of being politically inactive if they promote aims related to welfare and reducing the negative impacts of austerity. Conversely, AAOs promoting social change while pursuing aims related to collective identities and democratic practices are more likely to be politically engaged.*

Finally, a key feature, which can help to separate the different types of actor, is the solidarity approach, which Laville (2010) calls 'Democratic solidarity'. Democratic solidarity is an indispensable ingredient of solidarity actions, which separates solidarity in the broader economic field from charity/philanthropic solidarity. Charity or philanthropic solidarity leads to a situation in which the beneficiaries are in a state of person-

al dependency on donors, resulting in the creation of hierarchal inferiority (i.e., top-down solidarity approach). At the same time, democratic solidarity, relying on mutual help, is expressed in demands and constitutes both self-organisation and a social movement (Ould Ahmed 2014, 5; Laville 2010, 231-234). Given the fact that social movements are among the key actors in the political procedures, someone could assume that AAOs that adopt a mutual help approach will be more active in politics. To sum up, *I expect mutual help solidarity approach to be applied more by politically-oriented AAOs. On the other hand, I expect non-political AAOs to apply a more top-down solidarity approach.*

3. Data and Methods

The method used and developed for the purposes of the LIVEWHAT project is called Alternative Action Organisations Analysis⁴, and it offers a comprehensive and systematic study of AAOs (Kousis et al.; 2016b; LIVEWHAT⁵ 2016). It is derived from previous work that focused on protest events, protest cases and political claims analysis. Actually, it is an organisational analysis based on AAOs' websites.

The AAOs' websites were centrally retrieved from 'hub/subhub' nodal-websites which had been identified and ranked, according to criteria such as: a) they should have nationwide coverage of AAOs, b) the AAOs that they contain should be active in many different action fields (no single issue, e.g. only food-related initiatives), and finally, c) they should contain a significant number of websites (Kousis et al. 2016a; 2016b; Loukakis 2016; 2017). The nodal-websites are used as sources in a similar way in which newspapers are treated in protest-event or political claims analysis (Kousis et al. 2016b).

Based on the selected hubs/subhubs, the number of retrieved AAOs' websites for Greece is 3,656 (Marketakis et al. 2015). Initiatives with no websites or hub connections are not included in this approach. From the total universe, a random sample of 500 AAOs was coded. The randomly chosen AAOs were selected only if they were active at any time within the period of the recent global economic crisis (i.e. approxi-

⁴ More information on the method applied could be found at: LIVEWHAT,2016. Integrated report on alternative forms of resilience in times of crises (Deliverable: 6.4)- PART 1: Alternative Action Organization Analysis (Available from: http://www.unige.ch/livewhat/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/LIVEWHAT_D6.4.pdf)

⁵ More information about the study's codebook can be found at: Livewhat (2016) Work Package 6 Codebook on Alternative Action Organisations, Livewhat, <http://www.livewhat.unige.ch/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Deliverable-6.1.pdf>

mately between 2007 and 2016). Excluded from the sample are: 1) state (central)-related organisations as sole organisers of alternative action, 2) EU-related organisations as sole organisers of alternative action and, 3) corporate-related organisations as sole organisers of alternative action (e.g. corporate social responsibility action) (LIVEWHAT WP6 Codebook 2015).

With respect to the analysis, first I provide a descriptive and explorative part, where AAOs are divided into two groups. The first group is that of AAOs, namely 'political AAOs'⁶ (n=348), which are AAOs that are engaged in both solidarity and political activities⁷. The latter in our dataset is measured through evidence of having taken part in at least one of the following activities: a) any kind of protest activity, b) raising awareness about political issues, and c) lobbying or other forms of organised interest group representation. The second group is that of AAOs, namely 'non-political' (n=152), which solely organise solidarity activities without any measured political engagement. I will compare these two groups, and attempt to find similarities and differences in specific features. The features that I will examine are: the AAOs' type, the AAOs' scope of action, the AAOs' starting year, the structural features of the AAOs, their aims and the solidarity approach that they follow.

In the second explanatory part, I use these predictors of the descriptive and explorative analysis in order to see which of them foster or restrict the engagement of AAOs in political procedures. In more detail, I explore the effect of the three most common and significant organisation types, namely informal and protest groups, NGOs, social economy initiatives and Churches and Charities (dummy variables). I also test the levels of action (local, national), which are dummy variables. Following, the relation of the crisis with the AAOs' starting year is examined. For that reason I have created a new variable (namely established after 2010) in which AAOs founded after the 2010 crisis take value 1, and AAOs established before 2010 take value 0. To examine the effects of the structure of the AAO, I have created a composite index for formality. In more detail, formalised organisations were identified as those listing at least four of the following structural features: board, president/leader, secretary, treasurer, paid staff, written constitution, spokesperson/media-PR, general assembly/general body and committees or work group. I will also test the effect of open/neighbourhood assemblies (dichotomous

⁶ Solidarity activities could be seen as a form of political engagement and as a way that social movement organisations try to change society from below (shown in the previous section) but for the purposes of this paper, only those AAOs which take place in the aforementioned forms of action are identified as political.

⁷ There is a large variety of solidarity activities, which can be included in the following categories: urgent needs, economy, energy and environment, civic media and communications, alternative consumption/lifestyles, self-organised spaces, as well as art and culture.

variable), which are common among informal AAOs and it will be used to test the effects of horizontal decision-making structures. Moreover, I test the impact of the three most commonly mentioned and significant aims⁸ (namely: to promote and achieve social change, to reduce the negative impacts of the economic crisis/austerity, to promote collective identities and community empowerment). Finally, the solidarity approach⁹ is tested by using two different types, namely top-down and mutual help solidarity approaches (dummy variables).

4. Findings: Comparing the organisational features of political and non-political AAOs

Given the limited research on the political function of the AAOs, the analysis will be descriptive, exploratory and explanatory. At first, the organisational type and the main features of the organisations, such as scope of actions, year of foundation, organisational structure, aims and solidarity approach will be examined.

Moving into the analysis, a very first finding comes from the composition of the sample, as almost 70% of the total population of AAOs (n=348) engages in some form of political activity. This is a very important finding which illustrates the double function of AAOs, as solidarity providers and as political actors. Focusing on the organisation type of the AAOs, Table 1 provides information in total and separately for non-political and political groups/organisations. At first glance, most of the solidarity activities are organised by informal or protest groups (45.5%), followed by NGOs (27.5%). Social economy initiatives account for 9.5% of the total population followed by Churches and charities, municipalities and regional authorities and finally by unions and associations. Comparing those AAOs which have political activities with non-political ones, interesting differences emerge. More than half of the political AAOs come from informal or protest groups, followed by the NGOs which cover almost one third of the political AAOs. On the other hand, the population of non-political AAOs is characterised by di-

⁸ The second most commonly mentioned aim is, 'to promote health, education and welfare', but I will not use it in the regression model as it is not significant according to the *Chi-square* test results.

⁹ There are four types of solidarity approaches in the codebook: a) mutual help approach, a bottom-up approach in which all members of the group gain benefit from their participation in the group (e.g. a collective kitchen), b) cooperation between groups; in this approach, AAOs foster collaboration with other AAOs in order to help each other's activities (e.g. share resources, office, volunteers etc.), c) altruistic solidarity, entailing help/offers of support to others (e.g. volunteering), and d) top-down approach; this approach describes the distribution of goods and services to others, from top-down in which a relation of donors and receivers is embodied (e.g. soup kitchen to homeless).

versity. In more detail, informal or protest groups are also the most populated type in non-political AAOs, but they consist of less than one third of the total population. Social economy initiatives are also important actors in the non-political category (approximately 20%), followed by municipalities, charities and Churches, and NGOs (approximately 15% apiece).

Table 1- Organisation type of the AAOs in total, of non-political and political AAOs

<i>Organisation Type</i>	<i>Non-political (n=151) (%)</i>	<i>Political (n=344) (%)</i>	<i>Chi Square test</i>	<i>Total (n=495)</i>
Informal /protest groups	28.5	52.9	25.261, p=.000	45.5
Social economy	20.5	4.7	30.789, p=.000	9.5
NGOs	14.6	33.1	18.161, p=.000	27.5
Charities and church	15.2	3.2	23.757, p=.000	6.9
Unions/associations	4.6	4.1	.083, p=.774	4.2
Municipalities/Regional authorities	15.2	0.9	43.480, p=.000	5.3
Other	1.3	1.2	.032, p=.880	1.2
Total	100	100		100

Source: LiveWhat

Another important feature of the AAOs is the scope of their activities. As Table 2 depicts, the vast majority (93%) of the AAOs are active at the local level. Almost one third of the total population is active at the regional level followed by the national and finally the European scope (17.2% and 5.6%, respectively). Moving to the comparison of the two groups, AAOs in both categories are engaged in local-scale activities, thus there are no significant differences at this level of action. On the other hand, significant differences can be spotted when the regional and national levels are examined. More specifically, political AAOs are more active in regional and national levels than the non-political ones.

Table 2- Activities Scope of the AAOs in total, of non-political and political AAOs

<i>Activities Scope</i>	<i>Non political (n=152) (%)</i>	<i>Political (n=348) (%)</i>	<i>Chi Square test</i>	<i>Total (n=500)</i>
Local	92.8	93.1	0.19, p=.3891	93.0
Regional	18.4	39.1	20.485, p=.000	32.8
National	7.2	21.6	15.22, p=.000	17.2
European	5.9	6.3	1.128, p=.288	5.6
Global	0.7	2.9	2.414 p=.120	2.2
Total	100	100		100

Source: LiveWhat - Note: Dummy variables, Multiple answers allowed

One of the important aspects of the AAOs that this paper aims to investigate is their relation to the crisis, and more specifically, whether there is a relationship between the crisis¹⁰ and the establishment date of each organisation. Thus, Figure 1 provides information about the starting year of 371 political and non-political AAOs¹¹. In general, many of the AAOs, irrespective of their type, started their operation at the beginning of the century and continued until 2000. From 2000 and on, there was an increase in the establishment of new AAOs, which continued during the crisis years and picked up in 2013. In more detail, most of the political AAOs were founded before the crisis of 2010 (55.8%). On the other hand, most of non-political AAOs were founded after 2010 (54.7%)¹². This finding is very interesting if we take into account the general political situation in Greece after the crisis, especially after the summer of 2011 when the Greek 'Indignados' occurred. Many works in the social movement literature, as argued earlier, mention the connection between the square occupations and the beginning of new solidarity organisations; thus, someone might expect that most AAOs would be politicised, but this is not confirmed by the data.

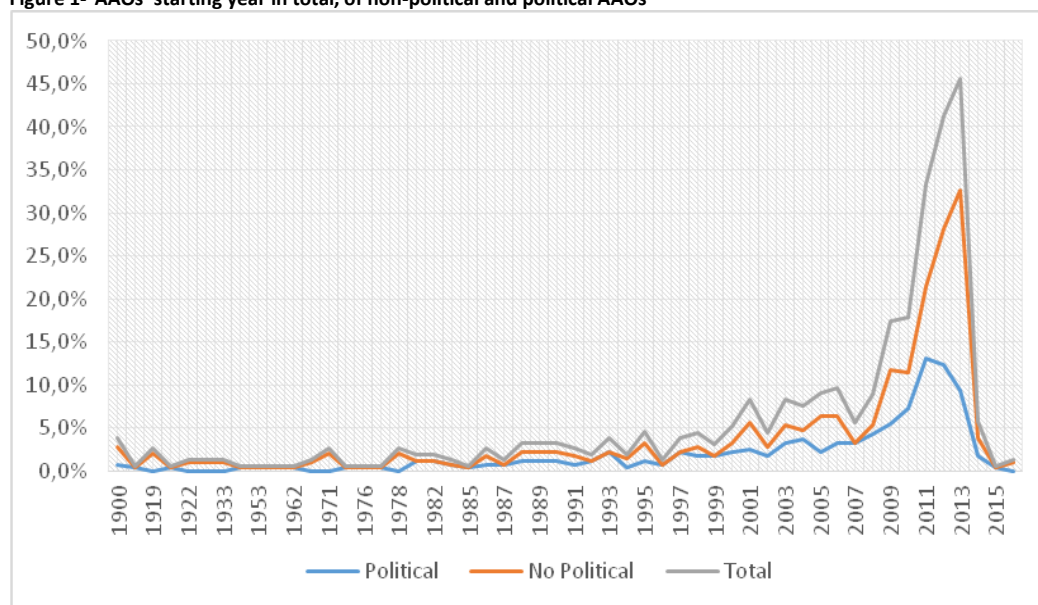
Table 3 provides the results of the explorative analysis with respect to AAOs' organisational structures. In general, most of the AAOs seem to have a more formal organisational structure, with a board and/or president (more than 20%). Moreover, about one fifth of the AAOs seem to have adopted more democratic decision-making procedures via open or neighbourhood assemblies. Focusing on the cross type comparison, significant differences can be spotted. In both AAO types, board, president and general assemblies are the top three features, but political AAOs mention these features more often. Political AAOs seem to be more professional than the non-political ones as they indicate more often that they have secretary, treasurer and spokesperson. Paid staff are mentioned more by non-political AAOs (7.9% instead of 6.9%), but this seems to be a statistically non-significant finding. Interestingly enough, at the same time, they seem to be more informal, as more political AAOs report open assemblies as decision-making structures than the non-political ones (26.7% and 6.6%, respectively).

¹⁰ As aforementioned in previous section, the crisis left its first marks on Greece during the first months of 2010, thus I divided the sample into two categories; the first consists of AAOs established until 31/12/2009 and the second, AAOs established after 1/1/2010.

¹¹ About one third of the AAOs do not mention the starting year of their operation on their websites.

¹² *Chi-square test*: 18.452, $p < 0.001$

Figure 1- AAOs' starting year in total, of non-political and political AAOs



Source: LiveWhat

Table 3- AAOs' organisational structure in total, of non-political and political AAOs

Organisational features	Non political (n=152) (%)	Political (n=348) (%)	Chi Square test	Total (n=500)
Board	13.2	28.2	13.207, p=.000	23.6
President/Leader/Chair	13.8	22.7	5.220, p=.022	20.0
Secretary	11.2	20.7	6.533, p=.011	17.8
Treasurer	7.2	16.7	7.908, p=.005	13.8
Paid staff	7.9	6.9	.158, p=.691	7.2
Written constitution	6.6	12.1	3.422, p=.064	10.4
Spokesperson/Media-PR	2.0	7.5	5.852, p=.016	5.8
General assembly/general body	12.5	21.0	5.063, p=.024	18.4
Neighbourhood/Open assembly	6.6	26.7	26.249, p=.000	20.6
Committees or work group	9.2	21.0	10.191, p=.001	17.4
Total	100	100		100

Source: LiveWhat

Note: Dummy variables, Multiple answers allowed

The differences between the two examined groups of political and non-political AAOs become clear in Table 4, where the findings about the AAOs' aims are presented. In general, about one third of the organisations mention the promotion and the achievement of social change (30.4%), the promotion of health, education and welfare (29.6%) and the reduction of negative impacts of the economic crisis/austerity as their goals (28.4%). Moving to the comparison between the political and the non-political AAOs, some very interesting findings appear. The most-mentioned aims by the political AAOs are: "achievement of social change" (26.7%), "against the discrimination and promotion of equality", "promotion of collective identities", "promotion of health, education and welfare" and "promotion of democratic practices" (approximately 30% for the latter three aims). On the other hand, the most promoted aims by the non-political AAOs are: "the reduction of negative impacts of the crisis" (39.5%), "the promotion of health, education and welfare" (29.6%), "the promotion of alternative economic lifestyles and values" and finally, "the reduction of poverty and social exclusion" (19.7% and 19.1%, respectively). To sum up the findings, there are three clear patterns, on the one hand, non-political AAOs aim to replace the social provision abolished by the state because of the Memoranda, and try to build an alternative welfare model. Political AAOs have completely different aims, however. On the one hand, some of the political AAOs target community and social empowerment by creating new collective identities and by promoting democratic practices. These AAOs are probably connected to social movements and the political initiatives of the era. On the other hand, some other political AAOs aim to achieve individual empowerment by promoting equal participation in society and individual change.

Finally, I will examine the solidarity approach that the AAOs follow. In total, mutual help and an altruistic approach are the main two that are followed by most AAOs (49.0% and 40.2%, respectively). About one third of the AAOs follow a top-down approach and finally, fewer adopt a collaborative pattern (19.4%). There are some interesting differences between the two AAO categories as significant associations are reported for mutual help, support between groups and top-down approach. Mutual help and support between groups is more common in political AAOs (56.6% and 23.3%, respectively) whereas top-down solidarity is more prevalent in non-political ones (40.8%). Finally, political AAOs tend to adopt the altruistic solidarity approach slightly more (42.2%) compared to non-political ones (35.5%), but without statistically significant association.

Table 4- AAOs' aims in total, of non-political and political AAOs

<i>Organisational / features</i>	<i>Non political (n=152)(%)</i>	<i>Political (n=348) (%)</i>	<i>Chi Square test</i>	<i>Total (n=500)(%)</i>
To promote and achieve social change	16.4	36.5	20.094, p=.000	30,4
To promote health, education and welfare	29.6	29.6	000, p=.999	29,6
To reduce the negative impacts of the economic crisis/austerity	39.5	23.6	13.170, p=.000	28,4
To promote collective identities and community empowerment	13.2	30.2	16.334, p=.000	25,0
To combat discrimination/ promote equality of participation	11.2	30.7	21.710, p=.000	24,8
To promote alternative noneconomic practices, lifestyles and values	15.8	25.0	5.196, p=.023	22,2
To promote and achieve positive/individual change	13.8	25.3	8.166, p=.004	21,8
To promote democratic practices	3.9	27.9	37.026, p=.000	20,6
To promote alternative economic practices, lifestyles and values	19.7	14.1	2.544, p=.111	15,8
To reduce poverty and exclusion	19.1	12.1	4.267, p=.039	14,2
To promote social movement actions and collective identities	3.3	18.7	20.808, p=.000	14,0
To promote sustainable development	11.8	12.1	.005, p=.943	12,0
To increase tolerance and mutual understanding	5.3	13.5	7.342, p=.007	11,0
To promote self-managed collectivity	6.6	12.9	4.360, p=.037	11,0
To promote dignity	5.9	11.5	3.717, p=.054	9,8
To promote self-determination, and self-empowerment	8.6	10.1	0.276, p=.594	9,6
To promote individual rights and responsibility	3.9	7.8	2.493, p=.114	6,6
Total	100	100		100

Source: LiveWhat

Note: Dummy variables, Multiple answers allowed

Until now, I have tried, through descriptive and explorative analysis, to point out the major features of the AAOs engaged in political activities compared to non-political AAOs. In the following part, I present the explanatory analysis using binary logistic re-

gression to predict specific features associated with AAOs' political participation (Table 6). The findings indicate that, with respect to the organisation types, NGOs as well as informal or protest groups are very likely to be engaged in political activities. On the other hand, social economy groups correlate negatively with political participation. The scope of AAOs' activities suggests that AAOs which are active on a national scale are more likely to be politically active. The same applies to the local scope but again the results are non-significant.

Table 5- AAOs' solidarity approach in total, of non-political and political AAOs

<i>Solidarity Approaches</i>	<i>Non-political (%)</i>	<i>Political (%)</i>	<i>Chi Square test</i>	<i>Total</i>
Mutual help	31.6	56.6	26.523, p=.000	49.0
Support between groups	10.5	23.3	10.998, p=.001	19.4
Altruistic	35.5	42.2	1.984, p=.159	40.2
Top down	40.8	31.6	3.951, p=.047	34.4

Source: LiveWhat

Note: Dummy variables, Multiple answers allowed

Table 6- Binary logistic regression models for predicting AAOs' political participation

	<i>Political participation</i> <i>N=495</i>	
<i>Organisation types</i>		
Informal and protest Groups	1.007**	(.368)
Social economy	-.953*	(.454)
NGOs	1.861***	(.373)
<i>Activities scope</i>		
Local Scope	.472	(.506)
National Scope	1.283**	(.420)
<i>Time frame</i>		
Established after Crisis	.426	(.273)
<i>Structural features</i>		
Formality	1.370**	(.397)
Neighbourhood/Open assembly	1.326**	(.412)
<i>Aims</i>		
To promote and achieve social change	1.065***	(.298)
To reduce the negative impacts of the economic crisis/austerity	-.690*	(.287)
To promote collective identities and community empowerment	1.047**	(.344)
<i>Solidarity Approaches</i>		
Mutual help solidarity	.508	(.341)
Top down solidarity	-.045	(.328)

Constant	-1.615	(.599)
Rsq	.427	

Source: LiveWhat

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, ° p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

AAOs' year of establishment seems to slightly increase the possibility of political participation but the results lack statistical significance. Moving to the structural features, formality seems to significantly increase the likelihood of engagement in political procedures. Similar findings are reported for neighbourhood/open assemblies, as the AAOs that are ruled by these kinds of direct democratic decisions are more likely to be engaged in politics.

With respect to the aims, AAOs that try to “promote and achieve social change” and “promote collective identities and community empowerment” are significantly more likely to be active in any form of measured political participation. On the other hand, AAOs that promote aims, such as to “reduce the negative impacts of the economic crisis/austerity”, are less likely to be politically active. Finally, with respect to the solidarity approaches, both mutual help and top-down solidarity approaches are not statistically significant.

5. Conclusions and further research

The 2009 economic crisis in Greece triggered a wave of solidarity and alternative actions in order to relieve those suffering most from the hardships caused by the crisis. As the present study shows, there is great diversity and heterogeneity between the organisations that are active in solidarity provision. A considerable number of these organisations (about two thirds of a random sample of 500 AAOs) take part in political activities such as protest, awareness raising, and/or lobbying. This is a very important finding, which highlights the dual role that the AAOs have as solidarity providers and as political actors. However, this article examines some very specific forms of political participation; further exploration is needed for a more detailed account of precursors that indicate political activity in AAOs.

The analysis above offers evidence that organisation types either foster or restrict their political participation. In more detail, informal or protest groups and NGOs are positively linked with engagement in political activities. These findings seem to accord with the recent literature which states that the vast majority of the solidarity work in Greece is carried out by informal networks (Kousis et al. 2016; Papadaki and Kalogeraki

2017; Cabot 2016). Similarly, other studies point out the participation of some NGOs in anti-austerity campaigns (Simiti 2017). On the other hand, social economy groups are negatively correlated with political participation. This is a very impressive finding, and contrary to our expectations, since the concept of the social economy embodies the idea of political consumerism and political engagement, in general (Forno and Graziano 2014; Andretta and Guidi 2017; Moulaert and Ailenei 2015). Thus, someone could expect that these initiatives would also be active in areas other than political consumption which can be explained by the fact that in many cases, social economy enterprises were the result of groups of unemployed people who took advantage of the legal framework and established new “Social cooperative enterprises”, many times lacking the political aspect which normally characterises social economy groups. This is a possible explanation which requires further investigation. Finally, another interesting finding is that not all of the informal groups develop political activities since about one third of the non-political AAOs come from this category. This finding maybe sounds paradoxical, but it can be explained by the existence of many neighbourhood assemblies and networks, which are not registered in authorities, thus they have an informal status and they are active in solidarity provision without any political engagement¹³. However, the high appearance of informal organisations as solidarity providers is very interesting because they are probably society’s last line of defence against the harsh austerity measures imposed by neoliberal Memoranda.

Findings also suggest that if AAOs are active at the national level, they are more likely to be engaged in politics. This finding is probably related to the type of the national campaigns, since many of them address the government and include awareness-raising activities, protests as well as lobbying actions, e.g. healthcare law, minimum income law, etc. Moreover, almost every AAO is active at the local level; this is an expected outcome since solidarity and especially the forms that are related to covering urgent needs such as clothes, food, medicine etc., must be given directly to those in need. However, further investigation is needed in order to explain if the AAOs that are only active at the local level do that because it is a form of everyday politics trying to change society from below, or do they not have enough resources to engage in larger-scale activities?

Also, interesting findings come to the fore when the year of establishment is examined. Findings suggest that the rise of AAOs was definitely in response to the degree of critical need within society. Thus, the economic crisis gave the AAOs the necessary opportunities to emerge (Kousis and Paschou 2017; Forno and Graziano 2014; Bosi and

¹³ Typical examples of these groups are: Solidarity network of (name of the neighbourhood), self managing community garden of (name of the neighbourhood), network of active citizens of (name of the neighbourhood) etc.

Zamboni 2015). However, contrary to my expectations, the findings show that most of the political AAOs were founded before the 2010 crisis. It is an unexpected finding which probably relies on the fact that after the crisis, Greek people distrusted the political system and faced a period of disenchantment with politics (Lyrintzis 2011,10), thus they became involved in solidarity, avoiding any engagement with the old corrupted political system. Of course, this is speculative, and further research is needed regarding the activists' motives.

With respect to formality, it also positively affects political participation, which is expected since political activities, no matter the type, require coordination which is easier in well-structured AAOs. Moreover, specific types of political activities such as lobbying, require reports, studies and scientific facts as well as human resources which can be provided only by AAOs with higher formality in their structure. Moreover, direct democratic forms of governance also positively affect political participation, which is expected since this form is mostly adopted by protest groups or informal groups aiming for real democracy (Simiti 2017; Cabot 2016; Loukakis 2016). On the other hand, non-political AAOs seem to be slightly more professional. A possible explanation could be that many of these AAOs provide services which often times need people with specific skills, thus they should hire professionals. Connected to this aspect, another explanation could be that some of the skilled activists, who could do these jobs on a voluntary basis, are engaged in political AAOs because they want to offer their work in the AAO as a form of political activism. This, of course, is also speculative requiring further research.

Finally, results show that aims really matter, since AAOs which promote aims "to achieve social change" and "collective identities and community empowerment" are more likely to be engaged in politics. These findings are related to aims of prefigurative politics, and are in accordance with the literature which mention that activists have turned away from the big Global Justice Movement protests to small, everyday activities and politics in order to change society from below (Forno and Graziano 2014; Bosi and Zamboni 2015). On the other hand, AAOs that promote aims "to reduce the negative impacts of the economic crisis/austerity" are negatively related with political engagement. These aims are mostly promoted by non-political AAOs which try to replace the welfare state and the state's provisions that no longer exist in this period of austerity. Most probably they are service providing AAOs which were founded after the crisis in order to help people to cope with the negative effects of the recession.

To sum up, in this paper, I have attempted to shed some light on specific unexplored aspects of solidarity initiatives. As the findings show, some of these initiatives combine solidarity with actions in the political arena. But these findings are only one side of the

coin; further investigation is needed into the organisations which frame solidarity activities as political activism. Finally, a last aspect that is worth mentioning is whether or not solidarity activities can formulate a new solidarity movement, or are they aspects of the anti-austerity movement which was dominant in the crisis era.

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