Education and Social Solidarity in times of Crisis: the case of voluntary shadow education in Greece

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Abstract
This paper aims to understand an emergent social practice of solidarity, that of voluntary shadow education (‘social frontistiria’), in its socio-economic context. Perceiving the welfare state as the institutionalized form of solidarity, this paper attempts to analyze its specific nature and the process of political legitimation stemming from enduring features of the Greek political culture. It is argued that the traditionally established practices are deconstructed in the face of the economic crisis. In the context of recession, new forms of solidarity emerge which transcend the enduring individualistic element of Greek society, based on social activism and volunteerism. While institutional solidarity is insufficient and traditional solidarity faints, civil society apparently emerges, introducing new social practices of solidarity. This paper shows, that the crisis, alongside its dismantling effects, may have some creative effect towards the development of new solidarities, new spaces of hybrid social practices.

Keywords: Social solidarity, education welfare, social activism, volunteerism, shadow education

Introduction
The aim of this paper is to engage with one of the primary concerns in political sociology, that of social solidarity. More specifically, the paper focuses on the emergent mechanisms of social solidarity in the context of the recent economic crisis that has dramatically affected the Greek economy and society. This issue will be explored in the social practices developed in the field of education, perceived as one of the major welfare state policies.

The welfare state has been considered as an institutionalized mode of social morality professing goals of social solidarity among people (Arts & Gelissen 2001). The recent fiscal crisis threatens not only the quality and depth of public provision in social services such as education, but social cohesion per se. This paper seeks for an understanding of the social strategies developed in the era of crisis towards the appropriation of educational goods and the implications on the process of constructing social solidarity.

The paper will, firstly, grapple with the ambiguous nature of the Greek welfare state and the prevailing modes of political legitimacy that involve the co-existence...
of public provision with individualism and ‘familialism’. Political clientelism and the constantly supplementary role of the family in social care construct social solidarity as a contested terrain. This issue will be particularly explored with regard to educational institutions where the welfare state deficit is evident in the exceedingly high private expenditures on education, especially in various forms of ‘shadow education’. Secondly, it will examine the social manifestations of the recent economic and fiscal crisis and their implications in the welfare state and education in particular. Recession, austerity measures, high unemployment rates and dramatic salary reductions have genuinely affected the ability of the working and middle class family to enact its traditional role in welfare provision, a fact with profoundly dismantling results in social cohesion. Thirdly, it will investigate a recent initiative professing social solidarity goals called ‘social frontistiria’. This emerging institution represents a form of social activism focusing on covering the needs of the poor in shadow education. Drawing on empirical evidence and qualitative interviews conducted in the area of greater Athens this paper will attempt to understand the impacts of the economic crisis in changing the predominant model of welfare and in the development of new modes of social solidarity. It will be argued that economic crisis deeply affects the cohesive element in society. While individualism and clientelism have been enduring characteristics of the Greek polity, being intrinsic constituents of the prevailing model of social consensus and welfare state, there is some evidence that in view of the economic crisis individualism, although persistent, is leaving space for emerging forms of social solidarity. This development, however, does not imply any radical shift towards a genuinely egalitarian welfare model, but rather, as David Harvey (2000) puts it, an emergence of “new spaces of hope” within the civil society which create a new paradigm of social action.

The welfare state deficit and social solidarity

Social solidarity is considered to be the highest form of social morality since it provides for the cohesive element that makes society possible. According to Durkheim’s classical analysis, social solidarity is:

“The totality of bonds that bind us to one another and to society, which shape the mass of individuals into a cohesive aggregate” (Durkheim 1984: 331).

Social solidarity, however, is a slippery concept. Its causes, contexts and consequences construct a field of contestation. Traditional bonding and enduring relationships developed within the *gemeinschaft*, perceived as the context of the family, the community or the ‘nation’, can be threatened in times of insecurity and unsettlement or in conditions of skepticism and post-emotional cosmopolitanism as described by Turner (2000). Moreover, it cannot be assumed that solidarity stems from any sort of ‘natural’ causes. The multiplicity of its initiation varies from mere coercion, to
expectation for material reward, or loyalty and commitment to common ideals (Crow 2002: 116). As Tsoukalas argues, in the contemporary context the challenge is not vaguely ethical, but merely political and as a matter of fact “it is not about a wider symbolic condition of solidarity, but it is rather about the institutional responsibility of the whole polity for a certain contribution to the corporeal needs of the individuals” (Tsoukalas 1998: 1). Inherent in the quest for solidarity is the presumption of unequal distribution of resources and wealth. Social inequality is the basis for the construction of rights in capitalist societies, a reasoning that has provided the ground for a political morality of redistributive justice, as for example in the Marshallian theorization of citizenship (Marshall 1950). The quintessential idea of the European welfare state has been the quest for moderation and elimination of the most repulsive forms of social inequality through policies of redistribution. In this sense, the welfare state represents the institutional form of social solidarity generated in constitutional principles and specified in codified entitlements to social policies. The content, quality and depth of these entitlements is a constant political arena of negotiation and its configurations integrate the history and political culture of the specific social context. It is through this spectrum that this paper attempts to understand the nature of the Greek welfare system.

Greece does not belong to any of the Esping-Andersen’s (1990) ‘three worlds of welfare capitalism’ since this widely accepted typology mainly refers to welfare regimes that have emerged in north European and Anglo-Saxon contexts including the USA, Canada and Australia (Cochrane, et al. 2001). Studies attempting to understand Greece through the spectrum of Esping-Andersen’s typology of welfare regimes, find analogies with the conservative type of welfare state (Stasinopoulos 1990: 220), arguing that the subsidiary element which is the distinctive feature of these regimes happens to be an eminent characteristic of Greek society. The Greek type of welfare state has followed a scheme of subsidiarity in the sense that a large part of social services and support, such as childcare, care for elderly people etc. is provided by the family and traditional social networks. Other studies juxtapose the Mediterranean countries to the central and northern European ones not in the obvious geographical terms, but by observing elements of convergence in the political culture and the construction of welfare. Some characteristics of the “Southern-European” or Mediterranean welfare regimes are considered to be: low level of state intervention in the sphere of social security, co-existence of public and private provision, unequal access to social insurance, fragmented and corporate system of ensuring income with polarizing effects, existence of grey economy and tax evasion, emphasis on the protection of the elderly and high expenditures on pensions against that of children and family benefits, poor housing policy, clientelism and patronage mechanisms in allocation of resources and subsidies (Ferrera 1999, Katrougalos and Lazaridis 2003). Arts and Gelissen (2001), analyzing data from the International Social Survey Program and the European Values Study, understand the Mediterranean countries
as ‘immature’ welfare regimes and detect convergent attitudes towards solidarity. They find that people in immature welfare states present strong commitment to institutionalized solidarity and egalitarian values. However, this exceptionally interesting finding needs further interpretation. In the case of Greece, for example, it is quite possible that the reason people tend to seek for institutional solidarity is related to the historical role of the state in social services, which, despite its interventionist character expressed in the expanded public sector, fails to guarantee social security. The failure of public provision develops insecurity and the demand for institutional solidarity. Moreover, the poor development of a social safety net in the Southern European countries has been underlined by Ferrera (2005) in a comparative study between Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain. In the same study Greece is considered as particularly lagging in the fight against poverty, a fact dramatically affecting children, the elderly and the unemployed. The lack of a guaranteed minimum income has been compensated by fragmentary measures and various benefits that cannot embrace the multiplicity of needs and effectively combat social exclusion (Matsaganis 2005).

Indeed, all the relevant studies converge that there is a substantial deficit in the development of the Greek welfare state. Central to the understanding of its nature is the historical role assumed by the political system in constructing legitimacy.

a. Statism and the ‘Employer-state’

According to Tsoukalas the expanded public sector in Greece (around 40% of the wage labour were public sector employees in the 1950s and around 30% in the early 1960s) has acted as a form of socio-political integration of large parts of population, while at the same time has contributed to the urbanization process shaping the class structure (Tsoukalas 1986). This is a situation which presents a continuity till the present times. What is of particular importance for the argument of this paper is that the state, instead of providing for institutional solidarity by guaranteeing quality social services, has acted as an employer promising work placement to the citizenry in the public sector. On the other hand, state bureaucracy has imposed central control to all aspects of public policy encouraging inertia on the part of the civil society.

b. Political Clientelism, Familialism and Individualism

The persistence of modes of social solidarity based on traditional institutions such as the family and kinship or clientelist networks that facilitate multilevel dependencies of the citizen from the state and its agents are enduring features of Greek society. Clientelism in particular, implies that the political system and its agents treat the citizen as a potential clientele, by satisfying individual interests in order to integrate
them in their political strategy as electorate. It is argued that these non-transparent networks develop a peculiar type of social consensus based on non-institutionalised modes of social transaction. This process of achieving social consensus, which has its origins in the 19th century Greek political system, but persists till today, undermines the development of a transparent public sphere and the construction of welfare state institutions and policies (Charalambis 1996). In present times the traditional 19th century clientelism, which was focusing on the individual citizen, has given rise to a mode of political networking between the state and selected and fragmented corporate interests which has been characterized as ‘corporate clientelism’, an integral component of the political system in the third Greek republic (after the restoration of democracy in 1974) (Lyrintzis, et al. 1996). Within this non transparent transaction the institutions that maintain trust and guarantee solidarity are those of the family and individual networks. However, the omnipotence of the family is a longstanding feature. Its origins are traced back in the period of the Ottoman rule, where the power of the Sublime Porte was exercised by the appointment of local leaders responsible for collecting tax revenues on behalf of the central power. These local elites were selected among a few families that enjoyed the confidence of the Sultan. (Kostis 2013: 31–44). Even in present times familialism is considered as a persistent eligibility criterion for a political career.

In the Greek regime political legitimacy continues to be constructed on the basis of eclectic satisfaction of fragmented interests. In spite of the significant progress of the past four decades (1974 onwards) towards the construction of a welfare system, institutional solidarity remains rather weak and uncertain while traditional solidarity presents sustainability and maintains its appeal.

**Periodisation of the education welfare system**

State intervention in education is relatively early compared to other European states (Green 1990). The establishment of public and compulsory education for all took place in 1834, a fact intrinsically connected to the nation building process and the formation of the Greek state (Zambeta 1998, Zambeta 2003). The development of public provision however was uneven throughout the country, while illiteracy persisted, especially in deprived rural contexts affecting mainly the poor and women (Eliou 1984).

The 1974–1989 period is the most fruitful in terms of the development of the education welfare state and the democratisation and modernisation of the education system and professional teaching. Generally speaking, after the restoration of democracy, in 1974, Greece enters a period of welfare state expansion and democratisation in the political system and public institutions. This process is continued when Greece becomes a full member of European Community (in 1980) and Europeanisation starts being a variable of education policy. The 1976 education reform initiated by a right wing liberal government practically implements the long
standing demand for the resolution of the language question and the expansion of the educational system. Later, in the 1980s, the socialist party abolished the 16-plus examinations. These policies withdraw some of the most significant barriers for the educational inclusion of the less advantaged social groups and contributed to the decrease of dropping out. At the same time initial primary school teacher education was upgraded at university level, while the inspectorate which represented an authoritarian institution scrutinising the teaching profession was replaced by the School Counselors. This policy was exceptionally well received and supported by the teachers’ unions. The 1566/1985 reform law reorganised the system of general education and initiated the concept of democratic accountability and ‘social participation’ in education planning through specific institutions. These institutions, however, had a marginal role and in the course of time became less active. Nevertheless the introduction of the concept of democratic educational management, although not fully materialised, has developed a new ethos and critical reflexivity regarding education policy among the crucial education actors.

During the period of the 1990s and onwards education policy reflects the restructuring of the welfare state and the effect of globalisation and Europeanization process. The emphasis is no longer on democratization and integration of the less privileged social groups. The entrepreneurial discourse tends to dominate in education, based on concepts of performativity, competitiveness, efficiency and market oriented education outcomes (Zambeta et al. 2005). Social inclusion is the term that replaces the concept of equality, following the ‘Third Way’ political discourse (Giddens 1990), and refers mainly to specified social groups, such as the minorities or the economic immigrants, which represent a substantial new category of student population (Lindblad and Popkewitz 2002).

The welfare state deficit is evident in the low level of public funding in key sectors of social policy, such as education, health or family policy. In the field of education in particular, despite the fact that education is considered to be a public good and it is offered free of charge, while private schools represent less than 5% of the overall school units, the private cost of education services in Greece is exceptionally high. Public education expenditure in Greece has always been particularly low compared to other EU countries (between 3%-3.6% of the GDP in the last two decades). This deficit in educational policy has been partially “substituted” by the increased private expense of the households. Strikingly, private expenses on education in Greece constitute an important part (more than 35%) of the overall education expenses (including public expenses 50% and EU contributions 15%) (Educational Policy Development Centre 2011: 537). This is due to the deficits of the public spending and to the increased demand of the Greek households to offer better education to their children. Investing in education has been always considered as the most important vehicle for upward social mobility. As far as the household budget is concerned, monthly private spending in education in Greece is one of the highest
Private spending in education mainly refers to additional education services in the sector of shadow education (‘frontistiria’), private lessons in foreign languages, art education and extra-curricular activities. On the other hand, tertiary education in terms of students’ accommodation and subsistence and especially student emigration in foreign universities are significant sources of severe economic burden imposed on the family. The numerus clausus, as well as the system of examinations which regulates access to higher education in the country is a source of constant anxiety and stress for Greek adolescents, which leads to the explosion of the private tuition enterprise and, in the case of failure, to student emigration.

The extended sector of shadow education (‘Frontistiria’)

The unusually high private educational expenditure in Greece is predominantly related to the existence of a large informal sector of educational services providing additional to the official education private tuition offered either at an individual basis, at home, or in special institutions called ‘frontistiria’. This important market that has been developed over the years absorbs more than a billion Euros yearly and corresponds to 0.5% of the 2010 GDP of Greece (Educational Policy Development Centre 2011: 473).

The phenomenon of shadow education is not a solely Greek peculiarity. However, the extent of its development in Greece gives it a distinct symbolic significance in the educational trajectory of the students and the educational practices of the family. According to a relevant study conducted in an urban context in Athens, 91% of secondary education students attend some form of private tuition, while the average attendance lasts four years during school life (Alevizaki 2009: 50). The most expanded section of shadow education is the one referring to secondary education and especially those services focusing on the preparation of students for the university entrance national examinations. The main reasons for turning to shadow education is that the Greek family does not trust the systematic form of schooling, especially for acquiring the crucial skills related to the university entrance examinations. Interestingly, shadow education attendance is perceived as an inescapable step for both public and private education students. All relevant data (Alevizaki 2009, Educational Policy Development Centre 2011) converge on the conclusion that shadow education attendance is a phenomenon which transcends both social class and merit. It seems that even students who attend high status and expensive private schools still believe that ‘frontistiria’ are necessary for their preparation to meet the standards for the national examinations. Moreover, attendance is not related to school performance, since all students including those with excellent school results, feel the need to receive extra support from some form of shadow education. Apparently, school as an institution is perceived as ineffective in empowering students and offering the critical skills.
to confront the most selective examinations in their educational life. In this respect, the Greek family, irrespective of its socio-economic background, in the attempt to ensure good performance in the national exams is prepared to undertake the heavy economic cost in order to send their children to ‘frontistiria’. For the highly ambitious Greek family, good educational performance represents a key to upward social mobility and a target for family investment.

This situation shapes the background on which the economic crisis hits Greek education.

**Dimensions of the economic and fiscal crisis in Greece and their impact on welfare state policies**

The Eurozone debt crisis (since 2009), following the international fiscal crisis that started in the USA in 2007 (housing bubble burst, toxic financial products, bankruptcy of certain banks), has hit the EU member states in different ways. While the Southern Mediterranean countries (Greece, Portugal, Spain, Italy and recently Cyprus), suffering from high public debt and deficit, were obliged to take severe austerity measures, leading to deep recession and strong fiscal retrenchment, other states of Middle and North Europe (e.g. Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Finland) succeeded to keep positive growth rates and avoid such painful measures.

Mostly affected from the implementation of fiscal adjustment programmes are the vulnerable countries of Southern Europe and especially Greece, as the “Eurozone’s southern Achilles heel”. A difficult period of economic adjustment in the framework of the first Memorandum agreed between the Greek Government and ‘Troika’ (European Central Bank, European Commission, International Monetary Fund [IMF]) and other fiscal consolidation Programmes, e.g. the Medium Term Fiscal Strategy since 2010, led to a reduction in the national budget deficit to GDP ratio from 15.5% in 2009 to 9.5% in 2011 and to 7% in 2012. This fiscal consolidation is considered by the Troika as an important positive step, since it brings public finances back on a sustainable track, although reasonable doubts have been raised regarding the sustainability of public dept (i.e. Varoufakis 2011, Tsakalotos 2012). Furthermore, the negative impacts of these policies on the real economy are immense. As it is stated in the last assessment of IMF in May 2013: “Overall, the economy contracted by 22 percent between 2008 and 2012 and unemployment rose to 27.5 percent; youth unemployment now exceeds 60 percent” (IMF 2013: 7).

This dramatic reduction of GDP (22% in the last 5 years) and the drastic rise of unemployment (doubled in the last 2 years to 27.5% in 2012) is the outcome of horizontal austerity measures concerning radical salary and pension cuts, both in public and in private sector. The average household lost more than one fifth of its income within the last 5 years. The average earnings per employee have been cut by 19% within the years 2010–2012, while in the public sector this percentage reaches
30%. Furthermore, measures towards a more flexible labour market have been introduced (abandonment of collective agreements, promotion of individual labour contracts, reduction of minimal wage). The recent OECD Review of Social Welfare Programmes in Greece recognizes the high social costs caused by the reduction of fiscal deficit and the implications for both social stability and growth (OECD 2013). The deep and longer-than-expected recession threatens social cohesion, since horizontal cuts of public spending included also social welfare expenditure, which was already relative low, compared to other OECD countries. The system of social protection, developed in the 1950s, characterized by fragmentation of funds, inefficient policy measures, incomplete or failed reforms, is inefficient to cope with the increased demand for social protection, that emerged during the economic crisis since 2009. (Matsaganis, M. 2011). The rise of poverty (as shown in Table 1), from 19.96% to 30.49% (measured on the basis of the 2009 median income), which has been estimated by Matsaganis and Leventi (2011) and confirmed through additional data collected in the recent OECD Study (2013), manifest the combined negative effects of recession and austerity.

The rise of poverty is distributed horizontally in the occupational structure, but affects more dramatically the unemployed: from 51.48% in 2009 to 67.45% in 2011 (Table 2). Moreover, it has started hitting seriously the middle class.

The need to focus on social protection in the crisis period in order to secure social cohesion (Mitrakos and Tsakloglou 2011), becomes more and more urgent, not only on the part of welfare state policy (e.g. through coherent reform strategies and not only emergency measures), but also on the part of the civil society (e.g. through the promotion and encouragement of social networks and collective self-help actions). The establishment of a “security net” against poverty is gaining ground (Matsaganis and Leventi 2011a).

The rise of poverty and unemployment and the decrease of average income has changed the consumption pattern in the recent years of crisis. The average monthly expenses of the households decreased by 9.3% in 2010 compared to 2009, whilst there is a shift from clothing, footwear and leisure to nutrition and housing expenses (Greek Statistics Service 2012). The persistence of deep recession for more than five years (2009–2013) compels the households to drastic cuts which touch the sensitive sectors of health and education.

Moreover, economic recession and austerity dramatically impacts on family and children, a fact with secondary consequences in the ability of the family to enact its traditional subsidiary role in education and compensate for the failures of the system. Moreover, the lack of a “safety net” is particularly evident in several emergency reports on the part of teachers about children in famine fainting at schools. Student meals that have been introduced in certain inner city schools by the Ministry of Education represent a limited policy manifesting ‘political sensitivity’ whereas
institutional austerity remains untouched. Municipalities, NGOs and especially the Church have assumed an altruistic role offering free meals to people in poverty.

In a national survey conducted by adolescents in the auspices of the Greek Ombudsman for Children’s Rights, school students respond that the economic crisis had severe impacts on their family and educational life. 23% of the respondents report that their school has been incorporated to another one due to austerity measures, while 33% of them find that the crisis affects their attendance in extracurricular activities (foreign language courses, music lessons etc.) and ‘frontistiria’. Moreover, 48% of the students report that there has been some form of social activism in their school, such as free meals on the part of the Church or NGOs, distribution of food, clothing and medicine to the poor, volunteer teaching support etc. (Greek Ombudsman for Children’s Rights 2013).

One of the consequences of the crisis is that many households cannot afford the severe economic burden of shadow education and they seek for alternatives. The federation of teachers working in shadow education estimate that attendance in frontistiria has been reduced by 10% to 20%. The decrease in student numbers is relatively higher in the first grade of the Lyceum and almost marginal in the last grade, a fact that shows that the family is still struggling and deprives itself to invest in the education of their children.

In this excessively hard situation the different social actors respond in various different ways. One of these responses is social activism in providing voluntarily services for free, a situation strikingly new in the Greek context of individualism and fragmented interests. It is on one of these responses that the next section of this paper focuses, the so called ‘social frontistiria’.

Social activism in shadow education: ‘social frontistiria’

Social frontistiria are voluntary education structures which have emerged throughout the country in the context of the recent economic crisis. They can be found also under other names, such as “School of Solidarity”, depending on the organizers. Their purpose is to provide free of charge services similar to those of shadow education, supporting students in their preparation for the university entrance examinations. The most significant characteristic of social frontistiria is that the teachers are volunteers.

In 2013, thirty-one social frontistiria were active in the area of greater Athens. Most of those (20) are local authorities initiatives, organized under the auspices of the Municipalities, which provide for the infrastructure (accommodation and equipment). Another part of social frontistiria is initiated by other agents such as NGOs, associations of citizens, the Church or parental associations. In these cases organization and administration is provided by volunteers. Student enrolment takes into account social criteria, such as the annual family income or the occupational status of the parents (i.e. the unemployed have priority). Social Frontistiria are
hosted either in public schools buildings, after the operational hours of the school, or in municipality buildings (libraries or cultural centers)\(^2\).

**a. Political initiative**

The introduction of *social frontistiria* is either initiated by institutional political actors, such as the Municipalities, or it is the outcome of social activism at the local level. The Municipalities understand this initiative as part of their social policy, since a substantial part of welfare policies have been supposedly decentralised to the local government. The lack of sufficient resources, however, does not allow the municipalities to provide for integrated social services. The situation becomes even worse under the economic crisis, since the public sector in general, and the municipalities in particular, are obliged to reduce their expenses and make some of their personnel redundant.

“Unfortunately, the welfare state has been demolished, its responsibilities have been passed on to the municipalities and individual private initiatives. The local authorities do not have sufficient resources and they do not afford to hire personnel in order to support them. But we are going to struggle with it.” (General Secretary, Municipality of Zografou 2013: Interview 6 April).

The rational for the introduction of *social frontistiria* is social provision for the most vulnerable social groups. The feasibility of the project, however, presupposes the supply of voluntary teachers. This develops a sort of hybrid institution which involves collaboration between institutional actors (the municipalities) and volunteers. This was the case in Zographou, a middle class area where the municipality is considered as one of the most prosperous since it receives revenues from a large cemetery.

“We have an expanded network of Social Care am . . . and one of its manifestations is the municipal centre of lifelong education. *Social Frontistiria* operate in the context of this centre. Am . . . basically it accepts children from poor or almost poor families, under purely economic criteria, apart from humanistic, based on income. . . . We provide for the infrastructure, there is the building, the technical support . . . whatever is needed, but above all is volunteerism, the volunteerism of teachers is incomparable. This is the best investment, inconceivable capital that exceeds any limits of monetary value” (General Secretary, Municipality of Zografou 2013: Interview 6 April).

In some other cases initiative came on the part of activists within parental unions, as in the case of Nikaia, or citizens associations, as in the case of Haidari, both low middle and working class areas. In these cases the institutional involvement of the local authorities was discouraged by the activists, considered as manipulative. There has been some rather eclectic collaboration with the local authorities, with all the precautions on the part of the activists to prevent any political exploitation by the Mayor. The mistrust towards the political system and its procedures is always present.
“On 25 January 2012 a group supporting students was set up in ISTOS (a solidarity activist association). After discussing the critical situation that many families experience, it was proposed to provide support for students. The reason to this is the troublesome situation prevailing in the country. Many parents are unable to cope with the financial need of their children.” (Teacher 10, ISTOS, Haidari 2013: Interview 21 March).

“It is not the Mayor’s role to get involved in what we are doing. He (the Mayor) has not exploited it at the moment, and if he tries to, he will find us against him. This is made by us (the parental union) and you (volunteer teachers).” (Parents’ representative, Nikaia 2013, Focus Group Interview: 19 June).

b. Social solidarity

As social semantics are internalized in the naming of certain institutions, in Nikaia the term used is the ‘School of solidarity’. Egalitarianism and solidarity towards the recipients of the economic crisis is the professed major purpose of this initiative.

“I have come across children who had given up frontistiria … where they had to pay, because something came up in the family, the well known things, unemployment etc. … so to speak, a basic endeavour of the Solidarity School is equality of opportunities for all children and in the midst of crisis we will need that”. (Teacher 2, Nikaia 2013, Focus group Interview: 19 June).

The existence of solidarity is not taken for granted. It is a scarce quality in short supply and the construction of it presupposes social effort. On the other hand, solidarity is not an one way process based on the presumption that “those who can, give and those who cannot, receive”. Social solidarity is based on a ‘division of labour’ in social support.

“it would be good to arrange meetings with parents in order to discuss every social issue, everything that troubles them, because, most of all, we have to do with families that are unable to send their children to frontistiria … last year only 20 parents out of 100 made shifts to support the School … we must ask parents to be integrated … so to speak (the solidarity school), to be supported by all of us. Because we are talking about something based on Solidarity!” (Representative of Parents’ Union, Nikaia 2013, Focus group Interview: 19 June).

As in redistributive justice, social solidarity presupposes distributive share of responsibilities.

“Support to students is based on social solidarity and teachers provide voluntary work without any economic obligation on the part of the parents. … Teachers have been committed to offer voluntarily their knowledge and time …. There is one parent responsible to organize parents to participate and help with the building” (Teacher 10, ISTOS, Haidari 2013: Interview 21 March).

The scarcity of solidarity is attributed to the erosion of collectivities. Implicit in this remark is the awareness of the individualistic element in Greek society. The need
cultivate and teach solidarity is perceived as a strategy of social defense against any possible future threat. Instability and lack of trust are encoded as uncertainty about the future.

“The reason that the children do not know what social solidarity means at this moment, is not unrelated to their life trajectory. Collectivities have been shattered, collectivities no longer exist . . . We should cultivate the sense of solidarity in our children, in order them to be prepared to offer at a later stage, because we do not know what awaits us. We do not know what tomorrow brings”. (Teacher 6, Nikaia. 2013, Focus group Interview: 19 June).

c. Activism and Volunteerism

Undisputedly, the condition ‘sine qua non’ for the operation of social frontistiria is the supply of volunteer teachers. Teachers activists certainly accomplish a humanitarian duty and they provide for the main ‘resources’ (knowledge and work) that make this initiative possible. The motivation of volunteerism, however, is manifold. Humanitarian duty, political sensitivity towards social inequality, the pursuit of an activist social identity may co-exist with well intentioned self-interest, such as the prevention of deskilling due to unemployment and the improvement of the CV. This finding is in line with the study of Pantea (2011) who argues that volunteerism, especially by youth, should not be understood as inherently altruistic, but it involves learning and self – accomplishment strategies as well. Activist teachers seek for a social identity and wish to maintain self-respect while they are unemployed or doing another job for subsistence, but at the same time they wish to acquire teaching experience and improve their professional profile. As Crow (2002: 20–22) argues, in Durkheim’s terms, individualism is compatible with solidarity.

“I am in the neighbourhood, I am involved in politics. I am an active citizen, I guess. I was one of the first who learned about it, when it got started and I came . . . Look, I have time. I have been alienated a bit from language teaching. I was teaching before. Now I am doing another job that has nothing to do with it. If you are a teacher nowadays you are sentenced to unemployment . . . Thus, one of the reasons I went for it was to stay in touch with teaching. Because I have given it up for 2, 3 years. It is not many years. I was giving lessons before. But I have given it up, and I think you forget.” (Teacher 7, Zographou 2013, Interview: 17 April).

“First of all I couldn’t find a job, I had sent so many CVs in private schools and private frontistiria . . . nobody replied positively. I wanted to know whether I like teaching, because I have studied it, and if I am good in it. So I decided to do it voluntarily. I will do it again next year, but I want to find a paid job as well, to tell you the truth. In that case I will do less hours here” (Teacher 8, Zographou 2013: Interview 17 April).

d. Organisation and networking

Interestingly, social activism has been facilitated by using official institutional networks. The first step for dissemination of information regarding the introduction
of *social frontiria* is made by using the public schools as an agency. In the second phase, the information is circulated by the participants themselves, students, parents and volunteer teachers who act as a network with multiplying effects.

“we informed all the schools about the Social Frontistiria, … we had a good cooperation with the school directors and we distributed application forms to every student, so everybody got informed, and it reached every household … and the number of volunteer teachers has been raised because it has started becoming known, in the beginning the children at schools were uninterested, but now the parents will learn about it … They were satisfied and now one brings the other. So to speak, yes … it is the result that always brings people” (Municipal official, Zographou 2013: Interview: 3 April).

“We need to draft a little text that will roughly explain in a few words what is the Solidarity School and its goals. And we shall distribute this in order to make a network among teachers and parental unions … to declare that teachers and parents together will struggle for public education … and of course the Solidarity School is just a substitute” (Teacher 2, Group Interview, Nikaia 2013, Focus group Interview: 19 June).

Personal contact and friendly conversation is essential to activate parents, especially the ones coming from the most affected by the crisis social groups. Parental involvement presupposes social support on the part of the activists towards these parents that confront unemployment. In other terms, social involvement and engagement is perceived as a deliberating strategy to cope with the depression of the crisis.

“(in order to activate the parents) we should seek for contact in person with each one of them, phone-calls, information, explanations, friendly conversation, we are here together …” (Teacher 4, Nikaia 2013, Focus group Interview: 19 June).

“If we were setting up a group focusing on parents. So to speak, to set up a group supporting unemployed parents” (Teacher 1, Nikaia 2013, Focus group Interview: 19 June).

e. *Experiences and outcomes*

Social activism and volunteerism is experienced as self-fulfillment and as enhancing social bonds preventing social isolation. Certainly a positive experience for young teachers.

“I have gained (from the Solidarity School) friends first of all, colleagues, and it has given me inspiration. I believe I have raised children’s self-esteem and I think it has given hope to the parents, because I have chatted a lot with the parents during the breaks … and I think this is one of the most positive things, that we came close to each other as humans, am …” (Teacher 4, Nikaia 2013, Focus group Interview: 19 June).
“I experience it as something extraordinary ... I feel I become better” (Teacher 8, Zographou 2013, Interview: 17 April).

Epilogue: Reflections on Social Solidarity

The aim of this paper was to understand an emergent social practice of solidarity in its socio-economic context. In doing so, the paper attempted to analyse some of the enduring features of the Greek political culture as they are interconnected with the historically established practices of solidarity and their deconstruction in the face of the recent economic crisis.

The paper argues that the welfare state deficit is intrinsically related to the prevalent modes of political legitimacy, referring to two basic angles. On one hand statism and the ‘employer-state’ promote a low level social security which encourages social inertia. On the other hand clientelism and familialism constitute fundamental aspects of the political culture that facilitate individualistic and fragmented satisfaction of interests, acting as a substitute to welfare policies. Thus, institutional solidarity encapsulated in welfare state policies has been rather weak and immature, compensated by traditional modes of solidarity based on individual and family networks.

In the field of education, in spite of the expansion of welfare policies that took place during the past decades, and especially in the period 1974–1990, the deficit persists and it is expressed in the continuously subsidiary role of the family. Greek society aspiring for upward social mobility was always investing in education, but rather individually.

The current crisis has hit the most important compensatory mechanism for the lack of public provision and institutional solidarity, that of the family. Economic recession, and austerity measures have dramatic effects on the ability of the family to accomplish its traditional role in providing and safeguarding educational goods. The more rigorous austerity becomes, the more socially extended its implications are, raising poverty and compressing the middle class.

In this context of recession, new forms of solidarity emerge which transcend the enduring individualistic element of Greek society, based on social activism and volunteerism. While institutional solidarity is insufficient and traditional solidarity faints, civil society apparently emerges, introducing new social practices of solidarity. In several cases this process creates hybrid social features, such as those which involve collaboration between institutional (i.e. municipal) and activist solidarity. On the other hand, volunteerism, apart from its benevolent goals, incorporates self-fulfilling strategies, a fact that may enforce the activist dynamic of solidarity.

This paper shows, that the crisis, alongside its dismantling effects, may have some creative effect towards the development of new solidarities, new spaces of hybrid social practices. This signifies that ‘we are still alive’. 
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Notes

1 Shadow education (Frontistiría in Greek) is an enduring element of the Greek educational system imposing a vast economic burden to the family. It provides for auxiliary and supplementary tutoring to the students, parallel to that of the school, at all education levels, but the most expanded area is that of secondary education and especially the preparation for the University entrance examinations. They take multiple forms varying from group teaching in privately run institutions to individual private tuition at home.

2 The data of this section stem from field work that has been conducted in three different areas of Athens: Zographou, Nikaia and Haidari. These are socially mixed areas, while Zographou is a predominantly middle class area and Nikaia and Haidari are lower middle and working class areas. The research has been based on semi-structured interviews (10 individual interviews and two focus-group interviews) with the main actors involved in each particular case, basically volunteer teachers, municipality officials, activists, parental union representatives and students. b. Data on the socio-economic background of the students. The research has been conducted between March and June 2013.
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Appendix

Table 1. Poverty rates before and after austerity and recession

| Poverty Rates          | 2009  | 2010  | 2011  | 2010  | 2011  |
|------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|                        | Austerity alone | Austerity and recession | Austerity alone | Austerity and recession |
| Fixed poverty line     | 19.96 | 23.54 | 25.83 | 26.26 | 30.49 |
| Conventional poverty line | 19.96 | 20.24 | 20.61 | 19.01 | 19.83 |

Source: (Matsaganis and Leventi 2011).

1 “Poverty rates” is an international indicator measuring the percentage of people living in poverty, which means people whose income is below 60% of the average median income. This percentage of people is considered as living “below the poverty line”. In tables 1 and 2, Matsaganis and Leventi (2011) calculate poverty rates as the percentage of people with equvalised household income below 60% of the median, using the modified OECD equivalence scale.

2 Matsaganis and Leventi have tried to calculate the impacts of austerity alone and austerity coupled with recession in the rise of poverty. “Austerity alone” refers to the impacts of the measures introduced by the government in May 2010, aiming to reduce fiscal deficits. These measures were imposed by or related to the Memorandum agreed with the Troika, such as cuts in wages of the public sector employees, reduction of public spending and attempts to reduce deficits through severe taxation measures. However, austerity measures had dramatic side effects in the recession of the economy as a whole, since it drastically reduced consumption. As a matter of fact, one person’s consumption is another person’s income. Therefore, the wider “recession” indicates changes in the economy that are considered to be beyond the governmental control, such as cuts in wages or redundancies in the private sector (Matsaganis and Leventi 2011: 4). This calculation has been confirmed and endorsed by the OECD (2013).

3 Conventional poverty is the percentage of people living in poverty by taking into account the median income of the respected year the measurement is conducted (2009, 2010, 2011 in the above tables). Fixed poverty is the percentage of people living in poverty in a particular year (2010 and 2011 in the tables above) by taking into account the median income of a selected previous year (2009 in the Tables 1 and 2). This is a particularly meaningful indicator, especially in times of crisis, because austerity and recession rapidly decrease the average median income. While conventional poverty blurs the picture presenting relative stability between the years 2009–2011, fixed poverty, measured on the basis of the 2009 median income, rises from 19.96% to 30.49% in 2011, that is within two years.

Table 2. Poverty rates by household head

|                        | 2009  | 2010  | 2011  | 2009  | 2010  | 2011  |
|------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|                        | Conventional | Fixed | Conventional | Fixed |
| All                    | 19.96 | 20.61 | 25.83 | 19.83 | 30.49 |
| Unemployed             | 51.48 | 59.58 | 63.14 | 58.20 | 67.45 |
| Employee (public sector or banking) | 0.31 | 0.42 | 1.39 | 0.75 | 4.16 |
| Employee (Private sector excl. Banking) | 12.38 | 11.81 | 16.41 | 10.46 | 20.40 |
| Liberal profession     | 3.79  | 3.72  | 3.72  | 3.69  | 7.29  |
| Own account worker     | 16.63 | 18.08 | 22.96 | 17.33 | 25.10 |
| Farmer                 | 46.88 | 45.48 | 51.79 | 43.37 | 54.96 |
| Pensioner              | 24.67 | 24.29 | 28.88 | 18.07 | 31.57 |
| Other                  | 20.65 | 20.40 | 28.88 | 18.07 | 31.57 |

Source: (Matsaganis and Leventi 2011).