

NEWSLETTER

LIVEWHAT—Living with Hard Times: How Citizens React to Economic Crises and Their Social and Political Consequences

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<http://www.livewhat.unige.ch/>



LIVEWHAT is a research project that studies policy responses and citizens' resilience in times of crisis. The project brings together universities and an international advisory board of leading scientists from nine European countries – France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

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LIVEWHAT updates

LIVEWHAT updates

This is the Final LIVEWHAT Newsletter. After 36 months, the project comes to an end, with our 6th Newsletter Issue highlighting key results emerging from the project's Workpackage 5 – “Causal effects of crises on citizens’ attitudes and behaviors” and Workpackage 6 – “Alternative forms of resilience in times of crisis”.

Visit our [website](#) to learn more about our LIVEWHAT publications, articles, and papers.

LIVEWHAT researchers conducted six lab and seven survey experiments with individual citizens in two countries with contrasting economic conditions: Spain and Switzerland (Workpackage 5). The aim of the experimental research was to get a better picture of the causal effects of different dimensions of the crisis on citizens’ attitudes and behaviours. In addition to the experiments, LIVEWHAT researchers conducted cross-country interviews with participants in alternative action organizations (AAOs) to assess their

impact upon vulnerable groups and communities (Workpackage 6). AAOs fall within the spectrum of the emerging social and solidarity economy (SSE). They refer to varying forms of co-operative, associative and solidarity relations. They include, for example, cooperatives, mutual associations, NGOs, self-help groups, barter networks, food banks, free medical services, soup kitchens, new cooperatives, associations of

informal sector workers, social enterprise and fair trade organizations and networks. Below we present some of the main findings of the experiments and the research on AAOs.

Unveiling the findings

Experiment on the economic crisis and national identification

This survey experiment sought to assess the impact that the loss of economic status of the nation, and the “blaming the EU” strategy has on three attitudes: nationalism, national identification and national pride. Over recent years, many European countries such as Spain have undergone deep economic crisis. Some of these countries have also witnessed the electoral success of existing and new radical right parties. Media commentators have interpreted the success of these parties as the symptom of a more general *malaise*. Nationalism has mainly touched those in a situation of economic vulnerability.

Exogenous shocks, such as economic crises, have hindered the nation’s international and internal prestige, damaging its status, and making national identity less attractive to people. Governments have tried to offset the negative economic impact of crises on citizens’ assessment of the nation by promoting nationalism to divert citizens’ attention from these problems. This has been achieved by emphasizing aspects where the nation excels (sports, culture, etc.) or by blaming others for the bad shape of the economy, e.g. the European Union

(EU) or the International Monetary Fund.

Against this background, LIVEWHAT researchers addressed three questions: Does nationalism increase with economic crisis? Do exonerative strategies pointing to the responsibility of a significant-other for the economic crisis increase nationalism? Is the effect of economic crisis unconditional or is it stronger among those who are more seriously hit by it?



The experimental design manipulated both the loss of economic status of the nation and the attribution of responsibilities to a third party (the EU) regarding the loss of economic status experienced in Spain.

The evidence indicates that lower social class respondents identify more strongly with Spain, and become more nationalistic and proud to be Spanish when both treatments are present. The effect is the opposite among high-income people and those belonging to the upper or upper-middle class. Here, there is no direct or indirect impact of blame attribution on nationalist attitudes for the unemployed. This finding appears to suggest that, in difficult economic times, people with a *low economic status seek shelter in the nation*, and people with a *high economic status turn their backs on it*.

Experiment on inequalities in Europe and attitudes towards the EU

This survey experiment studied how citizens’ perceptions of inequality between member states of the EU shape attitudes toward European institutions and the process of European integration. Some scholars have offered evidence that in the process of European integration, member states have lost some of their national economic sovereignty and loosened labour protection. Consequently, member states have been exposed to greater economic risks, including unemployment and poverty, and rising income inequality. The link between European integration and economic inequality suggests that citizens may hold European institutions responsible for rising inequality and may, as a result, be less favourable to further integration.



A handful of studies have examined the link between levels of *within-nation* inequality and attitudes toward European institutions or the degree to which citizens assign blame to European institutions for rising levels of inequality at home. Kuhn et al. (2016) find that the rise in income inequality at home is associated with increasing Euroscepticism, particularly among citizens of lower

levels of formal education. While these studies evince a link between rising levels of income inequality and European institutions, they tell us little about how inequality at the European level – that is, between member states – influences attitudes toward Europe.

To address this issue, LIVEWHAT researchers utilized an experimental design that exposed individuals randomly to two groups of graph bars picturing the poverty rates across EU countries. In the inequality treatment, differences in poverty rates in the EU were large, whereas in the equality treatment differences were insignificant. The results show that perceptions of inequality *weaken* the opinions towards the EU. However, differences between perceptions of inequality between member states are mostly unable to explain *detachment* from the EU, except for *trust* in the EU and in the European Central Bank.

AAOs' initiatives and projects

AAOs' projects and initiatives are developed as a response to their beneficiaries' needs and reflect the main challenges and problems faced by European society. AAOs usually adopt multitask approaches, which involve different action types and concern both the provision of services and advocacy. The actions undertaken by AAOs are reportedly characterized by heterogeneity, flexibility and innovativeness, inasmuch they are tailored to the needs of specific populations and localities. Altogether the national samples of the nine participating countries cover a very broad spectrum of actions, which are summarized in what follows.



Services which focus on basic needs include the provision of food (e.g. social kitchens and soup kitchens), shelter and commodities such as clothes and furniture as well as healthcare services to those in need (homeless, poor and immigrants).

In addition to them, AAOs usually offer psychological support and consultancy on legal, labor and financial (tax-related mainly) issues. Actions which aim at empowerment such as educational services (e.g. language classes and tutorials to assist students' learning) together with other types of activities, such as training courses for the unemployed and projects which aim at encouraging artistic expression are reported in Spain, Greece and Sweden. Another type of activities met in Spanish organizations concern initiatives to assist people who are not having the capacity to pay for basic utility services: water, electricity and gas. In Italy there are reported activities of housing occupation coordination and projects of building a mutual aid scheme based on members' contributions.

Political advocacy is expressed through different action types, apparently according to the degree of formalization of the organization as well as the degree in which a nation is exposed to economic and socio-political crisis.

Hence, in Sweden, AAOs representatives mainly refer to activities of communication with policy-makers and the organization of public campaigns, while in Greece advocacy involves more confrontational types of activity, including lobbying and protest participation. Watch-dog activities, political protest and participation in local consultations are reported in Polish interviews. Alternative economy associations and informal groups are developed under the criteria of democracy, equity, respect for the environment and collective rights. They include solidarity-based consumer groups and consumer associations, consumers-producers networks, work collectives and fair-trade enterprises (Italy, Greece and France), social economy initiatives to include vulnerable groups, such as disabled persons working as art merchants (Poland). Alternative economy ventures include initiatives elsewhere adopted by AAOs, such as alternative currencies, time banks and barter clubs.



Another category of activity includes the repertoire of action developed around a physical space: self-managed spaces in which different initiatives and projects take place are mentioned in Germany, France and in Italy; community centers and social clubs, providing co-working spaces or meeting places for the enhancement of cultural and symbolic capital are reported in Spain and Poland.

Bonding and collective identity building initiatives are also mentioned in Greek interviews. In parallel to their main activity, many AAOs undertake initiatives of collective empowerment aimed at awareness arousal, knowledge diffusion and encouragement of public participation.

These include public libraries, public lectures and the organization of artistic events, art exhibitions and cultural workshops.

AAOs and the crisis effect

The economic crisis has in general increased AAOs activity and disposition towards the development of innovative action, which is a reflection of the societal quest for alternative paths of citizens' resilience. The organizations which are mainly influenced by the crisis are those dealing with vulnerable groups and migrants and which aim at the satisfaction of basic needs (e.g. food, housing, health). In addition, solidarity organizations' scope broadened and the introduction of innovative action intensified, something that is most visible in countries harmfully hit by the crisis. Nevertheless, AAOs are also themselves affected by the crisis as a result of the imbalances between their resources and societal needs as well as due to the generalized climate of instability.

The crisis produced budgetary cuts and harsh austerity measures, unemployment and job insecurity, the increase of inequalities and a widespread loss of confidence together with distrust in institutions and the political system. Greek interviewees report that the crisis has limited the capacity of families

and individuals who until recently belonged to the middle classes to meet their needs, thus leading a large segment of the population to deprivation. Spanish interviews reveal that the crisis is most seriously affecting the youth, since the economic hardship in which families are going through, together with high unemployment rates and frustration, discourage them from continuing their studies. Hence, the crisis context created the conditions for the creation of alternative structures of support and prompted social economy flourish. New civil society and solidarity organizations emerged as a result. This is reflected on the national samples of the countries most seriously affected by the crisis (Greece, Italy and Spain) in which a considerable portion concerns organizations which created during and due to the crisis. The crisis is usually seen by AAOs' representatives as an opportunity for experimentation and broadening of their activity.



In Italy, it is noticed that social turbulence due to the crisis is providing opportunities to politicize its economic struggles and express them through radical initiatives. In countries less heavily affected by the economic crisis, there is still an increase of social demand for the supportive action of solidarity groups and alternative economy, due to unemployment and social anxiety. In Germany, the crisis is motivating society towards a value shift but also encourages

solidarity towards those – individuals, groups as well as whole nations- who are most seriously affected by it.

Refugee crisis is usually mentioned by German and Swedish AAO representatives as being related to the economic crisis and as being relevant to the intensification of AAOs' activity. In Sweden, an indirect effect of the economic crisis is that groups of beneficiaries have changed as a result of immigration, with immigrant populations becoming increasingly the main beneficiaries of AAOs. The reverse is observed in Italy and Greece, where the financial crisis urges interest and participation of the native population in supporting structures and programs which were used by immigrants only before the crisis.

Moreover, the crisis context negatively influences the operation of AAOs, since their funds are reduced and participation is becoming unstable, while demand increases. In France, associations that are mainly political, and which also receive extensive state funding, have suffered the most in the crisis. In Spain, the fall in funding together with increased complexity of the bureaucracy has resulted in drastic reductions on AAOs personnel. Volunteering is also attenuated and commitment on participation is reduced, which is mentioned both in Greek and Spanish interviews. In Poland, a country which is not harmed by the recent economic crisis, AAOs view state and EU funding becoming less accessible and their networks with other European countries languish. In the UK, on the other side, there is reported a desire to

move beyond the austerity idea of plugging a sort of gap in the welfare state towards a far more, positive and empowering notion of

people gaining skills, social connections and advice in a community setting. **Learn more about our experiments and**

research on AAOs here:
<http://www.livewhat.unige.ch/?p=452>

Announcements and upcoming events

LIVEWHAT Wikisite on Alternative Forms of Resilience is Out!

A wikisite was set up on the project website, which contains links to particular wiki pages of hubs and sub-hubs of AAOs in each of the nine countries studied in the project.

The wikisite can be accessed at:
http://www.livewhat.unige.ch/?inc_sub_wiki=livewhat-hubs

New LIVEWHAT Handbook of Good Practices!



The Handbook of Good Practices is the outcome of a three-year long cross-national research conducted within the framework of LIVEWHAT. It provides an in-depth presentation of key policy results and policy-pointers with the aim of helping EU and national/local policy-makers and civil society actors in Europe to identify a more comprehensive and concerted problem-solving approach to tackling the negative effects of the recent crisis.

The purpose of the policy pointers is to increase awareness about how the recent crisis could be a unique opportunity to shift toward a Better Europe, improving well-being for all.

Check out the Handbook of Good Practices here:

<http://www.livewhat.unige.ch/?p=457>

LIVEWHAT final conference

The LIVEWHAT project comes to a close after three years and to mark this we organized a Final Conference in Brussels on the 24th November, 2016. This public event will bring together members of the LIVEWHAT Consortium, external scholars policy-makers, and civil society actors with the aim to present and discuss the main project findings and offer both a scholarly and policy-oriented perspective on how citizens react to economic crises fueling public debate.

The conference will start with opening statement by the project Coordinator, Marco Giugni (University of Geneva), who will highlight the achievements of the project and strength of the partnership established among nine academic partners involved in the implementation of the project. This will be followed by a presentation of project research and policy results by LIVEWHAT researchers: Katrin Uba (University of Uppsala), Maria Grasso (University of Sheffield), Eva Anduiza (Autonomous

University of Barcelona), Maria Kousis (University of Crete), and Maria Mexi (University of Geneva). Subsequently, two panel sessions will be formed to discuss the research conducted within the framework of the project with reference to two themes: "Economic Crisis and the Rise of Populisms" and "Social Policies in Times of Crisis – Who Carries Burdens, Who Gets Protection?"



The first panel will examine the complex interactions between economic crisis and the rise of populism in Europe today. Economic turmoil has often been connected with the rise of populist political movements and parties. Unemployment and other personal and social consequences of economic crises have been found to favor vote for extreme-right parties and participation in populist movements. However, this is not a universal implication of economic downturns: even within the current European crisis we find a great deal of variation in terms of the rise of such parties and movements, across and within countries. In this context, the panel will seek to answer under

what conditions do economic crises breed populism. The second panel will discuss the implications of the recent economic crisis for social policy and vulnerable groups who are major recipients of social programmes. The distribution of the 'pain' now associated with the crisis is differentiated among countries, reflecting existing political and economic conditions and welfare state types.

Drawing on the experiences of Greece, Poland and France, the panel will bring to light the breadth and impact of the economic crisis on social policy in national contexts, while outlining the ways in which the crisis has motivated change in modes of social support (such as the rise of Solidarity Economy actions in Greece), and what patterns of national response are emerging. Panelists will address how contemporary social policy development has a greater sense of urgency than in times of economic stability but at the same time, as history tells us, policy is rarely more than incremental and while emergency economic measures can be introduced with some speed, the same cannot be said of welfare reform.

Hence, while it is possible to present analysis of the initial impact of a redistribution of public funds and its likely consequences for social policy, discussion of the long-term developments will always be more speculative. To what extent can and will essential change take place and to what extent does this reflect new social politics that put vulnerable groups at the centre of policy targeting? This will be a central question to be addressed.



Moreover, during the conference, the LIVEWHAT documentary film "Citizens and the Crisis" will be bscreened, and project publications were on display. Drawing on the LIVEWHAT findings, the documentary film showcases the social and political consequences of the 2008 economic crisis and the responses of citizens in each of the nine countries studied by the LIVEWHAT project: France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK.

Contact Us

LIVEWHAT Consortium includes nine European Universities across Europe. Project Coordinator is the University of Geneva (Switzerland).

The Consortium Partners are:

- European University (Italy);
- Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques (France);
- University of Crete (Greece);
- Autonomous University of Barcelona (Spain);
- University of Sheffield (United Kingdom);
- University of Siegen (Germany);
- University of Warsaw (Poland);
- Uppsala University (Sweden).

For questions about the project, you may contact the Project Coordinator, **Professor Marco Giugni**, Director

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