# Cosmopolitan Solidarity: A sociological perspective on values of the European Union

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**Abstract**

This paper explores the crucial connection between values, especially solidarity, and the integration processes at both intergovernmental (systemic) and societal levels within the European Union. It argues that the EU has predominantly focused on intergovernmental solidarity, often neglecting social solidarity, which became particularly apparent during the post-2008 polycrises and the increased refugee influx. The lack of intergovernmental solidarity is highlighted by the inability of member states to agree on burden-sharing and coordinated asylum policies, revealing a prioritization of national interests.

To address the issue of social solidarity, the paper introduces the concept of 'cosmopolitanism from below', as defined by Arjun Appadurai, focused on the ability to aspire, which is widespread throughout society, emphasizing concrete practices and local initiatives in operationalizing solidarity at the societal level. The *Riace model* in Calabria, Italy, is presented as a practical example of 'cosmopolitanism from below', demonstrating how welcoming migrants and promoting intercultural exchange - often conflicting with national and EU government policy - can lead to social cohesion and redefine the sense of belonging through shared values and experiences of marginality.

The paper critiques the epistemological and methodological limitations of mainstream European studies on values, which often adopt a Eurocentric perspective and a static view of society, neglecting the dynamics of transnationality and cultural hybridization.[1] In conclusion, the paper suggests the need for a new institutional framework within the EU that promotes social dialogue, cultural bridge-building, and greater involvement of local and regional authorities and civil society in implementing European values and managing migration. The *Riace model* is proposed as a potential pilot project within the framework of the European Pact on Migration and Asylum, underlining the importance of bottom-up approaches in strengthening European cohesion and reconnecting social integration with systemic integration. The paper emphasizes that adopting strategies based on 'cosmopolitanism from below' necessitates a cultural shift within the epistemic community studying European values, moving away from trajectory-based and Eurocentric visions.

**Key words:** EU Values, Social integration, Solidarity, Migration, Cosmopolitanism

# 1. Introduction

The analysis of the complex relationship between values and integration in the European Union can be worthwhile in terms of their interplay at both the systemic (intergovernmental) and societal levels. The paper posits that values serve as a crucial link between these two dimensions of integration, and in particular solidarity emerges as a key value for analyzing this relationship. However, as highlighted in the first part of this paper, there is a noticeable emphasis on intergovernmental solidarity within the EU, often overshadowing the significance of social solidarity, particularly evident in the Union's responses to the post-2008 polycrises and the increased influx of refugees. The prioritization of national interests and the lack of solidarity have manifested in the difficulty of establishing effective burden-sharing mechanisms and coordinated asylum policies. However, what happens at the intergovernmental level does not correspond to the social practices that are widespread in many local contexts, which have responded to these challenges by proposing solutions to problems through new forms of solidarity. The importance of creating inter-institutional and transnational networks for the full implementation of local practices is also emphasized. The ability to aspire, and therefore to act with an eye to the future, is widespread at the societal level and drives the implementation of EU values. This vision seems to be lacking in the political classes of European governments.

To explore and operationalize solidarity at the societal level, the analysis develops by introducing Arjun Appadurai's concept of 'cosmopolitanism from below', which focuses on concrete practices and local initiatives.[2] The *Riace model* in Calabria, Italy, is presented as a compelling case study, illustrating how welcoming migrants and promoting intercultural exchange can cultivate social cohesion that embraces diversity and reshapes understandings of belonging through shared values and experiences of marginality.

Based on the findings of the analysis of the *Riace model*, the paper then critically examines the epistemological and methodological limitations of mainstream European studies on values, arguing that these are often based on a 'trajectorism' and methodological nationalism, abstracted from concrete contexts, in which values are continuously reformulated and negotiated. In contrast, 'cosmopolitanism from below' underscores the dynamic negotiation of identity and the vital role of local and transnational networks in building solidarity and putting the values the EU has adopted into practice,

Ultimately, the paper concludes by advocating for a new institutional framework that fosters social dialogue, cultural bridge-building, and greater involvement of sub-national authorities and civil society in the implementation of European values and the management of migration. It suggests transforming consultation strategies into a clear allocation of responsibilities to these actors to promote inclusion and give practical effect to European values,

with the *Riace model* proposed as a potential pilot project within the framework of the European Pact on Migration and Asylum, highlighting the importance of bottom-up approaches in strengthening at the same time EU systemic and social cohesion.

## 2. The interdependence of integration at systemic and societal level: solidarity as a key value.

The assumption underlying the analysis that is developed in this contribution is that there is an interdependence of integration at the systemic and societal levels and solidarity is a key value for the European Union.

Values play a role in connecting systemic integration and social integration.[3] As early as the 1990s, Ralf Dahrendorf (1994) observed that a possible disintegration of the EU would not begin at the level of nation-states but would rather find its roots in social phenomena such as growing inequalities, weakening social bonds, and increasing anomie—trends exacerbated by neo-liberal regulatory frameworks, which the EU itself has promoted by prioritizing the market over social, civil, and human rights.[4] The events of the following decades have confirmed this trajectory. Society has emerged as a structuring factor that can either enable or constrain European integration processes and influence international relations.[5]

By putting the focus on integration processes, from a sociological point of view, it particularly calls into question the value of solidarity. As a sociological concept, solidarity is not an isolated, one-off interaction, but is part of a fabric of social and political institutions. The nature of solidarity could be described as the glue between the bricks that make up the architecture of our political and social institutions.[6]

Referring to the European Union, more attention has been paid to inter-state solidarity, thus marginalizing social solidarity, a less discussed and researched topic. In the context of the polycrises that have hit Europe, particularly after 2008, with the economic and financial crisis that affected several European countries,[7] the lack of solidarity within the EU was manifested by the inability of European institutions and member states to agree on burden-sharing mechanisms.

Although the European Union has developed a number of policy measures (e.g. the European Financial Stability Facility, the European Stability Mechanism and the Stability and Growth Pact), these have paved the way for a series of economic and financial policies that have exacerbated the internal division between debtor and creditor states, shifting responsibilities and financial risks to the nation-states and signaling an absence of solidarity. Interstate solidarity in the EU is focused more on "competitive solidarity" [8] than on a balanced protection of fundamental rights.[9]

This is clear in what happened in response to the increased influx of refugees from Syria and other war-torn regions and the inability of EU institutions and member states to agree on a coordinated asylum policy, quotas, and admission and integration mechanisms. Consensus was reached only on the external dimension (for example, border controls and the fight against human trafficking), leaving the question of internal coordination unresolved. The polycrisis also fuels the social basis of solidarity at the level of European citizenship, fostering resentments that have contributed to the rise of populist parties, the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union, and the mobilization of Eurosceptic and xenophobic protests throughout Europe (e.g., Kriesi and Pappas, 2015).[10]

The lack of intergovernmental solidarity was also evident in the reluctance to help the countries most affected by the health crisis caused by the COVID-19 virus - even though solidarity is a guiding principle enshrined in the EU Treaties[11] , revealing a prioritization of national interests. In the case of a pandemic, it is well known that public health remains essentially a national prerogative, as the Union's founding treaties confer on it a subsidiary competence in this area. As stated in Article 6 of the TFEU, the Union can only "support, coordinate or supplement the actions of the Member States," in areas such as "improving human health" and "civil protection". The financial instruments included in the package of proposals entitled Next Generation EU[12] , which includes the Next Generation EU (NGEU) and the Recovery and Resilience Facility, are positive signs of the European Commission's responsiveness, but do not seem to have introduced a different logic to the regulation of intergovernmental solidarity.[13]

It also highlights a more fundamental difficulty in agreeing on adequate and coordinated public policies. However, it is above all in the field of the reception of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers that the lack of inter-state solidarity is intertwined with a rhetoric shared by the governments of the member states, which frames the problem of migration in terms of security rather than addressing it in terms of human rights. The issue of refugees and asylum seekers demonstrates the aforementioned value deficit, affecting the entire European Union. For years, solidarity between European neighbors and Southern countries in addressing the migration phenomenon was not truly implemented. The entire Dublin Treaty has been described as an institutionalization of non-solidarity.[14] Recent attempts to reach an agreement on this issue have made no progress. The ups and downs of the European Pact on Migration and Asylum – proposed by the European Commission and approved by the European Parliament in April 2024- also illustrate the difficulty of finding a common ground for rights-based solidarity. Conceived as "a set of new rules to manage migration and establish a common asylum system at EU level", the Pact aims to "deliver results while remaining grounded in our European values".[15]

What seems really interesting in the context of thinking about the link between the value of solidarity at the systemic level and at the societal level is that the Pact "encourages Member States to interact with social partners, local and regional authorities, and other stakeholders, in particular representatives of civil society organizations, through regular exchanges and consultations. Such interaction helps to identify challenges, improve policy solutions and ensure broader ownership during the preparation of national implementation plans and subsequently during their implementation, phases in which these actors often play critical roles".  This is at least formal recognition of the grassroots action carried out by numerous networks of local municipalities, known as sanctuary cities, civil society associations and organizations, and political forces at the European parliamentary level. In practical terms, however, it faces resistance from national governments, which are reluctant to implement practices that involve these multiple actors.

 Despite repeated formal requests, such involvement has not taken place everywhere, definitely not in Italy, even though the Commission is due to adopt the first European Asylum Migration Strategy 2026-2030 in 2025 and the Council on the Solidarity Pool with the first financial and operational solidarity cycle.   In Italy "the Italian government applies three immigration policies: harsh closure, at least announced, against asylum seekers coming from the global South; liberal reception of Ukrainian refugees (170,000 in 2022, about 40% of the refugee population); and new openings towards workers".[16] Law No. 50/2023 on migratory flows and the recent "Albania model" are emblematic examples of the lack of involvement of civil society actors and local municipalities. The assumption is that externalizing borders is the most effective way to stem illegal immigration; the aim is to handle asylum applications from migrants coming from so-called safe countries elsewhere through an accelerated procedure. So far, the transfers of asylum-seekers to Albania have not been validated by the competent national courts, as the countries of origin are not considered safe. As a result, the return to Italy has been ordered in order to carry out the procedures foreseen in such cases. The European Court of Justice has also been asked to rule on the matter at the European level and has yet to issue a decision.

Continuous violations of EU values are perpetrated by individual member states, one example being the policy of rejection and the prohibition of rescue at sea, which has caused thousands of deaths in the Mediterranean. In this regard, the policies of both member state governments and those adopted at the EU level, based on a lack of solidarity between Member States, do not align with the dynamics of solidarity at the societal level, which are widespread at local, transnational, and supranational levels in European societies.

## 3. The value of solidarity in practice: the *Riace model*.

To imagine a connection between the value of solidarity as an EU value and its implementation, we need to look at social practices that incorporate this value and apply it in everyday life. Only then can we understand how to bridge the gap between the normative dimension at higher levels (the EU but also the Member States) and those at the local level.

The concept of solidarity in the sociological sense cannot be reduced to motivations dictated solely by interests, legal or political obligations, or ethical considerations. Solidarity is interpersonal, relational, and has a collective dimension, presupposing common norms, expectations, and practices.

In the thematization of social solidarity at the macro level, referred to European societies, it is often traced back to the welfare state — a distinctive feature of the so-called "European social model" — which ties social solidarity to its past institutionalized form, based on the rights and obligations of citizens, and to motivations linked to rational action, as seen in the insurance reasoning behind the welfare state.

To operationalize solidarity at the societal level, the concept of cosmopolitanism from below, developed by Arjun Appadurai, offers a critical yet constructive perspective on the European concept of cosmopolitanism. Although he rejects its Enlightenment roots for promoting trajectories and pursuits of uniformity that often disregard diversity, he also acknowledges its valuable contributions in fostering what he calls the capacity to aspire. This perspective offers an alternative to the Eurocentric concept of cosmopolis and provides a framework for analyzing how and where the value of solidarity finds application. Cosmopolitanism from below is grounded in concrete practice rather than abstract universalism, and it is open to evolution and reinterpretation.

Cosmopolitanism is associated with post-national sensibilities, openness to multicultural values, a global ethos and hybrid identities. It shares with the Enlightenment the idea of an expanded humanity, independent of ethnicity and nation. It is a cosmopolitanism that develops in local practices, in daily life, in friendly and family relationships, and in neighborhood relations. It tends to build global solidarity and affinity through experiences both near and far. It tends to broaden local cultural horizons, starting from exclusion rather than from inclusion in a space of privilege. The strategy of global alliances characterizes this dynamic of sharing, learning and knowledge to achieve common goals. These networks spread the values of democracy and the dignity of human rights. Transnational politics connects local, national, regional and global exchanges through creative negotiation. It inspires microcosmopolitical and transnational practices of cultural bridge-building.[17]

Cosmopolitanism does not refer only to cultural identity; it is also sustained by the economics of resources, rights and recognition. Access to education, professional growth, and the development of one's abilities are integral parts of it. It represents the effort to imagine one's existence in a multicultural and multilingual context. The negotiation between different subjects involves language, values, religion, and status; it requires horizontal solidarity between different actors and in confrontation with political institutions. Of course, this is not the result of an idealized and peaceful context: potential conflicts between the parties involved are numerous and arise constantly. Appadurai highlights that the norms that regulate conflicts and bring about change without violence can be conceived socially and applied in practice through a bottom-up process, even when political institutions are unable to do so.

Although Appadurai constructed the concept of cosmopolitanism from below, starting from ethnographic research on the alliance in favor of the poor by housing activists in Mumbai, it allows us to analyze other phenomena of bottom-up construction of solidarity between different and unrelated people in very diverse contexts.

The case of cosmopolitan solidarity concerning refugees and asylum seekers can be illustrated through the so-called *Riace model*, made in Italy despite what was said earlier about the reluctance of Italian national governments to adopt inclusive policies towards refugees and asylum seekers from the Global South .[18] It can be seen as a kind of Weberian ideal type, and it is useful to analyze it through the conceptual categories proposed by Arjun Appadurai in order to highlight the social construction of solidarity as a value in practice.

Riace is a small town in Locride, a region of Calabria in the province of Reggio Calabria. The town is divided into two settlements, located seven kilometers apart: the historic center, situated in the mountains, and the more recent settlement, Riace Marina, on the coast. As of January 1, 2025, the population of Riace was 1777 inhabitants, almost equally distributed between the two areas.[19]

Like much of Calabria, Riace has been severely affected by depopulation, driven by massive emigration that unfolded in two main phases. The first wave, occurring after World War II, saw residents primarily emigrating abroad to the United States, Latin America, Australia, and Canada. The second wave, in the 1980s, was characterized by migration toward northern Italy and Northern Europe.[20]

Against this backdrop, the inhabitants of Riace developed an identity rooted in openness to multicultural values, transforming their community from an isolated town into a European symbol of integration.

In the 1990s, when Calabria became a landing point for migrants arriving by sea, Riace welcomed its first group of boat people, consisting of Kurdish refugees and asylum seekers. In response, the local population, in collaboration with the church, spontaneously mobilized to

support the newly arrived asylum seekers. Among those involved was Domenico Lucano, who would later become Mayor of Riace for the first time in 2004. Along with a group of friends, Lucano drew inspiration from a reception project previously developed in the nearby town of Badolato. This led, in 1999, to the founding of the association *Città Futura*, which established an innovative reception model.

The *Riace model*, as it came to be known, later influenced Italy's asylum reception system (which remained in place until 2018) and inspired Calabria's Regional Law 18/2009, a policy framework designed to support migrant integration. Asylum seekers and refugees were trained in professional skills related to traditional crafts and trades that had disappeared from the town due to depopulation. Workshops were set up in weaving, ceramics, sewing, woodworking, glassmaking, and embroidery. In these workshops, each team always included both a refugee and a resident, with the majority of participants being women. Through these activities, workers were able to earn money through public funding and the sale of products, although the revenue was modest, as the goods were mainly sold to tourists. The reversal of depopulation also helped prevent the closure of several public services, such as kindergartens, post offices, and bus stops, contributing to the overall well-being of the community. Finally, the establishment of reception systems attracted highly skilled Italians to return to their native region or relocate to Riace.

The *Riace model* gained international recognition, earning Mayor Domenico Lucano a place on Fortune magazine's 2016 list of the world's most influential people and bringing global attention to Riace. The project appeared to promote social cohesion, allowing migrants and Italians to discover a shared sense of being outsiders, as both groups face exclusion in the context of the globalized economy. However, the Italian government has contested certain aspects of the model, in particular the use of alternative currencies and the prolonged stay of refugees beyond the expected duration. In October 2018, the Riace project was suspended. Following inspections by the Prefecture, the mayor of Riace, Domenico Lucano, was accused of facilitating illegal immigration and fraud in the management of waste collection services, leading to a ban on his residence in Riace. The hospitality system in Riace was closed due to irregularities. As a result, in October 2018, all migrants from the hospitality system in Riace were transferred to other facilities across Italy under the direction of the Ministry of the Interior.[21] The legal battle surrounding Riace and its mayor also sparked the creation of a national and international network of academic, artistic and political figures, such as Ada Colau, the mayor of Barcelona, who expressed solidarity and support for the *Riace model*. The trial of Mayor Lucano ended in April 2024 with his complete acquittal. Since then, Lucano has been elected to the European Parliament and re-elected as Mayor of Riace.

The case of Riace can be described in terms of an ideal type of cosmopolitanism from below: First of all, the creative negotiation of identity and openness to multicultural values based

on the capacity to aspire of both natives and migrants. In a context marked by depopulation, economic marginalization and the need to survive, social imagination becomes a crucial tool for constructing a new collective identity looking at the future. The community of Riace is not the result of a fixed and unchangeable identity, but of a continuous negotiation between different cultures, values, experiences, interests and languages, based on the openness of Riace to multicultural values. The search for new solutions to ensure the survival of the town has played a key role in reinforcing this openness and expanding cultural boundaries. The interaction between locals and migrants has not followed a simple process of assimilation but has evolved through a continuous re-elaboration of shared meanings and social practices, through coexistence and the sharing of spaces, experiences and narratives. In this process, the inhabitants of Riace, despite their different histories and backgrounds, have found common ground in shared values - peace, respect and solidarity - which serve as the basis for redefining their sense of belonging.[22]

These values, internalized to the point of constituting a habitus,[23] not only regulate everyday interactions but also help to legitimize migrants as an integral part of the community. The narrative of a shared migratory experience also plays a role in this process. Many residents perceive this parallel as a form of a common past - one that they have not lived through together, but which is nevertheless capable of shaping a shared historical consciousness. The social imaginary of Riace is thus constructed through the attribution of shared meanings to actions and behaviors that become points of reference for the collective, generating mutual expectations of belonging and cooperation. This personal history of displacement, and the emotions it evokes, is recognized as a common thread between locals and refugees. The ability to relate to feelings of loss, adaptation and rebuilding a life elsewhere fosters an empathetic understanding that transcends cultural and national differences. Rather than positioning themselves as completely separate groups, both locals and refugees negotiate their identities through this shared experience of mobility, transforming migration from a divisive factor into a bridge of mutual recognition and belonging.[24] The shared condition of social marginality between Riace residents and refugees has fostered the emergence of a form of horizontal solidarity based on shared experiences of economic hardship, isolation and precarity.

The capacity to aspire in Riace, before the closure of the reception project, was strongly present in both the local population and the refugees.[25] The project fostered an environment in which aspirations could grow, not only for the present but also for future generations.

In addition, the local network gave rise to a larger network that united many communities, first in the region, then at a transregional and European level. The involvement of Italian and foreign artists, intellectuals, journalists and politicians helped to strengthen the imagined community[26] of the Riace community in a cosmopolitan sense. One of the most striking documents of this experience is the short film entitled Il Volo, directed by the German

filmmaker Wim Wenders (2010). However, this generative experience has not found the national political-institutional ground to consolidate and has been hampered by increasingly restrictive laws and policies towards migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

Recently a signature collection was launched to submit a petition addressed to the European Parliament on the subject: "To promote in the implementation of the European Migration and Asylum Pact the 'Riace' model for the reception and inclusion of migrants. [27] The petition emphasized that "the Riace experience, born spontaneously at the end of the last century and affirmed through solidarity participation that has crossed national borders, has become (…) a global reference model of 'gentle' reception, i.e. based on inclusion without fractures between its inhabitants and immigrants, between the needs of the former and the latter, between the identities and values of the natives and the identities and values of the newcomers." The *Riace model* is proposed as a policy for the reception and inclusion of people migrating to European territory, in particular asylum seekers and refugees, in accordance with the provisions of Article 18 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Article 78 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. It also pleads to promote a balance of effort between Member States on the basis of Directive 2001/55/EC.[28] Among the requests made by the promoters to the European Parliament is that to…

> draw up a 'pilot project' to be included in an amending and corrective budget for the financial year 2025 involving local authorities and based on the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (FAMI) 2021-2027 as an instrument for building the Europe of bridges and breaking down the Europe of walls with a view to its renewal and reinforcement in the Multiannual Financial Framework 2028-2032.[29]

## 4. European Values in EU studies: epistemological and methodological limitations.

The analysis of the case study, using the categories of cosmopolitanism from below coined by Arjun Appadurai, suggests that there are epistemological and methodological limitations in the approach to values as reflected in EU policies.

Some suggestions come from the critiques of cultural and postcolonial studies, which allow Europeanisation to be understood as a multidirectional process .[30] From a postcolonial perspective, Arjun Appadurai  warns against falling into the trap of 'trajectorism' - an epistemological and ontological orientation that assumes linear time, a predetermined telos, a quest for uniformity that often ignores diversity, and frames patterns of change within this perspective.[31]

As Hans-Jörg Trenz has convincingly argued, this perspective entails a redefinition of the notion of Europeanization as a process that shapes the social imaginary, evolving around dynamics of unity and diversity, integration and differentiation, while also producing a countermovement of society in Polanyi's sense, capable of counteracting systemic-level trends. Trenz highlights the strong link between forms of the social imaginary and the identities of social actors engaged in Europeanization narratives.[32] These narratives compete with other local, national, and global narratives, interpreting the past and proposing different balances between unity and diversity, social openness and closure, across cultural, social, and political dimensions, thereby shaping future trajectories. The contestation of these narratives presents different ways of asserting social ties at local, national, or transnational levels. This process is distinctly European, as it unfolds within a unique context of institutionalized transnationalism—one that is inherent to, yet not confined by, the institutional order, as it is also socially constructed.

In order to analyze the question of values, it is useful to move away from both methodological nationalism — quoting Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grande — and what we might call methodological Europeanism, which are still present in the most influential epistemic communities, somewhat organically tied to the EU.[33] The mainstream tools used to grasp European values are based on the idea of a passive inheritance of common values or on purely instrumental purposes. As a result, society is seen only from a perspective of adaptation rather than change, following a one-sided trajectory that links the past and future according to an evolutionary perspective, moving from traditional to modern or post-modern values. The methodology adopted is primarily a comparative analysis between European societies, understood as delimited by national boundaries, with only slight differentiation within them. An example is the Cultural Map of Europe "The vertical dimension (y-axis) of the map reflects how traditional or modern a country is. A negative score on this dimension means that people emphasize traditional values. A positive score reflects values held by modern people in secular countries".  The second, horizontal dimension (x-axis) of the values map "reflects the level of post-modernization in a society. People in countries that score low on this dimension emphasize survival values over self-expression".[34]
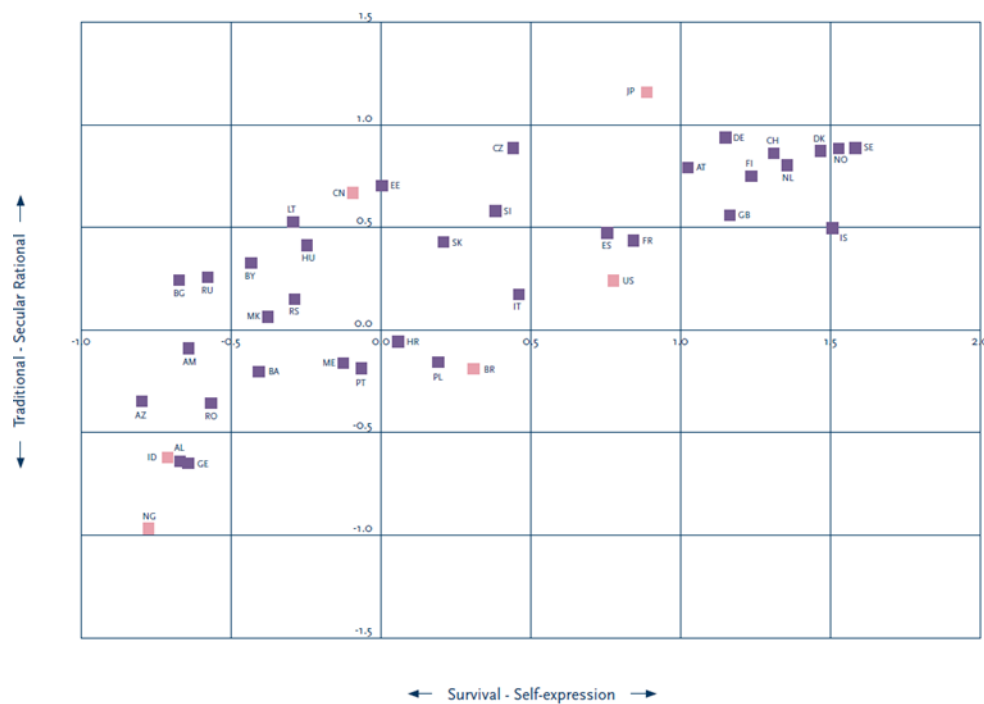
*Europe's*

*Cultural Map (Source: Halman; Reeskens, Sieben and van Zundert 2022, 36).*

Traditional values are referred to "the 'nuclear family' (father, mother, children), religion, and patriotism and show and demand respect for authority". Modern values are "non-religious, law- and ration-based values held by modern people in secular countries. They emphasize individual freedom and personal life choices. Typical disagreements between traditional and modern societies concern issues such as abortion, divorce or national culture".[35] Post-modern values reflect an even more pronounced deterministic approach: They are identified as "self-expression and individual well-being. People embrace equal rights for women and gay marriage and put less focus on material possessions. Post-modernization, as the term implies, follows modernization. Security in life thanks to high economic development stimulates a focus on individual expression and well-being". The opposite are the so-called survival values: "hard work and economic and physical. security. These societies are generally characterized by low levels of trust, intolerance towards out-groups and low support for gender equality".[36]

This map is constructed based on an abstract conceptualization of European values, without framing them in the dynamics of transnationality and cultural hybridization within the context of European and global interdependencies.[37] The rigid distinction between the dimensions of traditional and modern values endorses an essentialist view, which transcends even the historical contextualization of the cultural diversity that characterizes European society.

For example, an ever-changing combination of the values we find contrasted here as premodern and postmodern manifests itself in the contemporary world in different contexts and situations, with no sequentiality between them.[38]

The analysis at the macro level fails to capture the articulation of values at different levels, let alone the social actors who carry them. It is an approach that reinforces Eurocentrism and a narrative that excludes challenges posed by multiple identities and social forces acting at various levels of scale, both for cultural and institutional change.

This approach also endorses a conception of Europe as a closed society and a fortress. This view is blind to the profound transformations of our societies over the past thirty years, which have affected the social imaginary, also producing a countermovement within European society (Trenz 2016).[39] A paradigm shift is required if we want to grasp empirically the new constellations of values that characterize European society.

## 5. How can solidarity from below be assessed at EU level?

In order to draw some conclusions from this analysis, it is worth pausing for a moment to reflect on how to redefine political responsibilities within the EU, ensuring the effective implementation of European values in practice. The objective of maintaining both systemic and social integration is essential, with values serving as a driving force in this process. This implies institutions at different levels (from local to supranational) that promote social dialogue, cultural bridge-building, and ongoing negotiation, both in internal and international relations. A new institutional framework should be designed to achieve this policy goal, which, in turn, requires new social contracts at the political level. The discourse on solidarity within European societies is still based on the belief that constellations of identities and interests are grounded in a passive inheritance of common values or purely instrumental purposes. As a result, social solidarity is seen only from a perspective of adaptation, not change, following a one-sided trajectory that links past and future. If social solidarity is interpreted with reference to social ties rooted in inherited elements, the new, culturally defined conflicts — characterized by a plurality of values — tend to be seen as "unbridgeable," i.e., irreducible, precisely because a concept so defined is static.[40] This has negative implications for European integration: diversity and the pluralization of identities are viewed as insurmountable obstacles. But in empirical reality, there are also open forms of solidarity. Numerous studies conducted during and after multiple crises have revealed horizontal forms of solidarity at local, national, and transnational levels, characterized as outward and forward-looking, capable of recognizing otherness and engaging in dialogue with differences.

In the last decades, particularly in response to the economic-financial crisis, the Greek EMU solvency crisis, as well as issues related to migration and refugees, and the COVID-19 pandemic, individual and collective actors within the European social space have expressed new forms of social solidarity.[41] For example, there is a strong interdependence between the forms of interpersonal solidarity that have developed during the migration and pandemic crisis, and the institutionalized solidarities at the different levels in which the social system is articulated. In all this research, solidarity refers to people supporting each other, or otherwise acting with and for others, across social and economic differences. These are people whose acting in solidarity rests on a shared goal, a common characteristic or a common threat, which does not end in isolated interaction, but is part of a social and institutional fabric.

Some scholars propose, alternatively, that further European integration will take place through integrated yet diverse and decentralized networks of transnational, local, and regional governments, in partnership with civil society and social institutions.[42] The role of municipalities and local governments in mobilizing social agency is crucial for governing complex social processes that transcend national boundaries and are instead transnational and global in nature. Empirically, these processes are associated with grassroots cosmopolitan solidarity, in which the 'capacity to aspire' of individual and collective subjects acting at grassroots level includes a vision of the future that national governments often fail to demonstrate.

According to Zielonka, polyarchy describes these new arrangements, redefining the geographies of responsibilities and competencies among political, legal, and social institutions.[43] Clearly, this necessitates a transnational politics and policy framework capable of mobilizing the social resources required to address issues that individual states cannot resolve. It calls for transnational parties to ensure parliamentary representation beyond nation-states, bottom-up policy-making processes, and direct access to European resources for institutions operating at different levels of governance. National legislation should facilitate rather than obstruct these processes, while European regulations should be strengthened to support them.

Multiple crises at the international level appear to be further fueling the rise of anti-European sentiments, along with the resurgence of nationalism and xenophobia, reinforcing a rhetoric of fear. Conflicts are emerging not only at the inter-state level, with the revival of nationalist ideologies, but also within societies, where populist, xenophobic, and anti-European forces are capitalizing on these tensions to their advantage. At the same time, social practices and the social imaginary are evolving, and there is a growing recognition that no single public actor can effectively address internal challenges without engaging beyond national borders and cooperating with institutions at supranational, international, and global levels.

The solution is not, as Wolfgang Streeck suggests, to reallocate all competencies back to nation-states.[44] State boundaries do not correspond to the geography of contemporary problems

and challenges, particularly when it comes to the realization of EU values. These values remain largely unfulfilled, failing to address the evident lack of solidarity within the EU and the erosion of its internal cohesion, which is exacerbated by the creation of new internal borders. The social potential that cosmopolitan practices from below include and could strengthen the European Union, remains largely untapped. In the context of policies for the reception of refugees and asylum seekers, the opportunity could be the reorganization of the structural features of the Migration and Asylum Pact, which should be operational by June 2026. Actually, to this end, the European Commission has adopted a 'Joint Implementation Plan' which includes obligations for national authorities to involve regional and local authorities and civil society.[45] Indeed, the Plan encourages Member States to interact with social partners, local and regional authorities, and other stakeholders, in particular representatives of civil society organizations through regular exchanges and consultations. Such procedures involving social actors aim to deal with challenges, improve policy solutions during the preparation of national implementation plans and during their implementation. Based on the *Riace model*, this consultation strategy should be transformed into a clear allocation of responsibility and policy formulation to sub-national, regional and local actors, leaving room for the implementation of social practices in which stakeholders can express themselves and experiment with new forms of social inclusion. This could give grassroots actors a decision-making role that reconciles the need to regulate the migration phenomenon at EU and Member State level with the need to include and integrate migrants by giving effect to EU values. However, the adoption of new strategies based on cosmopolitanism from below also implies a cultural change within the epistemic community way of thinking about European values. As we have seen, the persistence of a trajectory-based and Eurocentric vision does not help to overcome the impasse in which we find ourselves today.

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# Notes

[1] By Eurocentric, I refer to a worldview that sees Europe, or the West, as the main protagonist and center of history and civilization, with universalist pretensions, but in fact from a unilateral perspective. It is a way of seeing values as uniform across Europe, which prevents the differences that arise from the diversity of cultures from being valued.

[2] Appadurai, Arjun, *The Future as a Cultural Fact*.

[3] Lockwood, David, "Social Integration and System Integration."

[4] Dahrendorf, Ralf, *Perché l'Europa?*

[5] Trenz, Hans-Jörg, *Narrating European Societies.*

[6] Habermas, Jürgen, *Im Sog der Technokratie.*

[7] Grasso, Maria, Lahusen, Christian, "Solidarity in Europe."

[8] Streeck, Wolfgang, Competitive solidarity.

[9] Sangiovanni, Andrea, "Solidarity in the European Union."

[10] Kriesi, Hanspeter and Pappas, Takis S. ed., *European Populism in the Shadow of the Great Recession*.

[11] Solidarity Clause, Art. 222, Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

[12] European Commission, Europe's moment: repair and prepare for the next generation.

[13] Pendenza, Massimo, "La solidarietà europea allo specchio della crisi pandemica. Ultima chance per l'Europa?"

[14] Schwan, Gesine, "Le condizioni istituzionali per un Rinascimento europeo"

[15] European Commission, *Pact on Migration and Asylum.*

[16] Ambrosini, Maurizio, "Il decreto Cutro e le tre politiche dell'immigrazione in Italia," 507.

[17] Appadurai, *Il Futuro come fatto culturale..*

[18] Versace, Alessandro, "Le nuove frontiere nell'educazione interculturale."

[19] ISTAT Popolazione residente per sesso.

[20] Carchedi F. and Vitiello M. *L'emigrazione dalla Calabria.*

[21] Betti, Elisa, *"Stinnimu i manu."*

[22] Ibid.

[23] Bourdieu, Pierre, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique.*

[24] Betti, Elisa, *"Stinnimu i manu".*

[25] Ibid.

[26] Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities*.

[27] Movimento Europeo Italia, Petition to the European Parliament.

[28] Council of the European Union, Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001.

[29] Movimento Europeo Italia, Petition to the European Parliament.

[30] Chakrabarti, Dipesh, *Provincializing Europe*

[31] Appadurai, *Il Futuro come fatto culturale, 223.*

[32] Trenz, Hans-Jörg, *Narrating European Societies.*

[33] Beck, Ulrich, and Grande, Edgar, *Das kosmopolitische Europa.*

[34] Halman, Loek, Tim Reeskens, Inge Sieben, and Marga van Zundert, *Atlas of European Values*: 37.

[35] Halman, Reeskens, Sieben, and van Zundert. *Atlas of European Values, 36.*

[36] Ibid: *37.*

[37] Beck and Grande, *Das kosmopolitische Europa;* Hannerz, Hulf, *Cultural Complexity*.

[38] Bauman, Zigmunt, *Retrotopia*.

[39] Trenz, *Narrating European Societies.*

[40] Calhoun, Craig, "Belonging in the cosmopolitan imaginary."

[41] Zamponi, Lorenzo, "Practices of Solidarity."; Leonardi, Laura and Calenda, Davide, "Le conseguenze della pandemia sulle forme di solidarietà sociale."

[42] Zielonka, Jan, *Counter-Revolution: Liberal Europe in Retreat.*

[43] Ibid.

[44] Streeck, Wolfgang, *Gekaufte Zeit*.

[45] European Commission, Common Implementation Plan for the Pact on Migration and Asylum.