

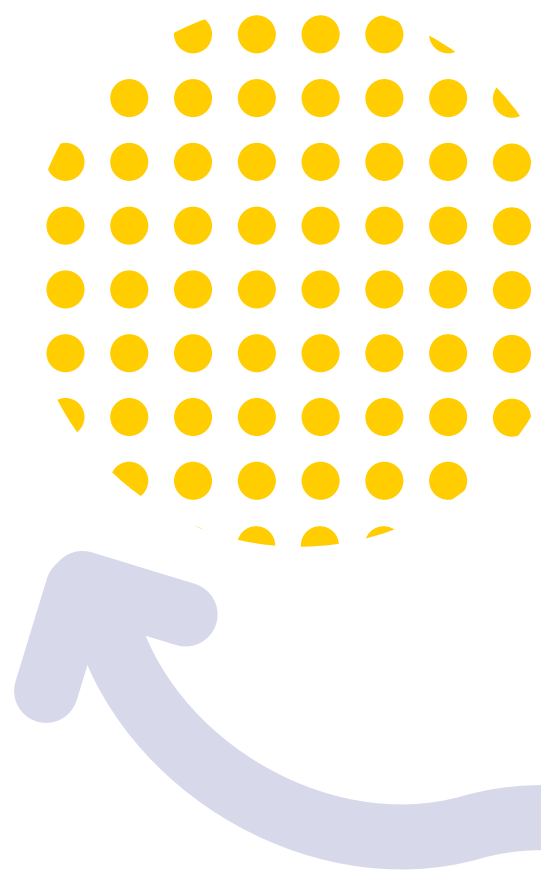
EUROPE TALKS SOLIDARITY

Snežana Bačlija Knoch & Susie Nicodemi

SALTO

EUROPEAN  
SOLIDARITY CORPS

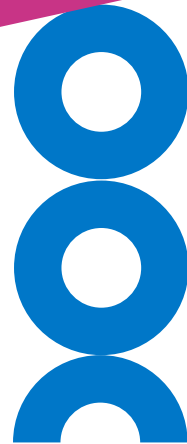
# Solidarity cake, anyone?



By  
Snežana Bačlija Knoch  
& Susie Nicodemi

DEFINITION OF SOLIDARITY • INCLUSION  
EMPATHY • HUMAN RIGHTS • ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP  
IMPORTANCE OF ACTION





## Snežana Bačlija Knoch

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Snežana Bačlija Knoch was born in Yugoslavia and now lives in Serbia with her family. She works fully freelance as a trainer and consultant and has been active for some years in facilitating the Training and Evaluation Cycle in EVS and now European Solidarity Corps. Snežana's passions are value-based education, conflict transformation and educational game design. She is a member of the International Youth Work Trainers' Guild. Snežana also enjoys the challenges of research (although she is not a researcher) and writing and has contributed to many different articles, publications, handbooks and reports.

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## Susie Nicodemi

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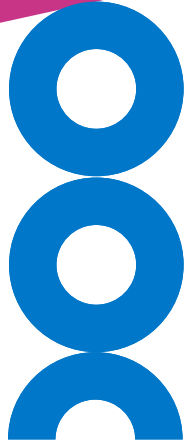
Susie comes from the practice field, has done a bit of policy-making, enjoys facilitating, and is getting more and more into writing and research. "I live in a town in the south of England with my family, trying to bring European values down to local everyday actions. I have been involved in youth work (local and international) for a long time – with many different hats on. European Programmes make a difference. Helping shape them makes me more me."

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## WHAT IS SOLIDARITY?

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**4 years ago this seemed to be a question that was buzzing through different circles of European youth work and the answer to it needed to arrive very fast!**

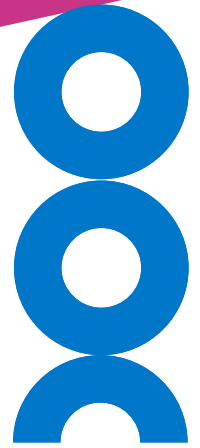
Let's go back just a little bit: Juncker's State of the Union speech in 2016 had solidarity at the heart. There was an urgent need to reflect on the European Union's response to the refugee crisis, to Brexit, to the rise of the far right political parties, to the climate crisis... to many things. Solidarity was seen as an answer under a new flagship programme of the European Union: European Solidarity Corps.

For many involved in youth work, the concept of solidarity has always been there, but under different names. There was a shared consensus that volunteering and international projects encompass many elements of solidarity, but there was no common ground or clear definition that framed it. Youth work, employment and volunteering organisations across Europe needed to understand 'exactly what is solidarity?' and start (or continue) putting it into practice. To provide those very much needed answers, the European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre conducted the 4Thought Study, asking the opinion of practitioners across Europe, as well as researchers, policy makers and young people.

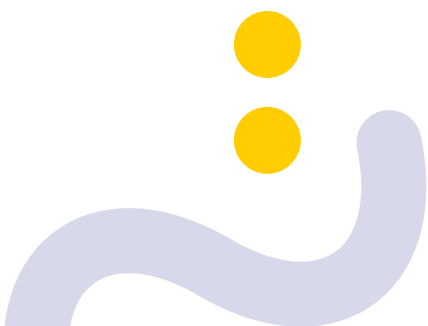
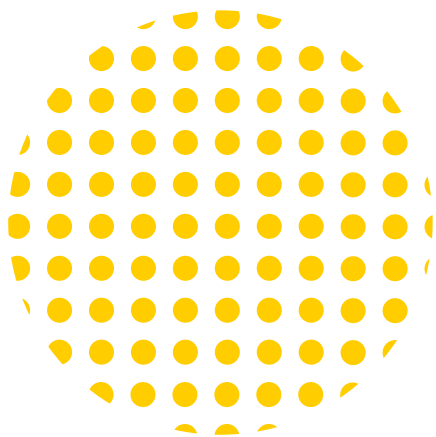
One thing that was very easy for everyone to agree on was that there is a (increasing) need for solidarity. Easy. To start with, solidarity between youth workers and young people or amongst youth workers themselves has always been there. But, even more than that, solidarity as a value has been nurtured as part of civic awareness and engagement. As one respondent to the survey said:

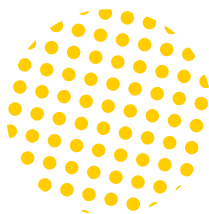
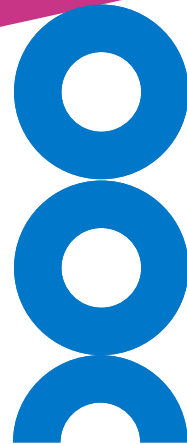
**"I believe youth work values imply solidarity. When we aim to develop skills and knowledge for young people to act in multicultural communities, that involves solidarity actions."**





However, when trying to put this 'solidarity' that we need, in one sentence, this is where the trouble started. It became very clear that there is no common definition and no common understanding of this concept at the European level. Not in the research, not in practical manuals and publications and not in direct conversations with the different stakeholders. Official documents, such as base legal documents of the EU, refer to solidarity as a fundamental EU value, but don't define what it is. The understanding of solidarity very much depends on an individual's personal and professional background, as well as the context(s) in which they have been living. Any concept that relates to personal experiences, influences and views makes it very difficult to have a common understanding and to find common ground with others.



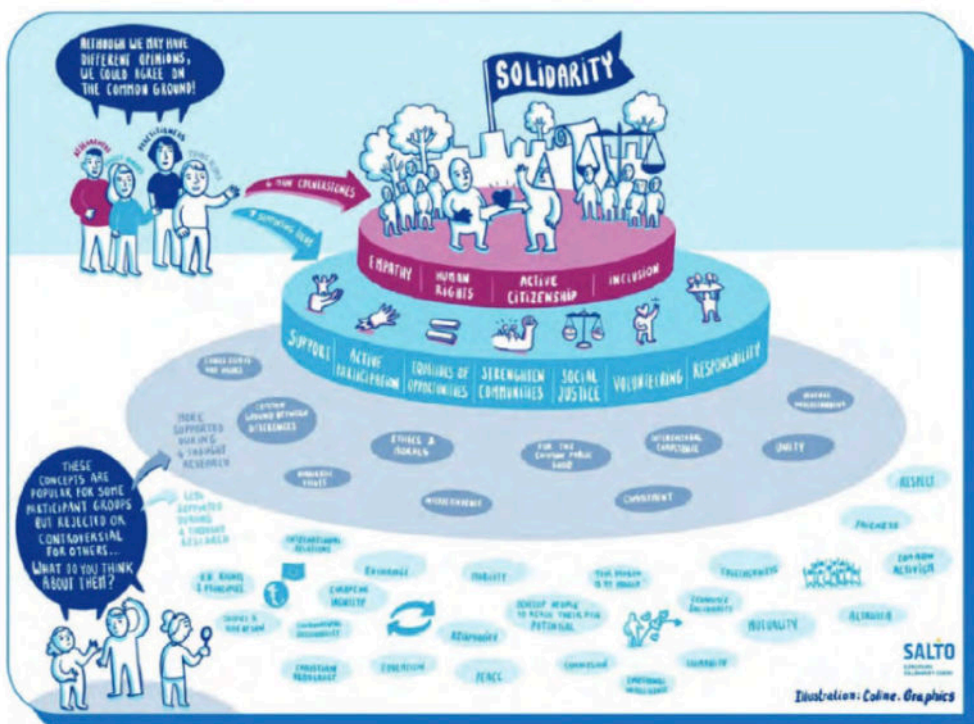


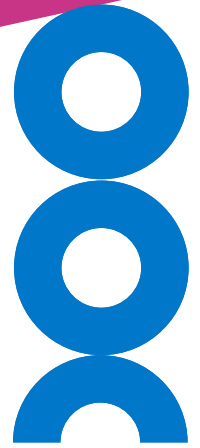
## Concepts that relate to solidarity

A one-paragraph definition would be impossible. What could we provide from the 4Thought process then? We aimed for something that supports the field and allows people to address solidarity from a variety of contexts. We developed a model that would help individuals reflect on their own interpretation of the concept of solidarity. In other words, to provide a frame that would support the readers in defining the most relevant concepts for themselves, without presuming levels or lines of importance, as different people put emphasis on different ones.

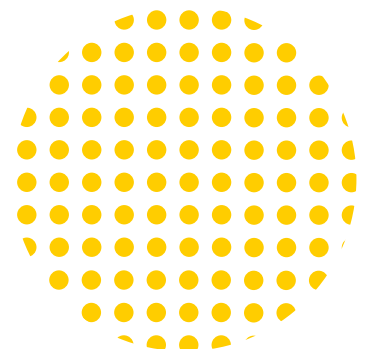
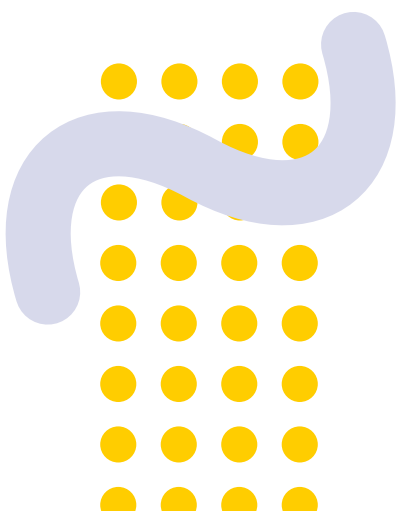
This model can also be used for individual reflection (eg: which 5 concepts are most important for you to define solidarity?), or for group activities (see many examples of activities on how to facilitate solidarity in Part Two of the [Tkit Value-based learning in mobility projects](#)).

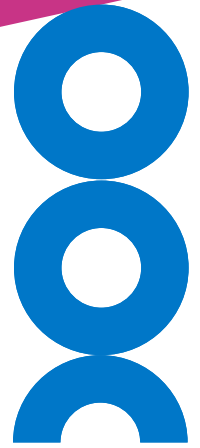
There are 4 main concepts that are at the core of this 'solidarity cake' model, seen as the concepts closest to solidarity both in theory and in practice. The 4 main concepts are: Human Rights; Active Citizenship; Inclusion; Empathy and became known as the '4 Cornerstones' of solidarity. They are the concepts most supported by all four sectors (policy, research, practice and young people):





- **Human Rights** Acting to promote and protect other people's rights. Standing and acting in solidarity with people who are not able to claim their rights and using privileges less for oneself and more for someone else;
- **Empathy** Understanding and feeling with others, recognising when someone is in need, sharing the sense of injustice and being motivated to act. Not empathising only with close ones and those with shared values and beliefs, but feeling empathy with every living being, including the environment as a whole;
- **Active Citizenship** Action is the core element of solidarity. Being a responsible citizen, part of the society and ensuring greater good for everyone. The willingness to engage, to contribute to society and the eagerness to show solidarity towards people and places in need;
- **Inclusion** Reaching out and including all young people. Going beyond the usual circles and in-groups. Including even those young people who do not necessarily feel or agree with what solidarity implies because they are probably the ones that might be needing it the most.





In the Solidarity Cake, the '4 Cornerstones' are supported by 7 supporting concepts, which were also highlighted to a lesser extent by people from the four participants groups:

- Social justice;
- Equality of opportunity;
- Support;
- Strengthen communities;
- Active participation;
- Volunteering;
- Responsibility.

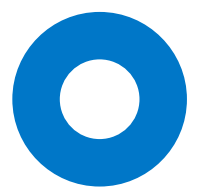
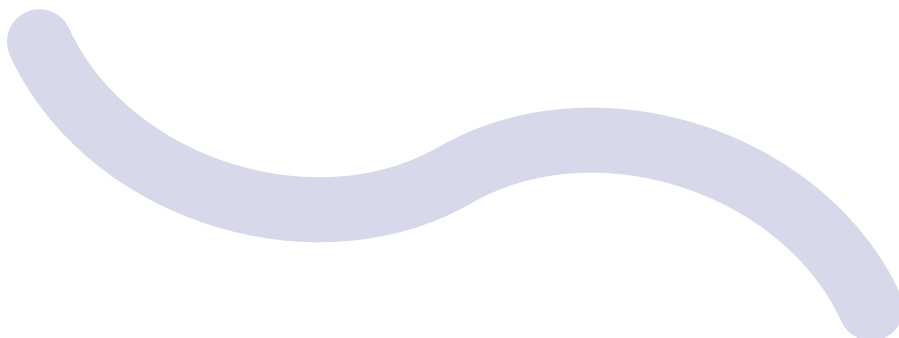
These 7 concepts complement the common ground on solidarity, as they add more nuances and more aspects to be explored.

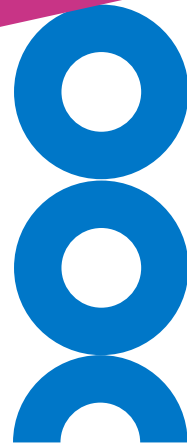
In addition, they are joined by other important concepts that did not find agreement among the 4 different participant groups. When people were processing their own interpretation of solidarity, these contentious concepts often created more

discussions and debates than those that were in common acceptance. Sometimes defining a concept by what it is not, helps to clarify a frame for people. Some of the most controversial concepts (that a selection of respondents found too limiting) were: EU Rights and Principles, Compassion, Reciprocity, Altruism, "Your problem is my problem", Christian Democracy.

One of the core aspects when filtering the concepts was the importance of critical thinking. Both when deciding what goes into the common ground (i.e. the concepts that were too limiting were not included, as they were perceived as not giving solidarity enough space to breathe) and when creating a common ground: so it is not set in stone, but rather a fluid, evolving thing. This critical thinking was in turn essential for critical action, in other words solidarity action based on critical reflection.

**In both 4Thought on solidarity and in the T-kit on value-based education that evolved from it, action is essential!**





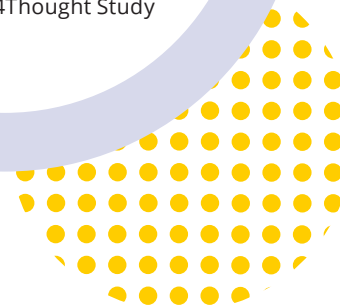
## Importance of action

Many respondents in the 4Thought study referred time and again to the need not just to feel solidarity but to transfer those feelings into action: solidarity means to participate, to be involved actively and to DO something. It can be to support a victim, to raise awareness, to prevent the cause of injustice, to sign a petition - all of these have been quoted as solidarity activities.

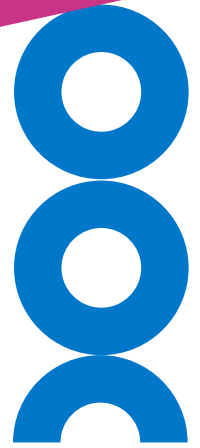
For many, this active participation in society, combined with a shared feeling for the need of positive change, is an integral part of the concept of solidarity: it is important to balance the feeling and the acting. It's about taking action for the common good, which can be funded through the European Solidarity Corps for example (eg. [Solidarity Projects](#) or [Volunteering Projects](#)). The importance of active citizenship, being active within the democratic structures of the society where you live, was also one of the highlights. For many people, there is a certain level of responsibility as a citizen or duty within that role, within the expectations of solidarity. But first you have to feel it and that comes down to emotions, attitudes and values.

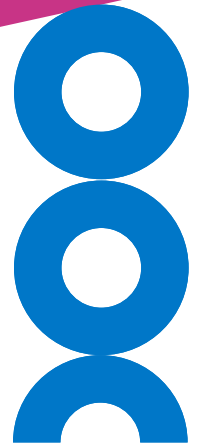
*"[There should be] active participation, in everything. In a democracy, people should be proactive, to use their rights and help others to use their rights."*

Lora Egle, Young Person;  
interview for 4Thought Study









## Value-based approach and action-centred education

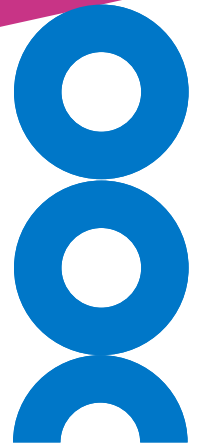
How can values be put into action? Or rather, how can people be active citizens with a strong value base, and which steps are needed in order for that to happen? In order to understand this, we bring in the perspective of action-centred education.

Essentially, in a value-based approach, the process can and should be facilitated towards young people feeling the need to be active, to participate, to

influence and to shape. However, this action should be based on values. Young people should not be indoctrinated by those values, but rather facilitated through a process of awareness, understanding and critical reflection. So, once they embrace those values, they feel compelled to act, in an aware, informed and critical way, to co-create their community for everyone's well-being.

And encouraging living together in well-being demands inclusion.





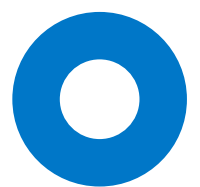
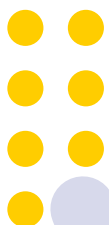
## Them and Us: Group bondedness

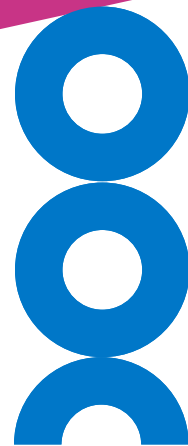
Inclusion is one of the 4 cornerstones – solidarity should be an inclusive concept. However, more often than not, it is reserved for those close to us, with whom we share values and realities. As such, it is closely related to belonging to a community and sharing bonds with other people, or “group bondedness”. Whenever there is more than one group, there is a (conscious or subconscious) choice to be made when engaging in a solidarity act. Very often, people will turn to their own ingroups and invest their solidarity within. What about those outside the group? Are we ironically consciously excluding some people to be solidary? And how does it work with dissimilar groups? Or when resources are stretched and priorities need to be made? It is group bondedness that weighs in when deciding who is “worth” or “deserving” of solidarity, at times when such priorities seemingly need to be created.

Based on the well-known contact hypothesis or intergroup contact theory, being in touch with someone different can reduce, under certain conditions, the level of prejudice and increase the likelihood of seeing them as a fellow human. As oversimplified as this theory might seem, local initiatives and volunteering projects have the potential to create connections and bonds across different groups, to widen the ‘in group’, and as such, to create solidarity across those groups as well.

Furthermore, learning mobility experiences in the European Solidarity Corps and in Erasmus+ can contribute to lifelong solidarity. That is, if the experience is facilitated in that direction. This means that solidarity will not be seen by young people as something that happens during a solidarity project or a period of volunteering abroad, but as a value that becomes integrated into their being – something they live by and that governs their life. And which makes them want to act to shape their community and leave an impact.

Youth work can help in all that, by supporting the young people: to grow, understand themselves as individuals and where they fit into different types of community (or not); to act and participate in making a positive change in their local reality and also to form their own concept of ‘What is solidarity for me?’, both in theory and in action. As a cherry on the cake, international youth work has an enormous potential in breaking those solidarity ingroups or at least enlarging them to take in young people of different backgrounds, worldviews and walks of life and, consequently, having young people act and participate in processes concerning diverse needs for solidarity. Solidarity calls young people, youth work helps that connection, and putting the values into action for positive social change helps solidarity come alive.





## EDITORIAL INFO

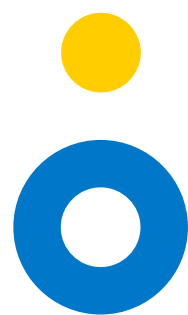
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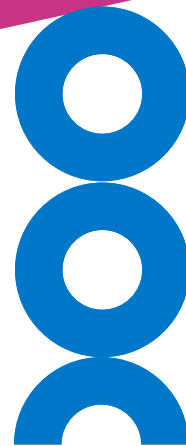
### **SALTO European Solidarity Corps**

SALTO ESC supports National Agencies and organisations in the youth field and beyond with the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps programme. The mission is to explore the potential of solidarity as a core value in European societies and to promote the use of the European Solidarity Corps as a tool for understanding and living solidarity. SALTO ESC coordinates networking activities, training, seminars and events that will support the quality implementation of the programme and maximise its impact. By doing this, SALTO ESC contributes to building a European Solidarity Corps community of organisations.

SALTO ESC is hosted by OeAD. The OeAD is the national agency for the implementation of Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps in Austria. SALTO ESC is part of a European network of SALTO Resource Centres with the mission to improve the quality and impact of the EU youth programmes as well as to support and develop European youth work.

Find us online at [www.salto-youth.net](http://www.salto-youth.net), [www.oead.at](http://www.oead.at) and [www.salto-youth.net/solidarity](http://www.salto-youth.net/solidarity)





## EUROPE TALKS SOLIDARITY

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This article is part of “Europe talks Solidarity” – a series of events and publications that offers a platform for the exploration of the concept of Solidarity, initiated by SALTO ESC. The discussion on Solidarity benefits from inputs from a wide range of experiences and backgrounds. The article was written for the Youth work Magazine Mladje, published by Movit, the Slovenian National Agency in Slovenian and is available here: [www.movit.si/fileadmin/movit/0ZAVOD/Publikacije/Mladje/Mladje%202023\\_%C5%A1tevilka%2043\\_splet.pdf](http://www.movit.si/fileadmin/movit/0ZAVOD/Publikacije/Mladje/Mladje%202023_%C5%A1tevilka%2043_splet.pdf)

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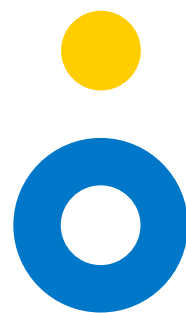
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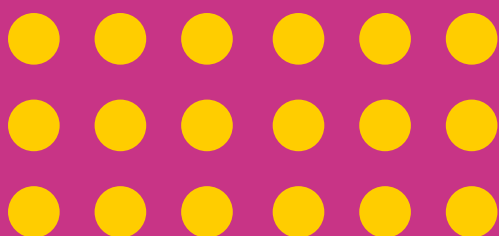


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