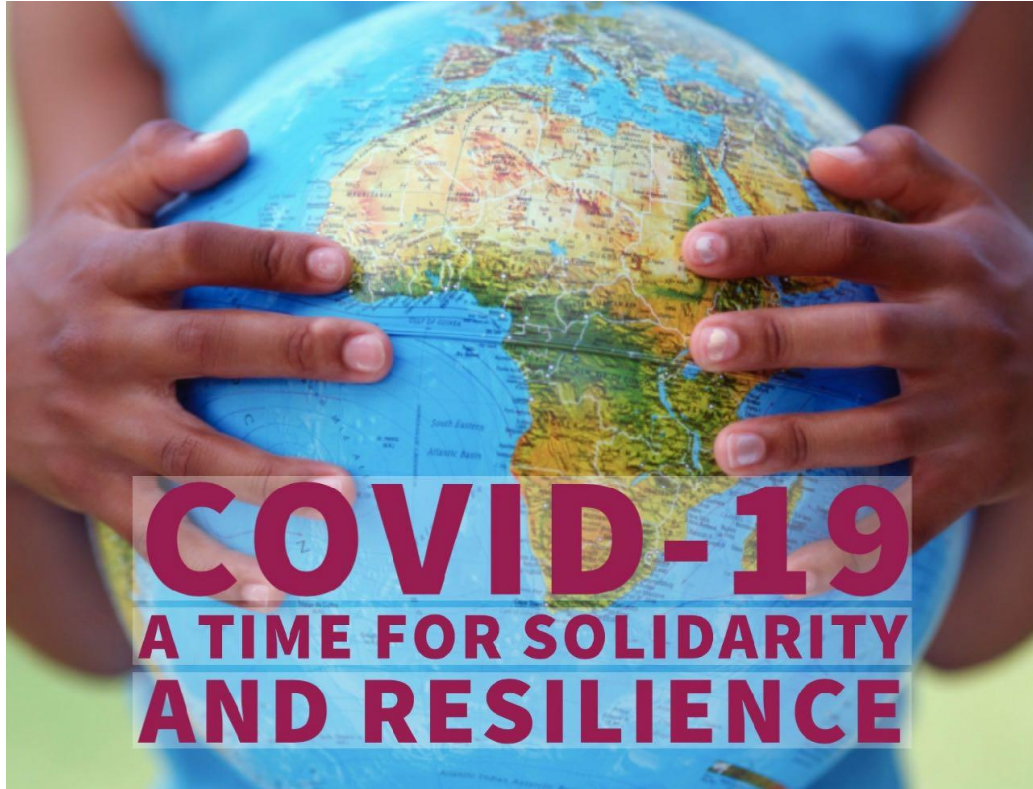




# **Rethinking everyday solidarities**

**Insights from two studies with  
young people**

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# Solidarities in flux

We lack a thorough scientific analysis and a late modern understanding of what solidarity is: How is solidarity embodied and enacted in practice in people's everyday encounters with others?

Traditional conceptualizations of solidarity (e.g., Durkheim, 1947[1893]) assume people's emotional attachment to a single community: solidarity is based on similarity, shared values and mutual goals

Social life in 21st century: the fragmentation of communities and the complexity of contemporary social life where people are simultaneously members of several groups, diverse communities and intersecting social categories (Oosterlynck et al., 2017; Nikunen, 2019).

Communal identities are built on and expressed as togetherness, reciprocity, and support but also on differentiation, othering, and control. Therefore, certain types of solidarities are likely to cause polarization of people and ideas and, hence, reproduce inequalities.

# Towards a third way...

Two opposites in the theoretical framing of solidarity (Juul 2010):

- the communitarian view: the concept of solidarity is used to strengthen the moral voice of community across society
- the liberalistic view: solidarity as a matter of individual choice

The “in-between” view, e.g. Bauman (2012):

- solidarity as an intense experience of togetherness when individuals are united by action
  - “..solidarity not that much in sharing the cause chosen, as solidarity in having a cause; I and you and all the rest of us (‘us’, that is, people on the square) having purposes, and life having a meaning” (Bauman 2012, 13).
  - connects a local landscape with cultural meaning and to a structural perspective.
- The triangle between meaning, structure, and locality

# ”Alternative” views taking the third way?

Feminist theories (e.g., Dean, 1995; Juul, 2010; Nikunen, 2019):

- Affective solidarity, typical between family members and friends, is limited to concrete others to whom we are emotionally connected
- Conventional solidarity emerges from shared values that unite a group or a community
- Reflective solidarity, based on the recognition of interdependency, is defined as a “mutual expectation of a responsible orientation to relationships” (Dean, 1995: 123); more potential to be built in differentiated communities than affective/conventional solidarities?

Spatial solidarity (Oosterlynck et al., 2016, 2017; Featherstone, 2017)

- recognises that informal acts of reciprocity and support are challenged by social and cultural diversity and value pluralism in contemporary communities
- solidarities are communicatively gendered “in the different spatio-temporal register of everyday place-based practices” (Oosterlynck et al., 2016: 765).

# Another alternative?

Adding the concept of **recognition** to the discussion on solidarity

- Aiming to non-exclusive solidarity in pluralistic communities means that we pursue to provide everyone with equal opportunities for recognition
- We are “under a moral obligation to make an effort to meet the other in an appreciative way, even when the other is a stranger who does not share our views on the good life” (Juul, 2010: 258).

The SoliPro (“Solidarity in Practice - Young people’s everyday communities as sources of recognition and spaces of preventive social work”) research project 2022-2026, Academy of Finland

The project examines what constitutes ‘solidarity’ for young people (age 15 to 18) and how their solidarities are negotiated in relation to communities, spaces, belonging, togetherness and otherness, and social and societal positions of power and inequality. Drawing on the concepts of recognition and reflective and spatial solidarity, these questions are investigated in three locations representing the central communal environments of young people: school, street and online. The hypothesis is that once we understand young people’s ‘micro-level solidarities’ in their everyday communal spaces, these solidarities can be used in professional work to enhance mutual recognition and hence, individual and communal wellbeing.

# To summarize...

- The traditional/modern notion of solidarity doesn't unquestionably fit today's pluralistic society
- We don't know what 'solidarity in practice' is for different people: where solidarity is performed, how individual choices and decisions (based on structural positions) related to solidarities are made, and how its borders and boundaries are expressed.
- Solidarities as political without a stated political aim (Oosterlynck et al. 2017)
- In the following studies the view is that solidarity starts with how we react to others with whom we share a common space with. Solidarity is not (necessarily) confined to shared values or a common cause as traditionally understood. Solidarities as stemming from a myriad of connections that simply are everywhere.
- This may be particularly meaningful with young people who, because of top-down adult-based decisions, experience 'thrown-togetherness' (Massey 2008) in their peer communities such as in schools and neighborhoods. In these youth communities, solidarities are neither fixed nor self-evident but negotiated at the intersection of individual, communal and structural positions offered to or stamped on them.

# STUDY EXAMPLE 1

## Young adults' relationships and solidarities during Covid-19 pandemic

Korkiamäki, R. & Oinonen, E. (2022) "Todellakin pitää puntaroida" – Nuorten aikuisten suhteet ja solidariteetit koronapandemian aikana. In Kekkonen, M. et al. (eds) Nuorten elinolot vuosikirja. Helsinki: THL & Nuorisotutkimusverkosto.



## Starting points

Everyday solidarities are often experienced and expressed through negotiating belonging (in space and time).

During Covid-19 pandemic, young people had to negotiate choices between people and relationships that had previously been allowed to them simultaneously.

Many of these negotiations were actualised in relation to 'space' (allowed/prohibited, real/virtual, open/restricted, the physical and social space of home).

➤ **spatial solidarity** (Oosterlynck et al. 2017)

- Informal expressions and choices related to solidarity in everyday spaces and encounters
- The reasonings and justifications for these choices (solidarities)
- 1) Sources, 2) places, 3) politics of solidarity
- solidarity = togetherness, friendliness, sympathy, help, social support, reciprocity; "reversed" solidarity = othering control

## Data

Graduating college and university students' (20-28 yrs) experiences during Covid-19 pandemic

19 essays, 11 diaries (3x7 days), 21 interviews, May 2020 – April 2021

### ***”Sources of solidarity”:***

Close family members and close friendships, relatives, other friends; Society; Humane solidarity

- Emotional solidarity for people in vulnerable position
- 'In action' solidarity for close family members or friends, or for "societal solidarity"

### ***”Places of solidarity”:***

Home - The place for testing solidarity in relation to places and people outside of home

Public places - Restrictions (as governmental control) caused stress and conflicts for young adults in actual situations of meeting people in public places and also in having to consider the potential of these meetings

Social media - The place for control, social pressure, guilt and shame AND for performing multiple solidarities

### ***”Politics of solidarity”:***

Inner negotiations / negotiations with other people

Open conflicts that may have consequences for future relationships

Social pressure, prioritising people and relationships, expressing these priorities through morality, blame, worry, care

## Conclusions

Young adults' sympathy towards people in vulnerable positions / "bubbling up" of the society (clearer divisions between communities)

Recognition of the polarisation of society / clear views regarding societal restrictions and recommendations

Loosening of (close) relationships and (tight) communities / friendliness, understanding and willingness to help

Public places activated moralising performances / ..guilt, worry/care and understanding

The necessity of considering and prioritising relationships: close family and friends on the expense of broader sense of belonging

- Social pressure, guilt, blame as practices of expressing solidarity
- Solidarity and control are not opposite of each other but "on the same continuum"

# STUDY EXAMPLE 2

## Local youth gatherings through the lens of spatial solidarities negotiated on and offline



Määttä, T. & Korkiamäki, R. & Vaahensalo, E. & Turtiainen, R. (forthcoming) Local youth gatherings through the lens of spatial solidarities negotiated on and offline.

## Starting points

Teenage young people seem to have a need to belong through gathering together (e.g. Farrugia, 2013; Korkiamäki 2019; Korkiamäki & Kallio 2017).

The self-organized gatherings of young people can be perceived as strengthening individual's understanding of oneself and one's place in the wider society, and therefore meaningful with regards to potential for solidarity (Matthews et al. 2020).

Society tends to problematize young people getting together on their own terms, which may create tension that can potentially make or break solidarities – not only between generations but also amongst young people.

Oosterlynck et al. (2016, p. 765) emphasize that to understand solidarities and potential solidarities, we need to understand the temporal register of everyday place-based practices.

- How young people's gatherings are used to define belonging and solidarities, and how solidarities in turn are manifested in spontaneous self-organized get-togethers?

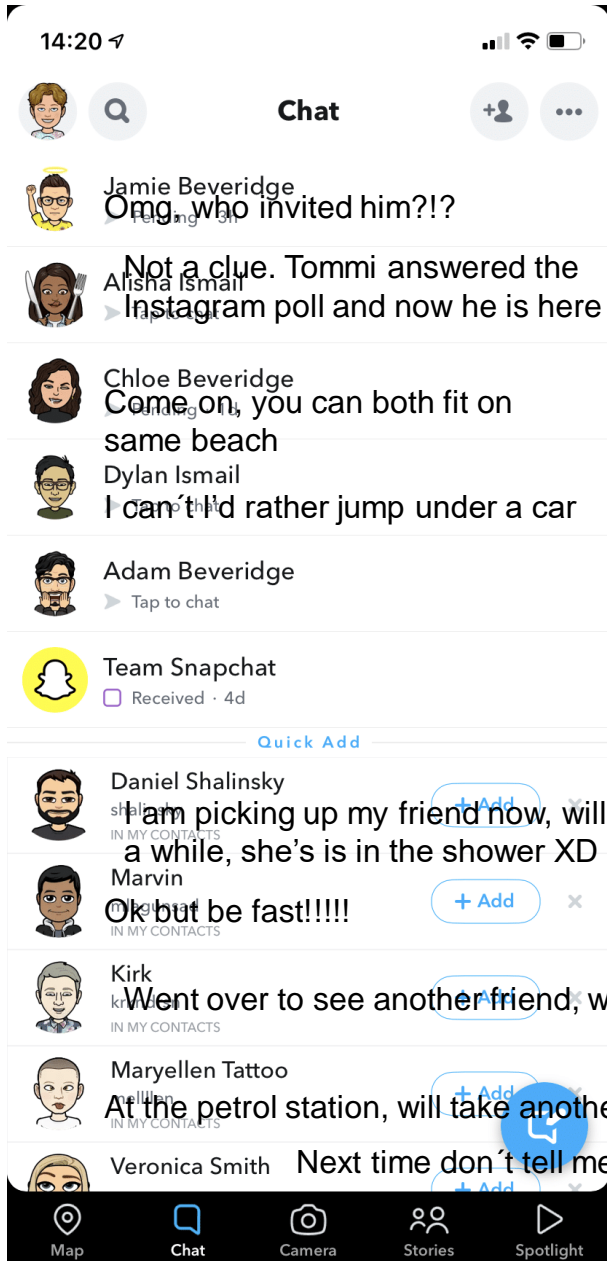
## Data

Snapchat group chat simulation with post-it notes

5 groups of 4-6 students with first graders of upper secondary school (15-16 years olds)

Three-part story completion: 1) proposing a gathering 2) messages and content during the gathering 3) police arrives

Results



**Strategies and practices** of spatial solidarity in young people's gatherings

Rejecting opportunities to be elsewhere

Solidarity is constructed and deconstructed through discourses drawing from the feelings of trust, hurt, resentment and loyalty (not built so much on similarities?)

Adult intervention as a nuisance and a challenge; feelings of irritation; reorganisation of the gathering; intensify the feeling of solidarity among young people but also emotional detachment of 'the ones to blame'

## Conclusions

The research of young people's self-organized everyday gatherings opens a window to unequal power relations that are instrumental to negotiating public places and creating, maintaining and reformulating solidarities.

Little evidence of exclusive solidarity to specific individuals or subgroups was detected.

Solidarities in the scripts were not stable but in constant motion. It seems that in large youth gatherings where the young people are diverse, solidarities are negotiated in the moment.

The role of technology. The online environment allows for the party to hold together despite disruptions in the offline environment.

In looking at solidarities, place can be the center focus as its organization reveals constant struggles against unequal ways of generating place and the relationships in it. These struggles shape and are shaped by solidarities. For young people, this process is intensified by technology and the use of offline environments.

**KIITOS!**  
**Comments,**  
**questions,**  
**ideas?**