

What is SOLIDARITY?

Revealing any topic necessarily puts forward a question. The truth is, that every question leads to another one, and the investigation chain may seem endless. This time the question is especially tricky- we will talk about solidarity. As any other abstract notion, it may be perceived differently. Dictionary says: solidarity is “loyalty and general agreement between all people in a group or between different groups because they all have a shared aim”. If we consider our world, including ourselves, to be such unambiguous, this definition would be enough to know. But in reality, this concept is hidden under numerous layers of causes and consequences, just like a cabbage stump in a great cabbage head. So let’s peel the layers off one by one to get to the core.

Focusing on revealing solidarity, we may consider the following issues: how and by which factors it is expressed, in which situations/conditions it appears, how do we recognize the need for expressing it (it may lead back to the conditions under which it arises), what is the difference between solidarity and charity, what are advantages and disadvantages of solidarity or, in another words, what are the objectives and side-effects of solidarity, and, finally, what is the role of solidarity in the modern society? Only reviewing all these questions will help us get to the core and give the answer to what solidarity actually is. It may seem too complicated, nevertheless, the notion itself may reveal many interesting details and nuances, just like when we start thinking about how we make a breath- not perceptible usually, though, extremely intriguing when investigated closer.

If we take the definition of solidarity (see the first paragraph) as a base for our further considerations, we can start our journey wondering how we can express it? Normally it may appear as understanding, support, sense of unity. Let’s imagine we are a few non-smokers in a smokers’ company in a room. We can show some solidarity to each other, asking smokers to leave outdoors to have a smoke, in case we all non-smokers agree. The solidarity thus would be expressed as a supporting move, considering the common interest of the non-smokers. As an opposite, we can imagine that several non-smokers do not feel comfortable to ask smokers to leave the room- maybe they are shy, maybe they do not mind. So when one non-smoker asks the smokers to smoke outside, this person would not receive any support by the other non-smokers, thus, no solidarity would be shown. The factors why solidarity, when having all opportunities to be expressed, is not shown, we will review in further paragraphs. Understanding each other and the situation could be called solidarity as well, such as opening the door for a mom with a baby or helping an old lady to cross the street. In this case solidarity goes hand in hand with understanding and respect to the other person as another human being, and nobody can claim that he would not be a human. Sense of unity also could be regarded as solidarity- though, not always expressed. One bright example of this could be solidarity between the speakers of one language, compatriots, representatives of the same religion, beliefs, lifestyle. It does not necessarily mean action but it do refer to people’s inner attitude to the “similar ones”- silent respect or honour, self-confidence, appreciation.

The way of reaction is strictly relevant to the stimulus. Everything has causes and consequences. Considering the situations which request people to show solidarity to each other, we must not forget that pressure is the power creating reaction. When you push a spiral, it jumps back. If you don’t touch it, it stays calm. There is an easy relevance: the Newton’s first and third laws. Life is not a mystery, it’s a reflection of the reality in the form of physical means. So solidarity could not be imagined without any opposite pressure causing people unite in the sake of their stands. Thus we may conclude the simple truth: while there is no contrary, no solidarity can be observed. The contrary itself could be also a duel

of two “solidarities”, such as the mentioned smokers and non-smokers. “People” is a countable variable, so as far there is a possibility to categorize people, as long solidarity will exist.

Another question is the reaction of the “solid unity” to its irritant. Here it depends only on the common sense of the individuals. People may show it and people may not. They may agree with each other, disagree with others, but the consequences of fighting for their beliefs (considered to be the expression of solidarity) depend on the means they use. Here we should recall in our minds the famous fragment from the Bible: the solidarity between these people led them to the construction of the tower. God did not like such turn of events, it seemed offensive, I would not even hesitate to say- wrong - to him. So when their languages were confused they could not find it possible to keep on realizing their goal. The lesson is, that solidarity itself is good, if we distinguish the “black” and “white” sides, though, when it comes to real actions caused by solidarity, it may become “wrong”. But who are we to judge what is good or bad, the only thing how to measure these two abstract concepts, is dividing the consequences into the benefits and losses, and counting them to see if there is any prevalence. Normally the situation should be clear once it’s done, however, many of you might remember several trailers on TV when the “good” policeman causes chaos on the street while catching the “bad” guy. Solidarity with law in this case is observed, but who pays for the losses of thousands and thousands of dollars?

Now you may seem confused and claim that in this case the best way of showing some solidarity is charity. Ouch. This trap was waiting for somebody! This is our most common mistake- we mix these two notions, moreover, it is much easier to help somebody in sense of charity, but it takes a lot of effort to give your own contribution in sense of solidarity, if we now turn to actions. Charity itself is giving away something own, it is sharing our belongings, to be them money, things or animals, to help somebody else. In its turn, solidarity is feeling belonging to a certain group of people, having a shared aim. It is possible that the aim of these people is to donate for charity purposes, but it will always remain a feeling of unity, not feeling sorry for somebody thus motivating us to help. Another sharp difference between these two concepts is that charity is not sustainable. Charity itself does not provide any long-term results. Have you ever heard a saying: “Give a fish to a hungry man- he will not starve one day. Give him a fishing rod- and he will not starve all his life”? Here the fish is charity and the fishing rod is solidarity. We show solidarity to our country when we attend elections. We show solidarity to our neighbours when we invite them to a cup of tea or coffee. The reason for solidarity must exist in ourselves as a particular feature, to be recognized by others as belonging to a particular group- human being, neighbor, citizen, student, elderly person, non-smoker et al. But when it comes to charity, no equality can be distinguished- how can a poor person donate to another poor person? How can we give something we own away staying somehow equal with the receiver, if the fact itself excludes such situation? In this case sharing would be an appropriate word, not charity. Sharing with others who are in the same situation- sharing experience, clothes, time, advice, plants, recipes, stickers et al.- it would never be called charity and now it may be recognized as an expression of solidarity.

Now we have finally arrived to the last destination of our journey and almost reached the cabbage stump... what is the role of solidarity in society? Needless to mention, modern life in its worst expression has been many times called as “busy”, “lonely”, “selfish”, even “hostile”. Reading these terms through, it is difficult to believe they are used to describe the life circle of a human being, who has always been claimed as a social and friendly being. So what happened to us and where is “solidarity” in the list? I would propose that the solidarity’s opponent “Selfishness” has been winning for a while. Social laziness and competitiveness for better living conditions has made people reluctant to participate in social life, they do not relate global, national or local processes to themselves as individuals. We may call it the lack of deduction. Or the lack of self-investigation. Because, as we found out before, everybody can be

categorized, thus everybody belongs to a particular group of people having shared interests, aims, fears, beliefs. No excuses regarding the number of people (the same example with smokers and non-smokers) will be accepted. According to the theory of psychology, 3 people already form a group. For example, wolves are sometimes referred to as hermits; though, who does not know they always hunt in a group. Nature is smart, it reveals the secrets of survival to those who listen. And humans are the smartest part of the Mother Nature, as they have the biggest number of tools for their survival. What it all means- that solidarity is nothing else than a tool for survival: may it be taken mentally or physically. Losing this special tool people become single units- with their own micro-sun which they rotate around. But once we break these strange walls and let the feeling of unity develop, we will be able to see a much wider and brighter horizon that it was in our little micro-sun-system. And now we can stop and stare, admiring the wonderful skyline. This is the feeling we have been missing. This is solidarity.