This chapter finally tries to answer the question of conditions under which more abstract forms of solidarity are likely to become accepted. At what point is it likely that previous categories of belonging will be given up in support of new institutionalised categories? Social psychologists have been studying processes of group categorisation and the formation of ‘we-ness’ for a long time, revealing mechanisms of social segmentation and stereotyping, as well as in-group favouritism or out-group derogation. It turns out that the so-called in-group bias is a consistent effect. In her classical article, Marilynn Brewer (1979) concludes that the establishment of symbolic in-group/out-group boundaries, even in the absence of a functional relationship between the members of a group, gives rise to an in-group bias: The tendency to favour one’s own group over another. This implies, for example, that members rate the quality of their own group’s product higher than that of out-groups; applied to benefit societies, we have seen that members tend to positively evaluate their societies’ effort and success to provide the collective good. Turner (1984: 535) advanced the hypothesis that ‘group membership is based upon the sharing of a common social identification rather than cohesive interpersonal relationships’. Ten years later, Brown (1995) showed that in-group favouritism is especially common among high-status groups. Sociologists apply these insights to various groups in order to better understand exclusion, discrimination and processes of preference formation (for example, Sniderman et al. 2004; Hooghe and Marks 2005).

Social identity theory argues that members of a group prefer to defend their in-group boundaries, but the in-group bias effect does not explain why some of the functionally linked actors of interest analysed here were willing to open the group, whereas others were not. One of the
approach’s weaknesses is that the conducted experiments are mostly based on one distinctive feature, when in reality individuals belong to different groups and categories (Brewer and Miller 1996: 9). However, in a sociological work the links between individual action, collective decisions and macro structures cannot be ignored. Chapter 4 shed light on how political factors shape mutual benefit societies and how these collective actors in turn determine the organisations’ character. This chapter again links the micro to a macro perspective in order to study the contextual factors that had an influence on the decisions of actors being evaluated. What made them willing to cooperate with out-group members who were previously excluded from the solidarity community due to narrowly or symbolically defined categories of belonging? Which historical factors motivated the stubborn reluctance to widen one’s group? Having presented the arguments of the actors, this chapter will now address these questions. It argues that the attitudes examined in the previous chapter were shaped and structured by a specific historical and social context, instead of exclusively being the product of common social identifications and the need for positive distinctiveness. Individuals do not operate within an experimental design; rather their perceptions and opinions are shaped by institutional, economic, social and ideological aspects that account for the different ways and forms solidarity takes, namely the boundedness of solidarity (see Chapter 3).

The following sections will shed light on some of the factors that influenced the construction of solidarity during the formation of the welfare state. Given the inductive approach this study follows, it will only draw on those scope conditions that the actors repeatedly refer to in their arguments. Pragmatic induction, as developed by Werner and Zimmermann (2006: 18), suits this purpose very well. It begins from the object of study and unfolds ‘an analysis of the manner in which individuals actually connect to the world’; thereby it integrates the ‘referential dimension of the objects and practices’ analysed. This might disregard or overemphasise some of the impact factors at work, but it prevents us from arbitrarily theorising on expected outcomes and instead involves reference points specific to the examined phenomena and processes.

The logic of crisis and the perception thereof

In the third quarterly report of 1911, General Secretary George H. Clarke of the Operative Bricklayers identified his own society’s destiny with the typical life course of many other small friendly societies: Death due to the ageing of the society and a deficit in the younger members of