

Union Membership in Post-Socialist East Germany: Who Participates in Collective Action?

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Abstract

This study has two aims: first, to examine the hypothesis that East German union members are strongly individualistic, instrumental and passive with regard to participation in collective activities; second, to test a selection of social psychological theories of willingness to participate in collective action, in a post-socialist context. A survey of members of the textile union provided some initial indication that union members in East Germany do not behave in a significantly different way from their Western counterparts with regard to their willingness to become active. Regression analysis revealed two major antecedents of participation: perceived instrumentality of collective action, and union identity.

1. Introduction

The formal transformation of the socialist industrial relations system¹ of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) into a 'modern, Western-style' system took place in a very short time during the unification process of the two German states in 1990. The entire West German industrial relations system was transferred to the East: West German labour law and collective bargaining arrangements were introduced, employers' associations emerged, and the industrial branches of the central state trade union, FDGB, were taken over by their West German 'counterparts' (see Fichter 1994, 1996; Weinert 1993). Works councils (which had formerly been forbidden) emerged in several companies as a result of work-force initiatives, even before the West German Works Constitution Act (*Betriebsverfassungsgesetz*) was officially introduced. All this happened without much resistance by the East German population (e.g. Kreißig and Preusche 1994: 2).

However, seven years after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 there is growing evidence that, although the industrial relations institutions are formally in place, they do not yet function as they should according to the West German 'norm'. For example, employers' associations lack members,

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and union stewards do not yet exist in most companies. Various explanations have been suggested for these findings. It may just be that more time is needed for industrial relations practice to adapt to the Western standard (e.g. Weidenfeld and Korte 1991; Zapf 1993, 1994). This indirectly assumes 'inevitable' modernization process in East Germany in a predetermined direction (i.e. adaptation to the West). It may also be due to the gravity of economic problems faced by the industrial relations institutions in the East, and for which they are not properly equipped (e.g. Jander and Lutz 1993; Kädler and Lottwitz 1992, 1994; Mahnkopf 1992). Or it might be due to the different backgrounds and socialization of the social actors and/or their current strategies (e.g. Koch 1992; Mahnkopf 1991).

Current research on the transformation of industrial relations is pre-occupied with macro and meso (institutional) changes, for example with the emergence and institutionalization of works councils (e.g. Jander and Lutz 1991; Kädler and Kottwitz 1994; Kreißig and Preusche 1992). The micro or actor level of employees has been largely neglected so far. (Exceptions are Andretta *et al.* 1994 and Alt *et al.* 1993.) This is especially true for trade union research, a field which in Germany is by tradition biased towards the analysis of institutions. But a discussion that focuses entirely on the 'institutionalization' of industrial relations is not very fruitful. According to Jacoby (1994), for institutional change to be effective and enduring, it needs to be accepted and supported by social actors rather than decreed by policy-makers alone. Besides, works councillors, union officials and managers are not the only relevant actors in this transformation: employees are too. Their attitudes and behaviour must therefore be taken into account if we are truly to understand transformation processes. This seems to be especially true for the establishment and functioning of unions in the post-socialist economy, as a result of the dramatic changes in union-membership relations (from membership of a socialist 'service station' to membership of a modern interest institution). Some statements in the recent literature on East Germany also acknowledge this fact. Mostly, East German union members are considered reluctant to engage in union activities of all kinds, which is seen as a major problem for the (West) German unions (e.g. Armingeon 1991; Lippold *et al.* 1992; Mahnkopf 1992; Neubauer 1992). According to Mahnkopf (1992: 35), 'there is only a small number of members who have an emotional relationship to the union, who identify with the content of union policies and are willing to participate in active and "self-responsible" collective action'. The increasing withdrawal from membership,² and the apparent lack of commitment and participation of members, are interpreted as signs of an individualistic, instrumental membership, which is qualitatively different from its Western counterparts. However, these accounts are simply assertions which have rarely been examined either theoretically or empirically.

This paper focuses on union members' attitudes and behaviour towards the newly established interest institutions, i.e. works councils and unions. Specifically, it examines why East German members do or do not become

active union and/or works councils participants. The purpose of this paper is two-fold. First, it aims to contribute to the understanding of members' attitudes and behaviour during the period of transformation. To this end, I consider whether East German union members are strongly individualistic, instrumental and passive with regard to participation in collective activities, perhaps as a result of their socialist background and/or their specific experiences during the transformation so far. Secondly, the study aimed to test a selection of social psychological theories associated with the willingness to participate in collective activities in a post-socialist context. A major question therefore is whether the supposed passivity of East German union members is reflected in a highly instrumental and individualistic decision-making process.

2. Theories of union membership and participation

In recent years, trade unions and researchers in the Anglo-Saxon countries (though not in Germany) have become increasingly interested in the attitudes and behaviour of union members, i.e. in why people join a union, stay in membership and participate in union activities. Studies of participation commonly focus on a number of quantifiable indices, such as attending meetings, voting in union elections, filing grievances or participating in collective action (e.g. strikes, go-slow, sabotage, demonstrations). A number of possible predictors have been put forward, including demographic and personality variables, job-related factors, union-related factors, non-work factors and structural factors. Many of the independent variables, such as age, gender, job status, job attitudes and size of the company, have either very weak or inconsistent associations with measures of participation and lack a clear body of theory, justifying their inclusion on no grounds other than that they are proxies for more fundamental arguments (Gallagher and Strauss 1991; Kelly and Kelly 1992; Klandermans 1986; Kolchin and Hyclak 1984; Nicholson *et al.* 1981). Sociologists and social psychologists have instead focused on four major approaches to participation in collective (i.e. union or works council) activities: theories of rational choice, social identity, attribution and frustration-aggression.

These approaches have been discussed in the literature as alternative disciplinary perspectives and have resulted in studies that differ in the participation as well as the antecedent measures used (see Kuruvilla *et al.* 1990: 375). This study tests the potential applicability of these theories to a post-socialist context, and in particular whether they can explain the apparent passivity of East German union members.

Rational Choice Theory

Rational choice theory is associated with Olson's theory of collective action (1971). It focuses on the individual worker and proposes that individuals are

calculating actors who attempt, within the bounds of rationality, to judge the potential costs and benefits of various lines of action. A major consequence is that they will participate in collective action only if they believe that their union (or their works council) is instrumental in achieving important work-related outcomes (see Barling *et al.* 1992: 109; Klandermans 1986). However, as Newton and McFarlane Shore (1992) state, there is a lack of adequate research on the determinants of instrumentality and its construct validity. Some authors refer to the 'instrumentality of trade unions' (DeCotiis and LeLouarn 1981), or the 'functionality of union activities' (Spinrad 1980), others to the 'perceived influence of unions' (Glick *et al.* 1977), or the 'perceived value and effectiveness of unions' (Anderson 1979; Kolchin and Hyclak 1984; McShane 1986). A broader related concept is that of 'union satisfaction' (Glick *et al.* 1977; Fiorito *et al.* 1988). Finally, Klandermans (e.g. 1986) emphasizes, among other instrumentality variables, workers' perceptions of the instrumentality of the collective action as such.

There is no specific German literature on union members' or workers' perceptions of the instrumentality of work councils. It will be argued however that the concept of union instrumentality is applicable to the works council, being the major form of interest representation at shop-floor and company level.⁵

As applied to the post-socialist situation in East Germany, several explanations of alleged worker 'passivity' are possible. Unions might not be perceived as instrumental in securing members' interests. In the socialist regime, unions performed completely different tasks compared with most Western unions. They were primarily 'transmission belts' between the party state and work-force, and were 'schools for socialism' (Lenin) rather than representative bodies of worker interests (see Freeman 1993; Héthy 1991). Because of its focus on production (raising labour productivity), the socialist union was unwilling or unable to represent workers' interests against management: strikes and conflict were forbidden and were condemned on ideological grounds. Workers therefore had to rely on themselves or on informal networks (e.g. their work-groups) to pursue their interests at shop-floor level (see Heidenreich 1991; Voskamp and Wittke 1991). However, although union membership was voluntary, most people were in the union and density was around 98%. The major reason for this high level was almost certainly that unions provided various welfare functions. All the workers in a case study that I carried out earlier⁴ mentioned access to a holiday resort as the major, and in most cases the only, reason for their having been in the union. With this background in mind, it seems that it will take some time for the new unions in East Germany to convince workers of their changed function (e.g. of the union's representative role).

With regard to the newly established works councils in East Germany, it has been argued that they do not yet function according to West German 'norms' because the economic problems of the enterprises restrict their capacity to represent workers' interests (e.g. Jander and Lutz 1991;

Mahnkopf 1992). Consequently, workers might be sceptical of the merits of this new institution. Alternatively, workers might not see voluntary collective action as instrumental because they have no experience of such action. Collective action in the former GDR was mostly directed and organized from above, although workers did have some bargaining power at shop-floor level because of labour shortages, and used this in informal negotiations with their supervisors (see Kern and Land 1991; Voskamp and Wittke 1991). Finally, workers might perceive the costs of participation as being too high (in the face of job insecurity) and the likely gains too small.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory (e.g. Tajfel 1982; Tajfel and Turner 1986) emphasizes the embeddedness of individuals in social groups and the influence on their behaviour of intergroup relations. Social identity is defined as the 'individual's awareness that he or she belongs to a certain social group, together with the evaluative and emotional significance of that membership' (Kelly and Kelly 1994: 4).⁵ The theory has two fundamental tenets. One is a proposed positive relationship between levels of ingroup identification and intergroup differentiation (Hinkle and Brown 1990; Kelly 1993: 60). Thus, individuals want to achieve a positive social identity (since this contributes to positive self-esteem) and this is achieved by demonstrating 'positive ingroup distinctiveness' through engaging in social comparisons with outgroups (Kelly and Kelly 1994: 4). In other words, social identification entails social categorization (the division of the world into manageable social units such as men and women, workers and managers, etc.), which may lead to perceptions of the outgroup in a stereotypical manner (them-us). There is evidence that a strong group identification is associated with more conflictual perceptions of 'us' and 'them' (e.g. Kelly 1993: 67). It follows that strong 'them-us' feelings will lead to a strong willingness to participate in collective action (e.g. Kelly and Nicholson 1980; Stagner and Efla 1982).

The other tenet of this theory is that strong group identification facilitates participation in collective action by promoting shared perceptions within the ingroup concerning the desirability and possibility of social change (Kelly 1993: 77; also Triandis *et al.* 1988). In the union context, this proposes that the more people identify with their union (social group), the more willing they are to participate in collective activity. (Cf. the literature on the concept of union commitment, e.g. Fullagar and Barlin 1987, 1989; Fukami and Larson 1984; Gordon *et al.* 1980, 1984; Gordon and Ladd 1990.)⁶

Applied to the East German situation, the theory would suggest that low participation arises from weak identification with the union. Weak union identification, in turn, might have arisen because of workers' dissatisfaction with the former socialist trade unions or because they now identify strongly with their enterprise and its management. Alternatively, it has been argued that East Germans are currently faced with multi-dimensional identity crises not only in their private but also in their working lives (e.g. Belwe 1992;

Maaz 1991; Rottenburg 1992). It is argued that the rapid unification of the two states meant a sudden and complete loss of formerly secure and stable personal and professional identities, material and social positions and ideological beliefs. For example, at their workplace East Germans have witnessed a dissolution of the former close work-community based on cohesive work-groups, long job tenure and on the social functions of the socialist enterprises.

Attribution Theory

Attribution theory (e.g. Heider 1958; Kelley and Michela 1980; Weiner 1985) is concerned with the ways in which people try to explain the behaviour of individuals and, more generally, events in their own social environment (Klandermans *et al.* 1991: 52). Attribution is defined as an explanation for an event or action in terms of reason, causes or both (Kelly 1996: ch. 5). A basic assumption is that, in order to make sense of the world, people will make judgements about the causes of behaviour or events. It is conventional to classify attributions along three dimensions: personal (internal) *v.* situational (external) causes, stable *v.* unstable factors, and controllable *v.* uncontrollable factors (Hewstone 1988: ch. 3). The theory then argues that each attribution has different consequences for future behaviour. For example, external and controllable attribution of workplace problems leads to mobilization, i.e. collective action (e.g. Feree and Miller 1985), whereas internal attribution could lead to fatalism or individual action (Kelly 1996: ch. 5; Klandermans *et al.* 1991: 55).

In the post-socialist context, attribution theory raises the question as to whether workers attribute their problems to themselves (e.g. 'I do not work hard enough, therefore I will be dismissed') or to external factors (e.g. controllable, such as 'the current economic crisis', or uncontrollable, such as 'unqualified management'). According to Stratemann (1993: 16), external, situational attribution (which also means delegating responsibility to external authorities) has been the prevalent form of attribution in the GDR ('the system is to be blamed'), and it is therefore likely that this will continue to be the case for some time. In other words, this theory would consequently expect a rather high level of collective action, and cannot support the picture of the passive, lethargic 'Ossi' (East German).

Frustration-Aggression Theory

Frustration-aggression theory sees participation as a reaction to frustration, dissatisfaction or alienation in the work situation (Klandermans 1986: 1990; Mielke *et al.* 1979, Wheeler 1983). People are defined as systems striving for equilibrium so that, if the equilibrium is disturbed, they attempt to restore it. An obvious example is 'job dissatisfaction'. It is argued that it is the unfavourable gap between what people feel they are entitled to and what, in fact, they receive that encourages activism. Yet, the evidence is divided as to

whether satisfied workers are less active than their dissatisfied colleagues (as frustration-aggression theory would predict), or more active (see Kelly and Kelly 1992: 3; Nicholson *et al.* 1981). Since workers in East Germany have experienced tremendous changes in their work organization (new payment systems, personnel policies, work organization and technology, etc.), there may be considerable scope for feelings of frustration or dissatisfaction.

It seems that all these approaches may contribute something to an understanding of the assumed reluctance of East German workers to engage in collective activities, and are therefore worth testing. However, it is rare for a set of theories to be tested simultaneously. In addition, attribution theory has rarely been tested at all. (An exception is Hartley *et al.* (1991), regarding attribution for job insecurity.) Most recent social psychological studies have concentrated either on union identity (e.g. Kelly and Kelly 1994) or on instrumentality (e.g. Klandermans 1984), although a few studies have tested 'union identity' and 'instrumentality' together and come up with mixed results (e.g. Fullagar and Barling 1989; Guest and Dewe 1988; Kelly and Kelly 1993, 1994; Kuruvilla *et al.* 1990). Fullagar and Barling argued that union identity and instrumentality both have a significant impact on participation, with instrumentality moderating the impact of identity. Klandermans (1992: 191) argued that instrumentality, commitment and social integration in the union have a 'mutually reinforcing effect on sustained participation', but this hypothesis has yet to be tested. Guest and Dewe (1988) found that instrumentality was the main correlate of continued union membership, but the study suffered from inadequate measurement of the two independent variables (e.g. union identity was operationalized as 'father's occupation', 'vocational education' and 'perceptions of social inequalities in UK'), while the dependent variable was not 'participation' but 'staying' in the union. Kelly and Kelly (1994) tested Klandermans's expectancy value theory and social identity theory and showed that union identity was the crucial determinant of participation. Finally, Kuruvilla *et al.*'s study (1990) of union members in Japan found union and work-group identity to be more strongly correlated with participation than was union instrumentality.

In short, this study aims primarily to test the application of these theories in a new cultural context and to explore their relative explanatory power in relation to collective participation. It is hypothesized that no theory provides an adequate explanation on its own, and that the theories are complementary rather than competing.

3. Method

The survey was carried out in 53 randomly selected textile firms across the bargaining region of the South East branch of the German textile union, GTB (Gewerkschaft für Textil und Bekleidung). The union branch covers

the largest part of East Germany and includes the traditional textile cities in Saxony. At the time of the study (summer 1994), this union area comprised 385 textile and clothing firms with 28,070 employees, out of which 14,425 were union members. This results in a union density of 48.2% (GTB Information, 1994). Most of the firms were privatized—only 13% were still owned by the state privatization agency, Treuhand.

The textile industry was selected for several reasons. This industrial sector was severely affected by unification and subsequent exposure to the world market (which led to a dramatic reduction of employment⁷), and is therefore representative of most East German industry (see Kùchle and Volkmann 1993). Additionally, it is a sector that has rarely been examined in studies of union membership behaviour.

The Questionnaire Survey

The questionnaire⁸ was distributed through the union machinery and works councils to union members. There were 440 completed questionnaires returned, which gives a response rate of approximately 40%. The sample contained 70% females, 25% present or past works council members, 8% union officials and 75% blue-collar workers; 17% declared themselves as formerly active union members. The sample slightly under-represents women textile workers and slightly over-represents works council members and union officials. I have no information on the representativeness of the age distribution for textile companies in this area.⁹ All questions were answered on five-point Likert scales. The four antecedents (collective instrumentality, social identity, attribution, and job dissatisfaction) were measured by multi-item scales, and factor analysis was used to test the validity of the assumed variables.¹⁰ A selection of the items is presented in Tables 1–7 below.

The questionnaire comprises six topics:

1. The dependent variable, *willingness to participate*¹¹ in union and works council activities (together called collective activities), was measured by a multi-item index adapted from Kelly and Kelly (1992, 1993), distinguishing two generic forms of participation: (i) self-initiated union activities (Kelly and Kelly call them 'difficult' forms), such as standing for election for the works council, recruiting new members or working in a union committee; and (ii) participation in organized collective action such as strikes or demonstrations (organized by the institution) (in Kelly and Kelly terms, 'easy' forms). There is a debate as to whether participation is a uni- or a multi-dimensional construct (see Barling *et al.* 1992; McShane 1986). Factor analysis¹² produced a six-item scale and supported the proposed distinction between self-initiated and organized participation (but did not differentiate between union and works council activities). The two measures were utilized, although Kuruvilla *et al.* (1990) noted the danger of using overly specific dimensions of participation in countries where not much research has been done on these issues.

2. The first independent variable, *collective instrumentality*, was divided into instrumentality of unions, works councils and collective action. It was thus tested as a multi-dimensional concept. Items referred to workers' perceptions of the works council and of the union in general (e.g. do we need works councils at all?) and to their evaluation of their current work with regard to specific issues such as job security, work load and pay (e.g. works council policies on overtime pay, or their achievements in negotiating job security). This conceptual distinction between general and specific perceptions of collective institutions was introduced in a study by Deshpande and Fiorito (1989).¹³ Additionally, several items asked about the perceived utility of sporadic collective actions such as strikes during collective bargaining. Factor analysis failed to produce a clear distinction between union and works council instrumentality and instead created a factor based on 'general' perceptions (three items) and another based on 'specific' perceptions (four items). A third factor relates to the instrumentality of collective action (two items).

3. *Social identity* was measured by three factors: union identity, work-group identity, and them-us feelings. The union identity items were adapted from Kelly and Kelly (1993) and Kelloway *et al.* (1992). The work-group identity items incorporated identification with the work-group as well as general collectivist attitudes (e.g. 'I prefer to work in groups than alone'), and were taken from Brown *et al.* (1986) and Kelly and Kelly (1993). The items on current and former (in retrospect) them-us feelings were adopted from Grant (1992) and Kelly and Kelly (1992). Factor analysis produced one factor for union identity (four items), and two factors for work-group identity: (specific) group identity (three items), and collectivist attitudes (three items). Them-us feelings yielded two factors: current (two items) and former them-us feelings (two items).

4. *Attribution* was operationalized with regard to three actual work-place grievances,¹⁴ work-load, pay (lower pay level than their Western counterparts) and job security; and respondents were asked about their internal and external attributions for these problems (thus simplifying the conventional classification—see above). For example, are the current job losses due to uncompetitive products, incompetent managers or an unproductive labour force? Factor analysis on the external attribution items revealed just one factor (three items), while for internal attribution two factors were created, one referring to attribution to poor individual effort (two items), and the other to the lack of solidarity among workers (two items).

5. The last antecedent, *frustration-aggression* theory, was measured in terms of job dissatisfaction. Factor analysis revealed two factors, general job dissatisfaction today (compared with former times) (two items), and specific job dissatisfaction with regard to the three grievances, pay, job insecurity and work-load (three items).

6. Finally, respondents were asked to supply some background information about themselves, i.e. age, gender, works council membership, job title (blue/white-collar) and seniority. Except for seniority (which yielded the

same distribution as age), all these demographic variables were included in the analysis, although as mentioned above there is no clear body of underlying theory. Looking at possible gender differences might be interesting in a post-socialist context as a testing ground for the assumed equalization effects of former socialist gender policies ('equal opportunities'). With regard to age, it might be worthwhile to investigate a generational impact, i.e. whether younger workers, who did not experience the old system, are more individualistic and instrumental than older ones. And finally, works council membership and job title were included because councillors and blue-collar workers represented a substantial proportion of the sample and could have biased the results.

4. Results

Three issues were investigated. The level of union members' willingness to participate in collective activities and the level of the four predictors of participation were investigated via frequency distribution. The purpose was to examine whether East German union members are strongly individualistic, instrumental and passive with regard to collective activities and their interest institutions, and also to investigate their general response to organizational changes at work-place level and changes in work-place relations during the recent transformation. Lastly, the significance and importance of the four predictors were tested on both types of participation via regression analysis.

The Willingness to Participate in Collective Activities

The frequency distributions of the items making up the two participation factors (Table 1) revealed an unexpectedly 'high' level of willingness to join organized activities (such as strikes), and a relatively low inclination to engage in self-initiated activities. More precisely, the engagement of self-initiated activities was much lower in absolute terms compared with organized participation.

The strong willingness to participate in organized activities such as strikes, demonstrations or works council assemblies (which take place during working time) challenges the popular notion of East Germans as being passive and reluctant to strike (e.g. Fichter 1996; Mahnkopf 1992; Woderich 1992), particularly bearing in mind that the textile sector is female-dominated and traditionally non-militant. The results are similar to those obtained in studies of West German workers such as Wiedenhofer (1979: 45), who found that 60% of union members in the West German food industry said they would participate in a strike. In a representative multi-sector sample of West German union members (Krieger 1989: 127), 42% said they were willing to join a demonstration and 34% were willing to participate in a strike.

TABLE 1
Levels of Organized and Self-initiated Participation (%)

	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>No view</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>N</i>
<i>Organized participation</i>						
If the GTB called a strike I would participate.	9.7	9.0	18.4	17.7	45.3	424
I would take part in demonstrations and rallies during collective bargaining.	7.5	12.7	20.9	26.4	32.5	416
I will attend the next works council assembly.	6.9	1.4	11.2	5.5	74.9	418
<i>Self-initiated participation</i>						
If asked I would have stood for the works council election.	26.6	18.2	17.7	12.4	25.1	418
If asked I would serve on a committee for the GTB.	40.4	19.2	22.6	10.1	7.7	416
I constantly try to recruit new members for the union.	35.6	19.5	18.0	16.1	10.7	410
I do not see myself as a union activist.	9.4	11.1	9.9	34.5	35.0	414

With regard to the more 'difficult' self-initiated forms of participation, less than 40% said they would stand for works council election, 17% would serve on a union committee, and 25% would try to recruit new members on a constant basis. In addition, 20% saw themselves as union activists. (See DGB Trendbarometer 1994 and Weischer 1993 for similar results from East and West Germany.) There are similar data from other Western countries (see Brett 1980; Van de Vall 1970). This last question can be also used as an indicator of how far people's own perceptions of activism correlate with the survey's willingness-to-participate measurements, and a significant correlation of 0.30 was found.

*Instrumentality, Social Identity, Attribution and Job Dissatisfaction*¹⁵

(a) Collective instrumentality

The three separate factors of collective instrumentality provided different results and underlined the multi-dimensionality of the concept (Table 2). The works council was widely perceived as a necessary institution, a fact that could indicate its successful institutionalization. (Unfortunately, the same question was not asked about the union.) The comparison between the BGL and the works council received more divided answers, with almost 50% saying that the works council was better. People were less sure about the works councils' effectiveness in dealing with specific shop-floor issues (pay, job security, work-load). Union effectiveness on the shop-floor was perceived even more negatively, but collective action as such was considered to be highly effective.

TABLE 2
Levels of Selected Items of Collective Instrumentality (%)

	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>No view</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>N</i>
<i>General instrumentality of works council</i>						
We don't need a works council since management cares enough for us.	71.1	18.2	2.8	5.7	2.1	422
The BGL [shop-floor branch of socialist union] represented my interests better than today's works council/union.	28.0	22.5	13.3	27.5	8.8	422
<i>Specific instrumentality of works council/union</i>						
The works council does not oppose management strategies enough [to secure jobs].	18.3	22.6	9.5	29.3	20.2	420
The GTB is not doing enough to secure the adjustment of East German wage levels.	7.5	10.8	9.2	25.9	46.6	425
<i>Instrumentality of collective action</i>						
Works council and GTB will be effective only if they get active support from the workers.	5.0	6.0	6.0	20.1	62.9	418
Strikes are an effective means of strengthening the union during collective bargaining.	7.3	8.7	10.4	28.9	44.7	425

(b) *Social identity*

TABLE 3
Levels of Selected Items of Social Identity (%)

	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>No view</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>N</i>
<i>Union identity</i>						
I share the aims and values of the union.	5.4	6.1	13.2	44.9	30.4	408
Union solidarity is very important for me.	4.6	3.9	11.2	32.8	47.4	411
I feel a sense of pride in being a member of the GTB.	9.2	18.2	15.8	35.7	21.1	412
I feel strong ties with the other union members [in my plant].	11.7	19.6	22.7	31.1	14.9	409
<i>Collectivism</i>						
I accept group decisions even if I have a different opinion.	4.2	5.2	5.7	50.4	34.5	403
I feel increasingly isolated in my group.	42.1	26.7	7.9	15.8	7.4	433
In the old days group solidarity was much better.	9.3	7.8	3.2	20.8	58.9	409

<i>Work-group identity</i>						
I prefer to work in groups than alone.	13.3	11.8	6.1	24.3	44.5	407
I identify strongly with my group.	17.7	9.8	17.2	31.1	24.2	396
<i>Current them-us feelings</i>						
Today I don't have any trust in my supervisors.	7.0	12.0	10.8	43.7	26.5	426
Today workers are exploited here.	6.8	5.6	5.4	27.9	54.3	427
<i>Former them-us feelings</i>						
In the socialist enterprise workers were not exploited.	10.9	20.6	5.9	40.4	22.2	423
In the old times you could still trust your supervisors.	14.8	22.2	9.8	42.4	10.8	427

Overall, the evidence in Table 3 revealed a strong positive union and work-group identity, and also strong collectivist attitudes. However, the question on work-group solidarity showed a more pessimistic picture, with 80% arguing that solidarity was better before 1989. Moreover, there was also a strong degree of them-us feelings today in contrast to former times (formerly trustful relations to management).

(c) *Attribution*

TABLE 4
Levels of Selected Items of External and Internal Attribution (%)

	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>No view</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>N</i>
<i>External attribution</i>						
Politicians are causing lower wage levels [compared with West Germany].	1.2	0.9	4.0	7.3	86.7	427
There is a lack of support from Treuhand [privatization agency] and politicians for the textile industry [which accounts for many job losses].	4.0	2.9	12.8	10.2	70.1	421
East German employers take advantage of the current labour market situation [therefore pay level is not equal to that of West Germany].	5.7	5.2	10.4	21.3	57.2	423
<i>Internal attribution</i>						
Not enough effort from the workers [which accounts for the job losses].	51.3	18.9	6.7	19.4	3.6	417
The work-force does not offer enough resistance to management's strategies [in terms of work-pace].	5.2	10.1	3.5	30.4	50.7	424

Overall, there was a high degree of attribution to external factors such as politicians and management (Table 3). Only a few attributed their work

problems internally to their lack of work effort or to the lack of solidarity among the work-force. The data did not tell us, however, whether externalizing is a new 'strategy' or a continuation of old habits. It could also be interpreted as a reaction to the current perception of helplessness within the transformation process.

(d) *Job dissatisfaction*

TABLE 5
Levels of Selected Items of Job Dissatisfaction (%)

	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>No view</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>N</i>
All in all, our work situation is better today than in the former socialist enterprise.	31.4	34.0	4.7	26.7	3.3	424
'Capitalist' enterprises treat their employees more fairly than former 'socialist' enterprises did.	39.8	36.1	9.4	12.4	2.3	427
I am dissatisfied with how hard I have to work now.	14.2	18.0	5.2	32.5	30.1	422
I am paid a fair wage.	65.7	19.2	3.5	8.4	3.3	428
I am constantly worried about losing my job.	7.0	7.7	3.3	22.1	60.0	430

Overall job satisfaction, whether 'general' in comparison with former times or 'specific' with regard to particular job issues and pay, was extremely low (Table 5). Similar negative data, although not to such an extreme, were reported from case studies in the East German chemical and metal industries by Andretta *et al.* (1994).

The Determinants of Willingness to Participate

Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations were computed for all variables, and these are displayed in Table 6.

TABLE 6
Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations for all variables
(a) Means and standard deviations

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>N</i>
1. Self-initiated participation	2.01	0.90	420
2. Organized participation	2.82	0.71	427
3. Specific (negative) instrumentality of works council/union	2.57	0.75	432
4. No necessity for works council	1.32	0.57	423
5. Instrumentality of collective action	2.71	0.59	430
6. Union identity	2.79	0.68	418
7. Collectivism	2.70	0.65	408
8. Work-group identity	2.83	0.73	405
9. Former trust	2.59	0.84	428
10. Current them-us	3.02	0.61	430
11. External attribution	3.03	0.56	432
12. Internal attribution (effort)	1.23	0.60	421
13. Internal attribut. (solidarity)	2.86	0.75	429
14. General job satisfaction	1.82	0.84	429
15. Specific job dissatisfaction	2.51	0.60	431
16. Gender	1.25	0.43	403
17. Blue/white-collar	1.20	0.40	405
18. Works council membership	1.74	0.44	404
19. Age	2.57	0.96	404

(b) Intercorrelations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
1. Self-initiated participation	0.030**																		
2. Organized participation																			
3. Specific (negative instrumentality of union/wc. council	-0.08	0.05																	
4. No necessity for works council	-0.16**	-0.13**	0.14**																
5. Instrumentality of collective action	0.18**	0.37**	-0.02	-0.15**															
6. Union identity	0.36**	0.29**	-0.14**	-0.17**	0.28**														
7. Collectivism	0.17**	0.18**	0.06	-0.04	0.17**	0.26**													
8. Work-group identity	0.02	-0.06	-0.13**	-0.03	0.02	0.13**	0.19**												
9. Former trust	0.07	0.06	-0.02	0.13**	0.04	0.11*	0.05	-0.07											
10. Current them-us	0.01	0.11*	0.21**	-0.08	0.01	0.03	0.00	-0.04	0.14**										
11. External attribution	0.14**	0.19**	0.27**	-0.12*	0.19**	0.10*	0.07	-0.06	0.09	0.21**									
12. Internal attribution (effort)	-0.05	-0.23**	-0.03	0.09	-0.05	-0.02	-0.12*	-0.05	0.05	-0.25**	-0.13**								
13. Internal attribution (solidarity)	-0.02	-0.01	0.36**	-0.04	0.09	0.07	0.05	-0.03	0.03	0.20**	0.29**	0.10*							
14. General job satisfaction	-0.06	-0.11*	-0.08	0.06	-0.09	-0.10	-0.03	0.02	-0.21**	-0.16**	-0.21**	0.14**	-0.16**						
15. Specific job dissatisfaction	0.12*	0.12*	0.21**	0.00	0.13**	0.09	0.06	-0.12*	0.15	0.18**	0.26**	0.04	0.24**	-0.20**					
16. Gender	0.14**	-0.08	-0.09	-0.09	0.05	-0.04	-0.06	0.05	-0.19**	-0.07	-0.01	-0.03	-0.12*	0.12*	-0.18**				
17. Blue/white-collar	0.05	-0.07	-0.11*	-0.15**	0.05	0.06	-0.05	0.03	0.01	-0.13**	-0.01	0.14**	0.06	0.00	-0.12*	-0.01			
18. Works council membership	-0.39**	-0.10*	0.18**	0.19**	-0.05	-0.12*	-0.03	-0.01	0.07	-0.06	-0.03	0.10	0.08	0.02	0.08	-0.14**	0.01		
19. Age	0.09	0.07	0.09	0.07	0.10	0.20**	0.06	0.04	0.07	-0.04	0.09	-0.09	0.08	-0.04	0.03	0.05	0.20**	0.02	

Multiple regression analysis was conducted for both forms of prospective participation, and all the above antecedents were entered as independent variables; the results are shown in Table 7, along with the hypothesized direction of the relationships between antecedents and dependent variables.

TABLE 7
Predicting Self-Initiated and Organized Participation in the Union and Works Council:
Standardized Regression Coefficients

Independent variable	Hypothesized direction	Self-initiated participation		Organized participation	
		Sig T	Beta	Sig T	Beta
Specific (negative) instrumentality of works council/union	-	0.648	-0.026	0.528	0.036
General (negative) instrumentality of works council (no necessity)	-	0.531	-0.032	0.577	-0.029
Instrumentality of collective action	+	0.030	0.110*	0.000	0.346**
Union identity	+	0.000	0.227**	0.001	0.180**
Collectivism	+	0.265	0.057	0.165	0.071
Work-group identity	+	0.510	-0.032	0.046	-0.099*
Former trust	+	0.969	0.002	0.754	-0.016
Current them-us	+	0.312	-0.054	0.586	-0.029
External attribution	+	0.123	0.086	0.045	0.112*
Internal attribution: lacking work effort	-	0.904	0.006	0.001	-0.180**
Internal attribution: lacking solidarity	-	0.765	-0.016	0.200	-0.071
General job satisfaction	-	0.578	0.029	0.779	0.015
Specific job dissatisfaction	+	0.012	0.133*	0.903	0.006
Gender (1=female, 2=male)		0.005	0.140**	0.291	-0.052
Blue/white-collar (1=blue, 2=white)		0.605	0.026	0.532	-0.032
Works council member (1=yes, 2=no)	-	0.000	-0.338**	0.142	-0.073
Age		0.857	-0.009	0.749	-0.016

* = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$.

Self-initiated participation: R^2 (adj.) = 0.27 (standard error = 0.76), residual = 322 cases, $F = 8.45692$ (sig. $F = 0.000$);

Organized participation: R^2 (adj.) = 0.26; (standard error = 0.59), residual = 322 cases, $F = 8.15402$ (sig. $F = 0.000$).

Self-Initiated Participation

Five major antecedents emerged. Males, high union identifiers, works council members, people with strong (specific) job dissatisfaction and those with a belief in the instrumentality of collective action were more likely to say they would participate in self-initiated activities. These findings are consistent with the theories of social identity, frustration-aggression and rational choice. They also support the common thesis of women's 'double burden' (paid work and domestic work) preventing their engagement in more time-consuming activities. However, there was no support for attribution theory or for the variables work-group identity, collectivism and them-us feelings.¹⁶ In addition, general job satisfaction, age and job status had no predictive power.

Organized Participation

Again, five major antecedents emerged, but they were different from the correlates of self-initiated participation. The major predictor was instrumentality of collective action, although other forms of instrumentality had no significant effect. Thus, the perceived instrumentality of a strike was more important for prospective participation than the general instrumentality of collective institutions. Union and group identity were both significant antecedents, but collectivism and them-us feelings were not. External and internal attributions were significant. Frustration-aggression theory (job dissatisfaction) was not supported, which might be explained by the fact that strikes or demonstrations are not the usual type of reaction to workplace problems in German industrial relations. None of the demographic variables had a significant impact. Women might have little time to engage regularly in union affairs (self-initiated participation), but this is not the case for sporadic events.

5. Discussion

The frequency distributions challenge the popular assumption in some of the literature that union members in East Germany have strongly individualistic, instrumental and passive attitudes towards collective interest representation.

With regard to the level of participation, the data show that East German members are more readily mobilized for selective collective actions than for continuous voluntary commitments, which seems to be in line with Western experience. The different results for self-initiated and organized collective action support the hypothesis that participation is best thought of as a multi-dimensional concept. The major result, however, is the finding that levels of willingness to participate seem no lower among East Germans than among their West German counterparts. This raises the question as to whether union members' participation patterns in post-socialist societies are in fact significantly different from those in the West, especially in industrial sectors hit by recession and restructuring. However, it might be argued that the correlation between willingness to become active and actual behaviour is much more loose in the East than in Western societies. East Germans might think they should participate (because of group norms, former socialization to be an obedient citizen, etc.), but nevertheless might not actually do so, unless there were very strong social pressure. On the other side, there is evidence of some actual collective action in this union district. There were a few union actions two months before the fieldwork, and one year later (in autumn 1995) the union branch went on a token strike for the first time in its history.

With regard to the level of the independent variables, there was support for the hypotheses derived from frustration-aggression theory and the

attribution theory. There was strong job dissatisfaction among workers because of the tremendous changes in company ownership, organizational structure, work organization and workplace relations. Moreover, many employees attributed their workplace problems to external factors, which suggests that it takes a long time to change people's attitudinal and behavioural habits. (See also Brähler and Richter 1995 and Marz 1993 for similar data on East German workers.)

There were also interesting findings related to rational choice theory and social identity theory. First, neither unions nor works councils were perceived as very effective with regard to specific issues, although the works council was generally accepted as an important institution. On the other hand, the positive perception of the instrumentality of collective action questions the argument of some literature that East Germans lack experience in 'voluntary' collective action and therefore cannot perceive it as an effective means to pursue their interests. It also challenges the hypothesis of the 'individualized' East German union member. It might be that workers still remember informal group actions from before 1989 and therefore regard collective action by the work-force as instrumental. One might conclude that, although workers perceive the necessity of works councils, they still prefer to rely on themselves to represent their interests rather than use the now institutional procedures. In other words, informal interest representation through collective action might not yet have been displaced by formal institutions, although some interplay of informal and formal interest representation is also possible (as commonly happens in West Germany—see Morgenroth *et al.* 1994: 90).

Second, the data revealed a strong degree of identification with the union and with work colleagues. Thus, the postulated East German 'identity crisis' does not seem to have affected this sample, even though they also perceived worker solidarity as decreasing (see also Deutschmann and Warneken 1991). This latter finding does not necessarily imply that 'objectively' solidarity was really better in socialist firms before 1989,¹⁷ or that workers are becoming more individualistic regarding workplace relations. Indeed, it may be that they feel the decline of solidarity so strongly only because they still strongly identify with their work colleagues. However, it has to be emphasized that this is not a longitudinal study, and thus we cannot say anything definite about possible changes in attitudes over time.

Third, the presence of strong 'them-us' feelings among the work-force raises the question as to whether this is a new phenomenon or a continuation from former times. The data suggest that it emerged during the transformation (either through privatization, i.e. 'expropriation' of workers' ownership of means of production, or through the interplay of structural factors and management strategies). However, this fact does not preclude the possibility of a similar division between the two groups, i.e. workers and management, prior to the transformation.

Finally, with regard to the determinants of willingness to participate, it was found that organized participation was explained mainly by the

perceived instrumentality of collective action, and to a lesser extent by union identity and attribution. Self-initiated participation, on the other hand, was explained mainly by union identity and works council membership. The fact that the two types of participation had different predictors gives further support to the proposal that participation is a multi-dimensional construct. The fact that union identity was associated with self-initiated participation, i.e. with the more 'difficult' form of participation, whereas instrumentality of collective action was the major determinant of activities such as strikes and demonstrations, seems understandable. A temporary event such as a strike, with more 'visible' costs, is more likely to provoke cost-benefit calculations than ongoing collective engagements. In sum, therefore, no single theory has encompassing predictive power, which is in line with our expectations. Moreover, social identity and collective instrumentality are highly interrelated. They are highly correlated with each other (see Table 6), and two additional regression analyses (with each of the two being the dependent variable) showed that each was the most important predictor of the other.¹⁸ Both have a mutually reinforcing effect on participation, rather than one playing the leading role as has been suggested in some previous research (e.g. Klandermans 1995; Newton and McFarlane Shore 1992).

6. Conclusion

Overall, the present study provides us with three major results. First, it seems possible and fruitful to apply 'Western' theories of union participation to a post-socialist context despite the differences between post-socialist societies and Western capitalist societies. This point echoes the positive findings of Kuruvilla *et al.* (1990) in applying 'Western' theories to Japanese union members. Second, the data give some initial indication that union members in East Germany do not behave in a significantly different way from their Western counterparts, with regard to their willingness to participate in collective activities, although further comparative research is certainly needed to substantiate this point. In addition, one gets the impression that the postulated crisis of people's social identities in the former East Germany has been exaggerated, since union members do feel a strong sense of belonging to their work-group and to their union. Lastly, the analysis also contributes to the theoretical debate on collective action. Testing four major theories of sustained participation illustrated the significance of two major antecedents, 'union identity' and 'instrumentality of collective action', while also showing lesser support for theories of 'attribution' and 'job dissatisfaction'. The finding that East German union members are not exclusively guided by cost-benefit calculations in a context that makes instrumental approaches to collective activities highly probable (according to several theories outlined above) gives particular weight to the argument that the concepts of social identity and collective instrumentality

are complementary and interrelated. Union identity might influence people's perceptions of collective instrumentality, and at the same time those perceptions might have an impact on their identity. This reasoning therefore rejects the popular notion of union members as either 'rational individuals' or 'social beings': they might well be both at the same time.

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Notes

1. The term 'socialism' is used rather than 'communism' as this is the common terminology used in the GDR.
2. For example, during 1992 membership in the East dropped by some 18% to just under 3.4 million; 1993 shows a similar picture, and in 1994 membership dropped by 11% (Fichter 1994: 61; 1996: 12).
3. The German dual system of industrial relations consists of interest representation at the industrial level, which is conducted on a voluntary basis through the institutions of collective bargaining between unions and employers' associations, and also at the domestic/company level, where negotiations are conducted on a statutory basis between works councils and individual employers (see Adams and Rummel 1977; Streeck 1984, Thelen 1991).
4. I conducted several in-depths interviews with blue-collar workers, and also interviews with managers and works councillors, in one textile enterprise in Saxony during 1993-4.
5. The theory is different from related concepts, such as Klandermans's (e.g. 1995) 'social motives', based on an interactionist theory, which argues that people are influenced by significant others in their social environment. However, social behaviour can also arise out of the identification with a group as such without being directly influenced by the other group members.
6. However, union commitment is defined in a problematic way, since it comprises 'moral' and 'calculative' attachment in one factor. This means that union identity does not equate with union commitment; if anything, it resembles the concept of moral attachment or of union loyalty as utilized by some authors (Fullagar and Barling 1989; Kelloway *et al.* 1992).
7. Between 1990 and 1993 the textile industry experienced a fall in output of 72% (Statistisches Bundesamt). Of the 320,000 textile employees in 1989, only 27,000 remained in 1994 (a fall of 90%) (GTB Information).

8. The questionnaire was translated from English by the German-speaking author. Copies are available from the author.
9. 12% are under 30 years, 37% are between 30 and 40 years; 25% between 41 and 50 years and 20% are more than 50 years old.
10. The principal component method and varimax rotation were used and alpha reliabilities were calculated. Factor analysis tables are available from the author.
11. Thus, it is the willingness to participate rather than the actual behaviour that is tested. Attitude studies (qualitative or quantitative) will only be able to measure statements of willingness, and thus risk a possible divergence between intention and actual behaviour. However, there are studies that have shown a robust correlation between the two variables (e.g. Ajzen and Fishbein 1980, or Premack and Hunter 1988 for union membership), and besides, for my purposes the declaration of intention is sufficient.
12. Self-initiated participation yielded an eigenvalue of 2.41960 (40.3% of the variance), $\alpha = 0.7257$; organized participation produced an eigenvalue of 1.24642 (20.8% of the variance), $\alpha = 0.5909$; the KMO was 0.67 (middling).
13. Deshpande and Fiorito found specific attitudes of union instrumentality (e.g. about a particular union) to be more salient determinants of voting for unionization in their US sample than general attitudes about organized labour (1989: 894). General and specific attitudes are not necessarily correlated (Barling *et al.* 1992: 193).
14. Based on information obtained from interviews that I conducted earlier in an accompanying case study.
15. The frequency distributions for all items are available from the author.
16. Work-group identity, collectivism and union identity are strongly interrelated, but not them-us feelings (see Table 6). This challenges the social identity theory of an interrelation of them-us and identity. Instead, them-us was strongly correlated with attribution measures.
17. It will no doubt be necessary to investigate how strong this collectivism actually was, or whether it was not just a 'ghetto-solidarity' out of pure survival instinct which inevitably breaks down after 'liberation'.
18. Dependent variable = union identity [R^2 (adj.) = 0.21 (standard error = 0.60), residual = 323, $F = 6.72$ (sig $F = 0.000$)] instrumentality of collective action was the major significant antecedent (beta = 0.18**); dependent variable = instrumentality of collective action [R^2 (adj.) = 0.12 (standard error = 0.56), residual = 323, $F = 3.92$ (sig $F = 0.000$)] union identity was the major significant antecedent (beta = 0.20**).

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