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Institutions Matter: Union Solidarity in Hungary and East Germany

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Abstract

This study examines the extent of union solidarity in two post-communist countries, Hungary and east Germany. It tests the hypothesis that post-communist union members are sceptical and unsupportive of their new interest representation owing to a legacy of disappointing experiences with their former communist unions. A survey of the union members, the first of its kind, in the Hungarian and east German clothing industry revealed strong differences between members' attitudes in both countries: east Germans were highly committed and supportive of their new union and works councils, whereas Hungarians lacked support for their institutions. The study points to the complexities of former and current attitudes and rejects the generic use of a communist legacy thesis. Instead, it links members' attitudes to the different institutional context of interest representation in the two countries. It argues that the dual system of interest representation in Germany facilitates members' trust in their new institutions, whereas the decentralized, overlapping institutions on Hungarian shop-floors impede union solidarity.

1. Introduction

This paper analyses the relationship between institutional change and actors' reactions to such change in two former communist societies. Utilizing survey data of union members in the Hungarian and east German clothing industry, it compares members' reactions to unions' efforts to transform themselves into viable and representative institutions in two different institutional settings.

When discussing transformation of societal institutions, including trade unions, it is sensible to distinguish between formal (legal) and normative (substantial) institutionalization. Formal institutionalization describes the process of setting up new institutional structures, whereas normative institutionalization refers to the establishment of a 'supportive culture'

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whereby certain values, attitudinal orientations and behavioural dispositions are congruent with the institutional structure (Roller 1992: 1). In the context of labour institutions, one might refer to union members who share the values of trade unions and trust their unions, who have solidaristic feelings towards their co-members and who can be mobilized to participate in collective action.

There is widespread evidence in the social sciences of the necessity of a supportive culture for the successful establishment and effective functioning of societal institutions (e.g. Almond and Verba 1963; Fuchs and Roller 1994). More specifically, studies have pointed to the importance of cultural conditions for the successful stabilization and persistence of new democratic institutions (see Grew 1978; Jacoby 1994: 2; Lipset 1981). This should be especially evident for the development of trade unions in east central Europe. Thus, union members' commitment and support seems to be essential for the establishment and functioning of unions in post-communist societies as a result of the dramatic changes in union–membership relations (from 'obligatory' membership of a communist 'service station' to membership of a modern-interest institution).

There is, however, a widespread argument that an abiding cynicism and distrust among citizens is both a predictable legacy of communist rule and the immediate problem to be overcome in east central Europe (e.g. Mishler and Rose 1997: 419). For example, the 'New Democracies Barometer'[1] found in 1994 that only 16 per cent of citizens in nine east central European countries trusted their societal institutions; 84 per cent were sceptical or distrusted them completely. Unions were among the institutions least trusted (91 per cent were sceptical or distrusted them completely).

Various authors explain this with reference to a continuing 'legacy of communist labour relations' in workers' attitudes (Blanchflower and Freeman 1993: 13), to a continuing 'socialist mentality' (Sztompka 1993: 243) or the attitudinal 'path dependencies' (Stark 1992). However, specific studies of union members in transitional economies do not exist, rendering empirical validation difficult. There are a few surveys on workers' general attitudes towards the market economy (e.g. Shiller *et al.* 1991, 1992) and more specifically towards the labour market (e.g. Blanchflower and Freeman 1993, 1997). Yet in both instances their focus is on examining differences between communist and capitalist worker attitudes (the data are from the very early years of the transformation[2]) and they consist of very broad questions.[3]

This study begins to fill this gap by providing a comparative quantitative study, the first of its kind, of union members in one industry in two post-communist societies. There are two interrelated aims. First, it evaluates the extent of the supportive culture of unions after the main transitional period in two different institutional settings. Thus, it tests a major hypothesis in the literature that civil institutions in east central Europe are not yet culturally embedded, and that this deficiency impedes these countries' successful institutionalization (e.g. Fuchs and Roller 1994; Mishler and Rose 1997).

Second, the comparative nature of this study enables us to examine possible explanatory factors of the existence or absence of a supportive culture. Thus, to what extent are union members influenced by the communist legacy or by different institutional structures through which their interests are represented?

2. Theoretical background and research-setting

There are two major theoretical approaches to explaining the sources of variation in actors' cultural support for societal institutions (e.g. Mishler and Rose 1997: 433). First, cultural theories (sociological and socio-psychological) emphasize that norms, beliefs and attitudes are a form of diffuse support that results primarily from socialization experiences (see Almond and Verba 1963; Inglehart 1990; Purcell 1953). Thus, one could argue that although communist societies created a variety of civil institutions, such as unions and youth leagues, these were in fact parts of the state apparatus (e.g. Sartori 1993). Moreover, citizens were forced to make an often hypocritical show of involvement or at least compliance (e.g. Mahnkopf 1993: 16). Thus, there was arguably massive alienation and distrust of the communist regime and a lingering cynicism towards both political and civil institutions (e.g. Eidam and Oswald 1993: 167; Mishler and Rose 1997). Consequently, the 'legacy approach' argues that disappointing communist labour relations in the past induced people's negative attitudes towards the current unions.

In contrast, political, economic and rational theories of political behaviour view commitment as a form of specific support that is contingent primarily upon assessments of institutional performance (Mishler and Rose 1997: 434; Weatherford 1994). Thus, commitment must be earned: commitment to civil institutions may have its origins in what Durkheim called 'precontractual solidarity', but it cannot survive unless citizens perceive the performance of civil institutions as providing some reasonable measure of individual and collective goods (e.g. Hirschman 1970; Olson 1965). In short, people's perceptions of the effectiveness of their unions today should determine their level of commitment.

In sum, the latter approach assumes that people adapt to the changing structural conditions, whereas the former assumes that attitudes are not so easily changeable and that the communist socialization still has a visible impact on people's current attitudes and behaviour (although the direction of the impact is not defined).

The two theories will be tested using data from the union membership of the Hungarian and east German clothing industry. Hungary and east Germany were chosen because they are among the most advanced east central European countries in terms of their economic transformation (e.g. Eisen 1996; Whitley *et al.* 1996). It is also widely argued that the formal transformation of industrial relations was successfully completed in east

Germany during political unification in 1990 (e.g. Fichter 1996; Hyman 1996), and in Hungary in 1992/3, as both employers and unions stabilized their new roles (e.g. Tóth 1997a). The fieldwork took place in each country four years after its main transitional period (in east Germany in 1994 and in Hungary in 1997). The purpose was to examine the explanatory factors of cultural support at a time when industrial relations were already more stabilized.

According to the cultural theories, both countries should share a common negative legacy of the communist unions. However, this has not been empirically validated. We decided therefore to examine whether Hungarian and east German workers had a negative or positive (unlikely, according to the literature) perception of their communist unions and whether this was similar in both countries (as the literature assumes) or different.

In terms of the political theories, we assume that union effectiveness in interest representation depends mainly on institutional structure and also on the employment situation. The two countries present different transformation paths and interest organizations which should therefore foster different perceptions of union effectiveness among workers and hence should influence their cultural support. The institutional differences will be outlined in more detail below. In addition, the clothing industry presents different economic conditions in the two countries. The Hungarian clothing industry is growing and booming, whereas in east Germany it is a declining sector.[4] Thus, situating this study in the clothing industry has the advantage of comparing a booming and a depressed employment situation.

Institutional Differences

In Hungary, as in most countries of east central Europe, there was a gradual, negotiated process of institutional innovation (Batt 1991: 28; Deppe and Tatur 1997: 245) in which some traditional institutions were kept and reformed and new, 'western' institutions were copied and adapted to local circumstances. The transformation was initiated by legal reforms starting in 1988, which opened space for a pluralization of the union structure and of industrial relations (e.g. Héthy 1995: 86; Tóth 1993). Hungary since the 1960s has had a decentralized union structure which accelerated in the early 1990s (Lehoczky and Ladó 1996: 103). One part of the old state union confederation reformed itself as MSzOSz, and after a period of political struggles six major union confederations emerged, with MSzOSz as the largest one (e.g. Ladó 1994; Standing 1997: 142; Tóth 1994). Moreover, union restructuring was accompanied by an extreme fragmentation: union confederations now consist of industrial or professional union federations,[5] which consist of 'enterprise unions'. This fragmentation was partly caused by internal actors' attempts to overcome the former principle of 'democratic centralism' which characterized all communist unions in east central Europe and by the rivalries among the union federations, but it was

also facilitated by legislation[6] that reinforced the traditional focus of union power at company level (Tóth 1997a: 164). For example, enterprise unions[7] have their own legal identity,[8] enjoy virtually unrestricted autonomy and can decide which federation or confederation they wish to belong to. As a consequence, multi-employer sectoral bargaining is rare and plays at most a supplementary role in some industries (e.g. Tóth 1997b).

Workplace relations were reformed by a new Labour Code in 1992. This reformed and reduced union rights at workplace level (e.g. derecognizing unions' formerly exclusive right to represent the workforce and their right to participate in management decision-making) and set up a new form of employee representation — works councils — for enterprises with 50 or more employees (e.g. Lehoczky and Ladó 1996: 120). As in Germany, works councils represent all employees and have the legal obligation to co-operate with the employer in good faith. (They are also not allowed to call a strike.) In contrast to Germany, the Hungarian works councils were given information and consultation rights but no real co-determination rights (see Tóth 1997a). Unions meanwhile kept their exclusive bargaining right at the workplace level and some information rights but no consultation or co-determination rights. Furthermore, union pluralism at workplace level is now regulated by the works council election, which appoints the union with most votes to be the exclusive negotiating partner of management. For example, the MSzOSz federation in the clothing industry received 96 per cent of all votes in 1993 and thus became the bargaining partner in virtually all unionized clothing enterprises (Somorai 1994). There is some evidence to suggest that works councils exist only in unionized companies and are in practice incorporated in the local union (e.g. Ladó and Tóth 1996; Kisgyörgy and Vámos 1994). Thus, in opposition to the conservative government's intention to create a dual system of interest representation (similar to the German model), unions took control over works councils, often using the very same people (Deppe and Tatur 1997: 258).

East Germany, on the other hand, is clearly a unique case in east central Europe in that it experienced a complete transformation of its industrial relations system following the transfer of the entire west German institutional setting to the east. During the political unification in 1990, west German labour law and collective bargaining arrangements were introduced. In addition, west German employers' associations opened regional offices, the industrial branches of the central state trade union, the FDGB, dissolved, and their West German counterparts moved eastwards using the infrastructure of the dissolved communist unions to recruit members *en masse* (e.g. Fichter 1994, 1996; Weinert 1993). Moreover, the Works Constitution Act re-established works councils, the plant-level interest representation of the workforce that had been formerly forbidden (e.g. Jander and Lutz 1991; Kädtler *et al.* 1997). In contrast to the weaker Hungarian version, German works councils have — in addition to their informative and consultative rights — co-determination rights in various

social and personnel issues (see Müller-Jentsch 1994). The combination of collective bargaining by unions and workplace representation by mandatory works councils constitutes the framework of the 'dual system' of German industrial relations (Hyman 1996: 602).

However, although the formal transfer of west German labour institutions in the east has been widely regarded as successful, the literature is sceptical about the extent to which the normative institutionalization has taken place. Various authors have argued that the labour institutions are severely impeded by the lack of a supportive culture in particular among workers and union members (e.g. Dathe and Schreiber 1993; Fichter 1996: 2; Kädtler *et al.* 1997). Union members are regarded as more individualistic in the east than in the west and more reluctant to engage in collective activities (e.g. Fichter 1996: 16; Gut *et al.* 1993: 50; Mahnkopf 1992: 35).

In sum, the two countries present alternative structures of interest representation on two dimensions: (1) reformed unions in Hungary *v.* transferred unions in east Germany, and (2) a decentralized, fragmented structure of enterprise unions and controlled works councils (which have both some overlapping (information) rights at workplace level) in Hungary *v.* a clearly distinguished, dual structure of industrial unions for collective bargaining and works councils for local interest representation in east Germany.

3. Hypotheses

We can now specify two sets of hypotheses. In terms of the cultural theories, we assume that, if former union experiences were positive, this should be supportive of a gradual modernization of the former communist unions such as in Hungary. In other words, if you were satisfied with the communist union, it is likely that you will be supportive of a survival and gradual reform of this union; its abrupt dissolution and substitution with a new (foreign) union institution will not so easily gain your support. On the other hand, if former negative experiences predominate, gradual union reform efforts are not likely to be viewed convincingly by people; however, in this situation a radical transfer of new institutions as in east Germany should find it 'easier' to gain people's support — particularly if these 'new' institutions are known for their successful functioning in west Germany.

In terms of the political theories, we assume on one hand that institutional reform in east Germany is more likely to foster cultural support than the evolving enterprise unionism of Hungary. It is generally argued that 'a fragmented and decentralised union structure is less likely to perform well than a cohesive, centralised union organisation' (Visser 1995: 54; also Crouch 1994: 54). More specifically, however, it seems that on the surface enterprise unions should facilitate members' cultural support because of their closer relationship between members and union officials

compared with industrial unions (which might not have any shop-steward basis, as is often the case in east Germany). Yet, the close relation to local officials also means that the performance of local officials (rather than the national performance of the union) seems crucial for members' evaluation of the unions' effectiveness. In transitional times (privatization and marketization of firms) these local union leaders are, however, likely to face tough times defending their workers' interests in the short term, and this might have a detrimental impact on the union's image among workers. In east Germany, on the other hand, even if the union is not (temporarily) successful in industry-level collective bargaining, the strong statutory rights of the works council guarantee a minimum interest representation at the shop-floor level. This might allow members to be more confident in their interest institutions even in uncertain times of restructuring and recession.

On the other hand, unions' current performance might also depend on their economic context. The employment conditions in the Hungarian clothing industry should then facilitate union restructuring and performance (and members' confidence), whereas in the east German case the desperate economic situation should impede unions' interest representation.

In a nutshell, the hypotheses are as follows:

H1. Communist legacies are the major determinant of members' cultural support, and if they are positive, cultural support is more likely in the Hungarian case (H1.1). If the legacies are negative, cultural support should be more likely in the east German case (H1.2).

H2. Union's effectiveness in interest representation is the core factor. Two scenarios follow. If the institutional setting is the main determinant of union effectiveness, cultural support should be more likely in east Germany (H2.1). If it is the economic condition, cultural support should be more likely in Hungary (H2.2).

It should be noted that these are clearly highly tentative assumptions, dependent on different conditions, rather than tight theories which might be easily testable and refutable. As noted before, this study is a very first attempt to develop a comparative analysis of attitudinal orientations to interest organizations in post-communist countries. The absence of strong theories, however, is a generic characteristic of the current research in post-communist societies (especially of the scarce research on industrial relations). As van Beyme (1992: 273) puts it, 'the heroic search for a theory of transformation' lies far down the road.

4. Methods and samples

As far as we are aware, there is no specific research that defines the cultural conditions of functioning labour institutions (defined as effective interest representation). Moreover, in the political sciences the related concept of a

supportive culture for political institutions is only vaguely defined, for example as 'a set of attitudes, beliefs, and feelings about politics current in a nation at a given time' (Almond and Powell 1978: 25). Fuchs and Roller (1994: 17) are more specific, however, and develop three cultural conditions: commitment to democratic values, legitimacy of democracy, and a positive evaluation of institutional performance.

To construct a scale to test the extent of a supportive culture among union members, Fuchs and Roller's definition has been used plus the concept of union commitment (cf. Gordon *et al.* 1980). Functioning labour institutions are then understood to require three major attitudinal and behavioural attributes of their members: (1) a commitment to collective values, thus solidarity (measured as union and group identity); (2) a willingness actively to support the institutions (measured as willingness to engage in organized and in self-initiated activities); and (3) a perceived necessity of the institutions and a positive evaluation of their performance (measured as perceived works council/union instrumentality and instrumentality of collective action). In the Hungarian survey we asked for union instrumentality only. As mentioned above, the literature generally describes the Hungarian works councils as union-controlled bodies. This was also underpinned in our interviews with workers in selected plants and officials of the clothing union headquarters. Works council and union positions were frequently held by the same persons and the interviewed workers made no distinction between the two organizations.

The 'strength' of the dimensions is measured by the absolute level of the frequencies. Clearly, this is a first attempt to conceptualize union members' supportive culture and not an exhaustive measurement. All categories were measured by multi-item scales: items of instrumentality were adapted from Deshpande and Fiorito 1989; Fiorito *et al.* 1988; Hartley *et al.* 1991; items of union identity were adapted from Kelly and Kelly 1993; Kelloway *et al.* 1992; items of group identity and them-and-us feelings were adapted from Kelly and Kelly 1994). All questions were answered on five-point Likert scales, and factor analysis was used to test the validity of the assumed variables.[9]

A questionnaire[10] was distributed through local union leaders and works councillors (in the German case).[11] In Hungary 1000 questionnaires were distributed in 45 production sites. There were 50 unionized production sites in Hungary at the time of the fieldwork, which means that the selected companies comprised 90 per cent of the population: 498 were returned (and were usable), giving a response rate of 49.8 per cent.[12] Of the respondents, 80 per cent were blue-collar, 88 per cent were female; 13 per cent were works councillors and 26 per cent were union officials. Women were slightly over-represented. (Women constituted about 70 per cent of union membership of the Hungarian clothing union.) There are no data on the number of works councillors and shop-stewards available, nor of the representativeness of the age distribution for clothing companies in Hungary. Union

officials at the headquarters, however, confirmed that our age distribution is in line with the industry.

In east Germany, 1060 questionnaires were distributed in 53 firms (out of 148 clothing firms in the east German union district, which makes a coverage of 36 per cent) and 440 were returned completed, giving a response rate of 41.5 per cent.[13] These included 75 per cent blue-collar workers and 70 per cent females; 25 per cent were past or present works councillors, 8 per cent were union officials, while 17 per cent declared themselves formerly active union members. Women were slightly under-represented (in 1992 they constituted 77 per cent GTB members in the east), while works councillors and union officials were slightly over-represented. We have no information on the representativeness of the age distribution for textile companies in this area.[14]

All companies had more than 20 employees and were privatized. The companies were selected by us in terms of accessibility and size. The local officials were responsible for the distribution of the questionnaires to 20 members in each firm. This might have induced a bias in that officials selected loyal and active rather than passive members. Because this would affect both samples, it is of no concern for our country comparison. Finally, one should note that although the return rates may appear low they are in line with other membership studies.[15]

5. Cultural support of unions: union commitment

We discuss means[16] and significant differences (*t*-tests) of the Hungarian and east German samples with regard to the three facets of a supportive culture. In order to avoid any possible bias of the share of union officials and works councillors in both samples, this analysis was restricted to rank-and-file members (i.e. members who do not have an official works council or union post). The sample size of the rank and file was 320 members in Hungary and 285 in east Germany.

Collective Identities

It was very clear from the individual items in Table 1 that in most cases a majority of Hungarians did not identify with their union and were significantly different from their strongly identifying east German counterparts. For example, 54 per cent of east Germans were proud members in contrast to only 31 per cent of Hungarians. Moreover, 74 per cent of east Germans identified with union values in contrast to 67 per cent of Hungarians.

The picture provided by work-group identity was slightly different. Hungarians strongly identified with their group and in most cases significantly more so than the German sample. For example, 85 per cent of

TABLE 1
Comparing Union Identity, Work-group Identity and Them-and-us Feelings in Hungary and East Germany
Mean (1=disagree–5=agree) and *t*-tests (* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$)

	Mean Hung.	*Mean EGer.*	*Sig.t (2-tailed) Hung.–EGer.*
Union identity			
I share the aims and values of the union	3.62	3.88	**
I am proud of being a union member	2.50	3.37	**
I feel strong ties with the other union members in my plant	2.75	3.07	**
I seriously think about quitting the union in the future	2.46	2.32	
I would remain in the union, even if I were unemployed	2.68	2.97	*
Work-group identity			
I accept group decisions even if I have a different opinion	3.32	3.99	**
I prefer to work in groups rather than alone	3.91	3.67	*
I increasingly feel isolated in my group	2.13	2.19	
In the old days group solidarity was much better	3.73	4.00	*
I identify strongly with my group	3.56	3.29	*
Only those who depend on themselves at work get ahead	3.29	3.67	**
In general problems are better solved in groups than alone	4.12	3.99	
Them-and-us feelings			
I don't trust my supervisor a great deal	3.22	3.70	**
Today workers are exploited here	3.83	3.48	**
Management tries continuously to reduce the influence of the workforce and union	3.52	4.18	**

Hungarians preferred to work in groups rather than alone compared with 67 per cent of east Germans, and a clear majority of 66 per cent of Hungarians identified strongly with their group compared with 52 per cent of east Germans. Hungarians also felt less isolated in their groups than east Germans and consequently felt group solidarity decreasing less than east Germans and thought that groups are better problem-solvers than individuals. However, Hungarians were less willing than east Germans to accept group decisions if these are different from their beliefs.

Finally, Hungarian members did not reveal strong them-and-us feelings against management. They had more trust in their supervisors than east Germans (35 per cent of Hungarians trusted their supervisors compared with 16 per cent of east Germans). Moreover, they were less likely to think that management tries to reduce workers' influence compared with the

Germans. On the other hand, Hungarians are more convinced than their counterparts that they are being exploited today.

Overall, the three dimensions of collective identity revealed a complicated picture of the Hungarians' collectivist and individualistic attitudes, whereas the east Germans presented a more homogeneous picture of collectivist and committed union members.

Collective Instrumentality

The three factors of perceived collective instrumentality revealed significantly different results between the two samples (Table 2). The Hungarian members were in all but one case significantly less convinced of their unions' effectiveness than the east Germans (most of whom scored relatively low levels too, except for their strong support of the necessity of the works council institution). For example, 78 per cent of Hungarians thought their union is not powerful enough to improve working conditions, compared with 56 per cent of east Germans.

The samples were more similar with regard to the necessity of collective support for these interest institutions. However, the effectiveness of strikes were acknowledged by only 46 per cent of Hungarians compared with 75

TABLE 2
Comparing Collective Instrumentality in Hungary and East Germany: Mean (1=disagree to 5=agree) and *t*-tests (* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$)

	Mean Hung.	*Mean EGer.*	*Sig.t (2-tailed) Hung.–EGer.*
Instrumentality of works council/union			
We don't need a works council or union as management cares enough for us	2.10	1.48	**
The works council (H: union) does not oppose management strategies strongly enough to improve job security	3.85	3.14	**
Our works council (H: union) is not powerful enough to negotiate better working conditions	3.89	3.38	**
EGer: Our union is not doing enough to secure the adjustment of east German wage levels/H: Our union section is not successful in raising our wages	3.66	3.94	**
Instrumentality of collective action			
Works council (H: union) will be effective only if it gets active support from the workers	4.13	4.22	
Strikes are an effective means of strengthening the union during collective bargaining	3.35	3.98	**
Evaluating former v. 'new' union			
The former communist union represented my interests better than today's union	3.64	2.69	**

per cent of east Germans. (Neither the Hungarians nor the east Germans had any actual strike experience.)

The final item dealt with people's evaluation of the former communist unions. Rather than just asking for their evaluation of the former unions, it seemed more reliable to ask for a comparative judgement with today's unions. The samples differed. Almost 70 per cent of the Hungarians viewed their former communist unions more positively than the reformed unions today (20 per cent disliked them) whereas only a third of the east Germans preferred the former ones. This is supported by an additional survey question (not reported here) on who represented your interests in former times. It revealed that half of the Hungarian sample felt they were represented by their former union, only 20 per cent mentioned the supervisor, and 15 per cent said nobody (the plant director, the work-group and the Party each received each less than 5 per cent). In contrast, in east Germany a third said that nobody represented them, a third referred to the supervisor and only 13 per cent referred to the union. (In addition, 10 per cent mentioned the work-group and 7 per cent the plant director.)

In sum, the Hungarians were more negative about their institutions' effectiveness than their German counterparts; they also regarded collective action as not an effective tool, and they preferred the former union to their current one in contrast to the Germans, who preferred their current union.

Willingness to Participate in Collective Activities

The items on collective participation can be divided into two broad categories: 'organized' and 'self-initiated' forms of collective activities.

TABLE 3
Comparing Collective Participation in Hungary and East Germany: Mean (1=disagree–5=agree) and *t*-tests (* $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$)

	Mean Hung.	*Mean EGer.*	*Sig.t (2-tailed) Hung.–EGer.*
Organized participation			
If the union were to call a strike I would participate	2.79	3.82	**
I will attend the next works council (H: union) assembly	3.66	4.42	**
Self-initiated participation			
If asked, I would stand for the works council election	2.34	2.78	**
If asked, I would serve on a committee for the union	2.40	2.18	*
I constantly try to recruit new members to the union	2.79	2.32	**
I don't see myself as a union activist	3.35	3.85	**

The former comprises activities organized by the union or works council where people 'submissively' join without making any initiative of their own. The latter comprises activities where people deliberately take the initiative to become active.

The frequency distribution in both samples revealed a relatively 'higher' level of willingness to join organized forms of participation (such as strikes) than to become active on one's own (see Table 3). In other words, the involvement in self-initiated activities was much lower in absolute terms than in organized activities in both samples. Overall, Hungarian members were significantly less involved in organized activities than the east Germans. For example, only 35 per cent of the Hungarians would participate in a strike compared with 63 per cent of east Germans.

With regard to self-initiated (more difficult) activities, the Hungarians revealed a more complicated picture. Although they were less likely than their counterparts to stand for works council election, they were more inclined to stand for a union post and to recruit new members compared with the Germans. For example, 35 per cent of the Hungarians declared that they constantly try to recruit new union members, which is much higher than the 19 per cent of willing east Germans. Even more surprising, asked about their self-image as active or passive members, more Hungarians felt themselves to be active union members than east Germans (27 per cent compared with 14).

In short, the willingness to engage in collective activities in both countries depended on the type of activity. East Germans were highly interested in joining organized activities but were less motivated to act on their own initiative. In contrast, the Hungarians were low on organized activities but scored high on self-initiated action.

6. Discussion

Overall, the findings suggest that supportive cultural conditions exist in the east German but not in the Hungarian case. This study thus highlights country variations within east central Europe which is in contrast to the literature's claim of an overall lack of cultural support.

In more detail, east German members yielded in most cases collectivist, thus supportive, results. They identified strongly with their union and acknowledged the necessity of the new collective institutions. Moreover, although they did not perceive them as highly effective, this did not lead to a rejection of the institutions as such. Thus, despite their realistic perception of the currently low effectiveness of their union and works councils, members seemed to be prepared to invest a considerable portion of goodwill into these institutions and decided deliberately to support their institutions. Thus, the study finds no evidence for the claim by some writers (e.g. Mahnkopf 1992) of individualistic, apathetic, alienated union members in the east, who survive the transformation without having any

interests, expectations or commitment. The findings presented here indicate collectivist attitudes and a commitment to the new institutions which do not stand in the way of the transformation of industrial relations institutions. In contrast, these workers turned out to be a stabilizing, strongly supportive factor for the newly introduced works councils and union. Such results are particularly remarkable in the case of the clothing industry, where individualistic reactions might have been anticipated (i.e. declining industry, female workforce and a traditionally non-militant union). This leads us to conclude that the formal institutional transfer in this sector at least is accompanied by a successful normative institutionalization at membership level.[17]

Hungarians yielded significantly different results from the east Germans, however without being consistently less or more committed. Their pattern is more complicated. Hungarians did not strongly identify with their unions, yet they revealed strong group feelings towards their work colleagues. They did not believe in the instrumentality of their institutions, but nevertheless declared themselves as strong union activists in certain issues. They were passive with regard to organized activities (e.g. strikes), but were more active in self-initiated activities.

Two conclusions can be drawn. First, with regard to the core items of union commitment, 'union identity', 'union instrumentality' and 'willingness to become active', a majority of Hungarians clearly did not support their institutions. One can conclude that the normative institutionalization of the Hungarian clothing union was not yet successful. Members did not provide their union with any real goodwill which seems necessary in transitional times. Second, the strong work-group identity is clearly an indicator that the Hungarians cannot be characterized simply as pure individualists. An additional evidence is their relatively strong self-image as union activists and their willingness to stand for union election.

This somewhat contradicting attitudinal pattern of Hungarian union members might be explained simply as an outcome of the societal transformation and its attendant confusions. However, the same should hold true for the east Germans, but apparently it did not have a visible impact. Another possibility might be to refer to stereotypical clichés of cultural differences between the countries: Germans as 'institution-believers' *v.* Hungarians as 'flexible individualists'. But as Max Weber convincingly argued, 'trying to explain differences between countries by "national mentality" is but an admission of ignorance'. This was further examined by testing the impact of the country factor ('Hungary/east Germany') on members' union identity in the merged data set. The regression analysis[18] revealed no significant direct or indirect (through the other explanatory factors) influence of nationality and thus provides a further support that 'country' is not a sufficient explanator for attitudinal differences among Hungarians and east Germans.

Finally, one could investigate to what extent this particular attitudinal pattern in the Hungarian sample, and indeed the difference between

Hungarians and east Germans, reflects the different structure of interest representation or the countries' communist legacies as outlined above. We argue that the latter has more explanatory power than the former. Our conjecture is that Hungarian union members do not strongly identify with their union because the fragmented, decentralized union structure makes people more likely to identify with their shop-stewards and co-members at their plant rather than with the union as an institution (what the questionnaire asked for). The union headquarters in Budapest is far away and has no real impact on their working lives. Thus, the union seems to be more 'personalized' than in Germany. This could explain why Hungarians do not see the union institution as instrumental but nevertheless engage as individuals in collective activities. Union members might be characterized as 'individualistic activists'. Consequently, they do not support or trust the interest institutions in their own right. This is different from the east Germans, who provide their new institutions with a surplus of goodwill and support and follow organized activities more easily than they become active on their own initiative.

In sum, the Hungarian union seems to have an individualistic membership with some activists but no binding ideology or shared value system in which the institution is embedded and which is arguably necessary to make the union an effective institution. This interpretation thus supports hypothesis H2.1, that structural differences are the major determinant of cultural support.

Turning to the cultural theories, we found that the Hungarian and east German evaluations of their former communist unions were quite different: Hungarians were overall positive, east Germans negative.[19] This challenges the literature's assumption of an overall negative legacy of communist unions in east central Europe. Moreover, according to our first hypotheses (H1.1 and H1.2), if former experiences have a crucial impact on people's attitudes today, east Germans are likely to be relatively positive about their new transferred unions and Hungarians to be positive about the fact that the communist unions were not abolished but reformed. The east German data might comply with this hypothesis, but not the Hungarian data: Hungarians were positive about the former union but not about the reformed union. This offers another tentative support for the view that the attitudinal differences in the two countries might be due to other factors, notably the structure of their interest institutions. This hypothesis was further examined in a test of possible antecedents of members' cultural support.

Explanatory Factors of Cultural Support

'Union identity' was utilized as a main indicator of members' cultural support. We conducted a multiple regression analysis in both samples using several antecedents commonly used in the literature (e.g. Barling *et al.* 1992; Fullagar and Barling 1989; Kelly and Kelly 1994; Kuruvilla *et al.*

1990): perceptions of union (works council) instrumentality and of collective action; evaluation of the former union[20]; job insecurity[21]; them-and-us feelings; work-group identity; and demographic variables (gender, age, union/works council post) (Table 4).[22] The main purpose was to analyse whether the evaluation of the former union had any major impact on union identity. We were also able indirectly to test the different economic conditions of the clothing industry in both countries. The variable 'job insecurity' was used as a proxy for the employment situation. The frequency analysis revealed significantly different means.[23] Thus, east Germans were significantly more worried about losing their jobs than their Hungarian counterparts, which reflects the employment context in each country.

TABLE 4
Predicting Union Identity in Hungary and East Germany: Standardized Regression Coefficients

Independent variables	*Hungary beta*	*East Germany beta*
Work-group identity	0.082	0.110*
Perception of former union	0.060	0.027
Them-and-us feelings	0.147**	0.032
Instrumentality of collective action	0.172**	0.225**
Necessity of works council (only in east Germany)	—	−0.175**
Instrumentality of union	−0.281**	−0.126**
Job insecurity	0.104*	0.037
Gender	−0.008	−0.088
Age	0.058	0.186
Union post	−0.094	0.010
Works council post	−0.022	−0.090

* $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$; Hungary: R^2 (adj.) = 0.129 (standard error = 0.3536), residual = 487, F = 8.378 (sig. F = 0.000); east Germany: R^2 (adj.) = 0.153 (standard error = 0.6145), residual = 421, F = 8.108 (sig. F = 0.000)

In both countries, members' union identity was influenced mainly by their perceptions of the current instrumentality of unions, works councils and of collective action. In addition, them-and-us feelings were important for Hungarians and work-group identity for east Germans.[24] Furthermore, job insecurity was significant (but at a low level) in the Hungarian case, which is somewhat puzzling because Hungarian members did not yield a high level of job insecurity. Yet job insecurity was not significant in east Germany, where one would have expected it more since the east Germans expressed much stronger job insecurity than their Hungarian counterparts.

Finally and most importantly, union identity in both samples was not influenced by the perception of unions' former effectiveness. One could object that the evaluation of former unions might influence the current perceptions of the union/works council and hence might influence union identity indirectly. Indeed, both were strongly correlated.[25] Yet, repeating

the regression analyses without union (and works council) instrumentality made the item 'evaluation of former unions' not significant and indicates that there is no direct link between this item and union identity. In other words, the fact that most Hungarians thought the former union was more effective than the union today, or that east Germans thought the former union was not better, did not influence their current union solidarity. In contrast, union identity in east Germany was strong and in Hungary it was weak.

In sum, the descriptive and multivariate data analyses provided some evidence to support the hypothesis that cultural support for the new interest representations is stronger in east Germany than in Hungary and that this might be explained by their structural differences of interest representation (H2.1) rather than by their communist legacies (H1.1, 1.2) or economic conditions (H2.2).

7. Conclusion

To what extent can the findings be generalized? The data are clearly a 'snapshot' and are not necessarily representative either for the clothing industry or for the entire union membership in either of the two countries. Moreover, the results of the regression analyses are limited in that the antecedents do not explain a large amount of the variance.[26] In addition, the regression analyses might be weakened by the fact that the communist legacy and job insecurity were each measured with a single variable (albeit robust ones), and that we could not include a variable of the institutional differences of interest representation.

At a more general level, one should also acknowledge the natural limits of survey methods in investigating the causes of different transformation processes and outcomes. Ideally, such research should be enriched with qualitative and historical studies investigating the meaning of former interest representation, people's hopes and expectations and how these might influence their reactions today. Despite the above limits, it is none the less rare to see relatively large samples of unionized workers in two countries being examined together, and this in an industrial sector which is normally neglected in such an area of research.

Finally, there might also be doubts about the extent to which the experience in the clothing industry can be transferred to other industrial sectors. However, as argued earlier, this industry presents a critical case study: that union members in the declining clothing industry in east Germany with a relatively weak union and constrained works councils still trust and support their new interest institutions is a remarkable indicator of the stability and successful institutionalization of the (west) German dual system of industrial relations. On the other hand, the fact that union members in a growing, prosperous industry in Hungary are not showing any collective support towards their reformed unions highlights

the severe problems of a decentralized, fragmented union structure during transitional times.

To conclude, this study provides support for the view that the cultural institutionalization of new interest organizations might be more successful in some post-communist countries than in others. Moreover, our findings illustrate the complexities of union members' attitudes in transitional economies and emphasize a more cautious approach to 'cultural legacies' on members' attitudes and behaviour. There is some evidence to suggest the importance of the institutional characteristics of interest representation to foster cultural support among union members.

In particular, the findings highlight the advantages of mandatory co-determination to enhance workers' trust and commitment in their new industrial relations institutions. The German works council with its statutory participation rights seems to facilitate the creation of commitment among members even if the union is not perceived as powerful enough to represent its members' interests satisfactorily. Arguably, weaker forms of works councils with only information and consultation rights, and which are in addition incorporated in an enterprise union structure, are not able to fill this 'representation gap'. Moreover, the German-style works councils should also have a positive impact on the overall workplace climate.

All this suggests that German-style works councils should be seen as a major stabilizing factor for the labour movement in transitional economies. This hypothesis, however (which clearly needs further research), is in sharp contrast to views in the western literature that see works councils as a potential threat to the well-being of labour movements (e.g. Kelly 1998). On the other hand, it remains an open question for future research to what extent decentralized union structures can escape the vicious circle of weak union performance and low trust and commitment of their members in east central Europe.

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Notes

1. An annual comparative and representative survey in east central Europe (see Rose and Haerpfer 1994).
2. e.g., Blanchflower and Freeman use data of the ISSP survey of 1987, 1989, 1990.
3. e.g. 'how good are trade unions for the country as a whole?' in Blanchflower and Freeman (1993) as a measure of people's attitudes towards the role of unions.
4. The Hungarian clothing industry is one of the few growing industries and one of the largest with regard to employment (employment is growing: in 1996 employment in the clothing industry increased by 6.2 per cent (compared with 1995), whereas total employment in Hungary decreased by 4 per cent in the same year (Munkaerõpiaci helyzetjelentés 1997:81). The clothing industry in east Germany was and still is severely affected by unification and the subsequent exposure to the world market which led to a dramatic reduction in employment (e.g. Küchle and Volkmann 1993). Between 1990 and 1993 the clothing and textile industry experienced a fall in output of 72 per cent (Statistisches Bundesamt 1994). Of the 320,000 clothing and textile employees in 1989, only 27,000 remained in 1994 (a fall of 90 per cent) (GTB information).
5. For example, MSzOSz alone lists more than 50 member union federations.
6. See Labour Code 1968, which allowed workplace-level collective agreements.
7. There is no agreed definition of enterprise unions in the literature. Most authors refer to the location of wage bargaining. We use a stricter definition: enterprise unions are unions that are a legal entity and where most collective bargaining takes place.
8. The 1988 Law on Associations enables 10 employees or more to establish an enterprise union which enjoys all the rights outlined in the Labour Code.
9. The principal component method and varimax rotation were used and alpha reliabilities were calculated. This resulted in reliable factors for each of the dimensions. Alpha reliabilities did not vary significantly between the two samples. Factor analysis tables are available from the authors.
10. The questionnaires were translated from English into German and Hungarian and re-translated into English by a different person and were tested in a pilot study in both countries.
11. Of the Hungarian clothing union, Ruhazati Dolgozok Szakszervezete (a former communist union affiliated to MSzOSz) and of the German clothing union, Gewerkschaft Textil Bekleidung (GTB, which has now merged with the metalworkers' union).
12. Each firm returned on average 13 questionnaires.
13. Each firm returned on average 8 questionnaires.
14. Twelve per cent were under 30 years, 37 per cent were 30–40 years, 25 per cent 41–50 years and 20 per cent were over 50.
15. Etzel and Walker (1974) claim that a 'normal' return rate for mailed surveys of union members is between 10 and 30 per cent. It should be noted that most clothing jobs involve piece-work, which makes it difficult for workers to complete a questionnaire at the workplace (especially in this highly competitive industry); and many (mostly female) clothing workers have the double burden of housework, allowing them less time to do so at home (an argument the authors frequently encountered in their interviews). This does not entail that the survey results are biased. On the one hand, active union members may have been more likely than those less committed to fill out the questionnaire; but on

the other, dissatisfied members might have been more inclined to participate to make their views known. In fact, a similar survey in a major east German clothing company, which was distributed and collected by the author in person and achieved a response rate of 73 per cent, revealed no significant differences in the answers (Frege 1998: 178). These factors increase confidence in the validity of the present survey results.

16. Likert-scaled: 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. Percentages in the text refer to the sum of 'strongly (dis)agree' and '(dis)agree'.
17. This was further substantiated in an additional comparative study with union members in the west German clothing industry (Frege 1998) which revealed in most cases no significant differences between east and west Germans.
18. Union identity was used as dependent variable. The independent variables consisted of control variables: country (beta=0.013), age (−0.134**), gender (0.111**), union post (0.005) and works council post (−0.007); and some explanatory variables from the literature (see Table 4): evaluation of the former union (0.037), them-and-us feelings (−0.082*), union instrumentality (0.073*), job satisfaction (0.61), work-group identity (−0.088**) (with *=$p<0.05$, **=$p<0.01$). R^2 (adj.) = 0.042 (standard error = 0.2919), residual = 943, F = 5.189 (sig.F = 0.000).
19. This study cannot explain the differences in workers' union evaluation. A straightforward explanation might be simply a halo-effect: because their new interest representation is functioning reasonably well, east Germans might be more inclined to condemn their old unions. Hungarians on the other hand are not happy with their current union's functioning, and hence might see the old unions in a more positive light.
20. This variable comprised a single item: 'the former communist union represented my interests better than today's union'.
21. This was measured in a single question, 'I am constantly worried about losing my job'.
22. See n. 9.
23. 3.39 (Hungary) and 4.31 (east Germany) (significant at $p<0.01$).
24. This paper will not discuss possible reasons for the similar and different antecedents.
25. Correlations coefficient in Hungary: 0.453** (union instrumentality); in east Germany: 0.163** (union instrumentality), 0.556** (works council instrumentality).
26. R^2 is below 0.20 in each sample.

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