

# Transferring Labor Institutions to Emerging Economies: The Case of East Germany

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The formal transfer of West German industrial relations institutions into the East has been successful. Yet the literature is sceptical about the extent to which supportive attitudes and behavior among the actors have been developed. This article compares unionized workers' reactions toward their new unions and works councils in the East and West German textile and apparel industry. The research, first of its kind, shows that East Germans do not significantly differ in their attitudes from their western colleagues and that overall there is a strong support for the new institutions.

## Introduction

The formal transformation from the communist industrial relations system of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) into a capitalist and democratic system involved a transfer of the entire West German industrial relations system. During the political unification in 1990, West German labor law and collective-bargaining arrangements were introduced. In addition, West German employers' associations opened regional offices, West German unions moved eastward using the infrastructure of the dissolved former communist confederation FDGB to recruit members *en masse* (e.g., Fichter, 1994, 1996; Weinert, 1993), and works councils, the plant-level interest representation of the workforce (which had been formerly forbidden), were established by

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the Works Constitution Act (e.g., Jander and Lutz, 1991; Kädtler et al., 1997).<sup>1</sup>

Institutional transfer plays a central part in the postcommunist transformation throughout central eastern Europe. Guided by the assumption that if democratic capitalism won, it must exist as an identifiable institutional complex, most central eastern European governments, often aided by western academics, have tried to build new societal institutions by using institutional designs developed in the West (Jacoby, 1996:11). In the area of industrial relations, this comprises the transfer or borrowing of western labor legislation and of labor institutions. For example, German-style works councils were introduced in Hungary, and German labor legislation was introduced in Slovenia. East Germany, however, presents the most rapid and thorough institutional transformation within central eastern Europe (e.g., Wiesenthal, 1994) and is a unique case to examine the process of transferring an entire industrial relations system to a different cultural environment.

It is sensible to distinguish between formal (legal) institutional transfer and normative (substantial) institutionalization. *Formal institutionalization* describes the process of setting up new institutions, whereas *normative institutionalization* refers to the establishment of a “complementary culture” of the actors involved, i.e., certain attitudinal orientations and behavioral dispositions that are congruent with the institutional structure (Roller, 1992:1). In the context of labor institutions, one might refer to union members who share the values of trade unions, who have solidaristic feelings toward their comrades, and who can be mobilized to participate in collective action.

There is widespread evidence in the social sciences of the necessity of a complementary culture for the successful establishment and effective functioning of societal institutions (e.g., Almond and Verba, 1963; Fuchs and Roller, 1994; Shiller et al., 1991). More specifically, studies have pointed to the importance of cultural conditions for the successful stabilization and persistence of new democratic institutions (see Jacoby, 1994:2; Lichbach, 1981; Lipset, 1981). This should be especially evident for the development of trade unions in central eastern Europe. Thus union members’ commitment and support seems to be essential for the establishment and functioning of unions in postcommunist societies, as a result

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<sup>1</sup> Works councils are elected by the whole workforce, and as statutory bodies, works councils are formally independent of the unions. They have specified information, consultation, and codetermination rights concerning various social, personnel, and economic issues (e.g., overtime, working time, recruitment, redundancies) but are not allowed to bargain pay.

of the dramatic changes in union-membership relations (from “obligatory” membership of a communist “service agency”<sup>2</sup> to membership of a modern interest institution), and also for the installation of works councils, which are a new institution for most East Germans (a few older workers experienced them before or during the war).

A widespread argument of the German industrial relations literature is that the necessary cultural conditions for the institutionalization of the newly transferred labor institutions (unions and works councils) do not yet exist in East Germany. Thus, although the formal transfer of West German labor institutions in the East has been widely regarded as successful (e.g., Bergmann and Schmidt, 1996; Fichter, 1997; Turner, 1992, 1998), the literature is sceptical as to the extent to which the normative institutionalization has taken place and refers to the enduring problems the institutions face in the East (such as union membership decline,<sup>3</sup> the weak bargaining power of unions, or the limited scope of action for works councils). Fichter (1997), for example, talks of the “uncompleted crucial step from institutional transfer to institutionalization of industrial relations.” Similarly, Kädtler and Kottwitz (1994:19) argue that although the institutions exist, the necessary network of informal and formal norms, habits, cooperation, and forms of conflict resolution between the actors has not yet been achieved in the East (also see Reißig, 1993:18). And others declare a mismatch between the “foreign” West German institutions and an incompatible East German culture (e.g., Dathe and Schreiber, 1992; Zapf, 1992:8). Thus a central assumption of the literature and topic of this study is that the successful institutionalization of unions and works councils is partly hindered by the lack of a complementary culture of its actors and in particular of workers, respectively union members (e.g., Eidam and Oswald, 1993:167; Gut et al., 1993:50; Lippold et al., 1992; Mahnkopf, 1992:35).

Notwithstanding this forceful assertion, the published research is almost entirely based on expert interviews and/or case studies of specific companies. More representative, quantitative studies have yet to be produced. In addition, while comparing their eastern findings with the experience in the West on a theoretical level, most studies do not provide an empirical comparative analysis. Indeed, having West Germany as a natural benchmark is clearly a distinguishing methodologic advantage for research on the

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<sup>2</sup> Communist unions were concerned primarily with the distribution of social benefits at shop floor level (e.g., places in company-owned holiday homes, financial loans) (Heering and Schroeder, 1995:176).

<sup>3</sup> For example, between 1992 and 1995, union membership in the East dropped by 43.2 percent (compared with a decrease in the West of 8.5 percent) (Fichter, 1997).

transformation in East Germany as compared with other central eastern European countries. Another somewhat more important deficiency of this literature is the neglect of an analysis of union members' perceptions. Most research is restricted to an analysis of the transfer of unions (e.g., Fichter, 1994; Mahnkopf, 1992) and works councils (e.g., Kädtler et al., 1997; Kreißig and Preusche, 1994), sometimes including analyses of opinions and attitudes of union officials, works councillors, and also managers, but rarely of workers or union members themselves.

This article begins to overcome these deficiencies by providing a comparative quantitative study of the functioning of the union and works councils in one specific sector (textile/apparel industry) in East and West Germany. The purpose is to examine the success of the normative institutionalization of the labor institutions in East Germany. This will be based on an analysis of unionized workers' perceptions of their new interest institutions. The comparative data of West German members is used as a benchmark to evaluate the extent of workers' support in the East.

## Hypotheses

This study tests the literature's hypothesis of the absence of a supportive culture of East German union members. The literature can be summarized in three statements: (1) East German union members have no commitment to collective values (e.g., Fichter, 1994:56), (2) East German union members do not express a strong willingness to engage in collective activities (e.g., Klinzing, 1992), and (3) East German union members perceive their new interest institutions as not highly effective in representing their interests (e.g., Mahnkopf, 1993). Thus the null hypothesis of this study is that East German union members are significantly more individualistic, passive, and negative about the institutions' instrumentality than their western counterparts. In this case, one can conclude that the labor institutions have not yet succeeded in establishing a supportive culture among the people they represent.

The literature provides a mixture of explanations that are either based on certain attitudinal legacies of the communist past or are interpreted as reactions to new structural forces of the institutional transformation of industrial relations. In the following these explanations will be reviewed briefly.

*"East German union members have no collective values."* Two main reasons for workers' lack of union identity are presented. First, it is argued that union members were not morally affiliated with the former

state union, FDGB, and have insufficient experience of being a member of a truly voluntary organization, i.e., a social movement. In former times, the union functioned as a department of the state; today, the union functions and has power only through the support of its members. Thus the new union members are not prepared for “solidaristic actions, open conflicts, or for thinking in legally defined rights, demands, and duties in the German dual system of industrial relations” (Mahnkopf, 1991:279, 1993:16). Furthermore, they are not familiar with the role of unions and the duties of their members in the West (e.g., Heidenreich, 1991). Unfortunately, the literature neglects to define and to empirically test “moral” affiliation or “union commitment.”

Second, there is the proposal that the rapid societal transformation resulted (inevitably) in high disorientation and insecurity in dealing with the new situation, a sudden and complete loss of formerly secure and stable personal and professional identities, material and social positions, and of norms, values, ideologic beliefs, and behavioral patterns (see especially Marz, 1993a; also see Becker, 1992; Brähler and Richter, 1995; Hofmann and Rink, 1993; Senghaas-Knobloch, 1992; Trommsdorff, 1994; Woderich, 1992). It is argued that this situation led to a widespread “identity crisis” (e.g., Belwe, 1992; Maaz, 1991) that resulted in a common individual response of general desolidarization (e.g., Alt et al., 1994) and consequently diminished workers’ commitment to the unions and works councils (e.g., Pollack, 1991:280).

Most of this literature is based on population surveys and not specifically of the workforce. It is also not specified whether workers, for example, desolidarize with their colleagues, with their company, and/or with their union. Thus it is not evident why the supposed identity crisis necessarily leads to individualization and lack of commitment to unions and works councils. Moreover, it is not clear whether the two provided reasons are complementary or alternative explanations. Clearly, if members had no union identity in former times, they could not lose it during the transition.

*“East German union members are passive with regard to collective activities.”* Four major explanations are presented here. First, some authors explain that workers’ passivity is due to the current economic recession. This relates to the well-known, but ever-simple argument that collective action is lower in recession than in boom periods. For example, Augustin and Sprenger (1992:38) argue that people in general are afraid to make use of their “freedom of speech” at their work place because they fear being sacked (see also Kurbjuhn and Fichter, 1993:39; Lippold et al.,

1992). However, this instrumental approach to collective action is taken for granted and not further discussed. One might ask whether the authors regard this as a universal approach or see it as a specific legacy of the former instrumental attitudes to the FDGB. The latter argument is developed by Klinzing (1992:20), who proposes that workers had an entirely consumption-oriented, cost-benefit approach to their former trade union that continues today. Thus, in light of the current depressed labor market situation, the perceived costs of participation are just too high. There are unfortunately insufficient data on workers' former attitudes to state unions to sustain this assumption.

Another argument, which is sometimes emphasized, is that of company size. Most East German industries now consist of small or medium-sized firms (e.g., Windolf, 1997:4) in which work place relations could be more paternalistic and company-focused than in large companies, and thus collective action is less dominant (e.g., Lippold et al., 1992:99).

Third, some authors stress that East Germans lack experience in "voluntary" collective action and therefore cannot perceive it as effective (e.g., Klinzing, 1992:20; Mahnkopf, 1991:278).

Finally, there is a frequent reference to communist socialization and the attempt to find psychological explanations for the supposed continuing passive behavior (e.g., Belwe, 1992; Hofmann and Rink, 1993; Marz, 1993a; Stratemann, 1993). The key thesis with regard to the unions is that the communist system of paternalistic "caring and social security" ("from the cradle to the grave" or "custodial state"; Henrich, 1989), i.e., the bureaucratic paternalism of the enterprises (Deppe and Hoß, 1989), had psychological consequences that reduced individual activism and involvement both in former times and today (e.g., Marz, 1993b:78). For example, Mahnkopf (1991:278) regards self-confidence, self-responsibility, personal initiative, or proactivity as virtues that the communist system sanctioned negatively. Kreißig (1990) adds that the common (and official) thinking in former times in categories of the "community" (which prohibited the classic conflicts of distribution) and the fact that the enterprises belonged to all and therefore nobody really felt responsible are a legacy that now hinders union members' mobilization.

*"East German union members do not perceive labor institutions as effective interest institutions."* Three explanations have been put forward. First, it is suggested that East Germans still expect the trade union to fulfill the holistic caring role of former times and are now disappointed about the limited service that the West German unions provide (e.g., David, 1992:133). For example, they are disappointed about the closure

of the former “help lines” of the union that dealt with complaints and proposals, and in the event of legal difficulties or conflicts of interest, the union officials sprang more or less automatically into action with a phone call (Mahnkopf, 1993:17). Mahnkopf argues that East Germans therefore have an even higher expectation of unions as pure service and insurance institutions than their western colleagues. Furthermore, because the West German unions provide fewer social services than the former state union did and also maintain a lower profile on the shop floor (e.g., not a large number of union stewards), wage agreements emerge as the primary and most tangible union “service” to the East German worker (Mahnkopf, 1993:14). Since unions are currently not seen to be doing well in pay bargaining, there is a strong disappointment among their members. Similarly, there is the assertion that the current problems works councils face (e.g., restructuring, insecure financial situation of firms) and that account for their apparent poor performance make the workforce perceive them as ineffective.

Another argument, but one that is somehow conflicting, is that people were highly disappointed by the former “farce of interest representation” of the communist unions and so continue to have a sceptical, disillusioned image of unions and works councils (e.g., Eidam and Oswald, 1993:167). For example, Klinzing (1992) proposes that today’s union members often elect their works councillors and union stewards in order to relieve themselves of any activity. She interprets this passivity and wait-and-see attitude of members as an alienation from the union that she believes will take a long time to overcome. However, if all FDGB members were indeed highly disappointed, then they surely would not have joined the new unions. With the massive numbers of East Germans who joined the new unions during 1990–1991 (over 4.1 million new members<sup>4</sup>; see Fichter, 1997), one has to wonder how disappointed these members really could have been.

In sum, although the literature provides a variety of explanations for members’ supposed individualistic, nonsupportive attitudes and behavior toward their new interest institutions, it remains an open question whether and how these explanatory factors interrelate. The explanatory factors were sometimes complementary, sometimes contradictory. Moreover, no empirical data indicate which (if any) of these factors reduce members’ commitment.

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<sup>4</sup> This represented nearly half of all the former state union (FDGB) members and resulted in a union density of around 50 percent (Löhrlein, 1995:93).

## Concepts, Research Setting, Samples

As far as I am aware, there is no specific research that defines cultural conditions of functioning labor institutions (i.e., effective representation of workers' interests). Moreover, in the political sciences, the related concept of a complementary 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), "interpersonal trust" (Almond and Verba, 1963), or "civic or discourse culture" (Sztompka, 1993). 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, an adaptation of Fuchs and Roller's definition has been used plus a related concept in industrial relations, the concept of union commitment<sup>5</sup> (e.g., Gordon et al., 1980). Functioning labor institutions are then understood to require three major attitudinal and behavioral attributes of their members: (1) a commitment to collective values (measured as union and group identity), (2) a willingness to actively support the institutions (measured as willingness to engage in organized activities and in self-initiated activities), and (3) a perceived necessity of the institutions and a positive evaluation of their performance (measured as perceived effectiveness of works council, union, and collective action).

The three 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 participation were adapted from Kelly and Kelly, 1994), all questions were answered on five-point Likert scales, and confirmatory factor analysis was used to test the validity of the assumed variables.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, this is a first attempt to conceptualize union members' supportive culture

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<sup>5</sup> The concept comprises in its original form (1) union loyalty and a desire to remain a member of the union, (2) a feeling of responsibility toward the union, (3) a willingness to exercise a strong effort on behalf of the union, and (4) a belief in and acceptance of the values and goals of the union and the labor movement as a whole (Gordon et al., 1980).

<sup>6</sup> The principal component method and varimax rotation were used, and alpha reliabilities were calculated. This resulted in reliable factors for each of the dimensions [e.g., standardized alpha of organized participation: 0.7626 (West)/0.5871 (East); of self-initiated participation: 0.8294 (West)/0.7311 (East); of instrumentality of works council: 0.6908 (West)/0.7299 (East); of union identity: 0.8700 (West)/0.7560 (East)]. Factor analysis tables are available from the author.

and not an exhaustive measurement. The scale is used to compare the extent of cultural support in the East and the West. *Ipso facto* it is taken for granted that West German union members provide a sufficient level of cultural support for their interest institutions.

The textile and apparel industry was selected for various reasons. This sector has so far been neglected in the industrial relations research on transformation not only in East Germany but also in other central eastern European countries. In addition, the East German textile and apparel industry was (and still is) severely affected by the unification and the subsequent exposure to the world market (e.g., between 1990 and 1993, the sector lost 72 percent of its net production), which led also to a dramatic reduction in employment (a decline from 98,215 employees in 1990 to 22,240 in 1995; GTB statistics), and is one of the least recovered sectors in East Germany (e.g., Küchle and Volkman, 1993).

These devastating economic and structural conditions should have induced especially low levels of collective activities and negative perceptions of institutional effectiveness in the eastern sample (a widespread argument is that workers in periods of recession act less collectively and militantly than in periods of economic boom; e.g., Ingham, 1974; Shalev, 1983; Shorter and Tilly, 1974). This should be further reinforced in the case of textile workers who are traditionally (in the western literature) associated with a nonmilitant union and with a largely inactive, noncommitted female membership. In addition, the textile union is not the most successful union in terms of bargaining power in East Germany compared with the other German trade unions<sup>7</sup> (e.g., Kittner, 1995:161). Moreover, the textile and apparel industry in East Germany now consists of small plants (which are seen by some authors as evoking individualism; e.g., Barling et al., 1992:116; Lippold et al., 1992:99). In sum, this industry should provide a critical case study for the observation of nonsupportive reactions in union members.

The study is based on a survey of union members<sup>8</sup> of the textile and apparel union GTB (Gewerkschaft Textil Bekleidung, which has now merged with the metal workers' union) that was carried out by the union and works councils in two large West German districts (Nordrhein and Westfalen-Osnabrück) in 1995 and in the East German district in 1994.

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<sup>7</sup> In 1994, blue-collar textile workers in the East earned on average 72 percent (69 percent) of the pay of their western colleagues. In comparison, the metal industry, for example, had an East/West ratio of 87 percent.

<sup>8</sup> The questionnaire comprises altogether 73 questions on various issues of the transformation of work place relations. A copy is available from the author.

In West Germany, 4500 questionnaires were distributed in 76 firms,<sup>9</sup> all with over 150 employees; 1722 were returned, of which 1691 were usable, giving a response rate of 34 percent. Of the respondents, 72 percent were blue collar, 47 percent were female, and 94 percent were full-time workers; 36 percent were works council members and 15 percent union officials. The gender distribution is representative (women constituted 49 percent of union membership in both districts); members of the works council and union officials were overrepresented (presumably because the survey was distributed by the union and works councils).

In the East, members were approached in 53 firms (all with over 100 employees).<sup>10</sup> Most firms were privatized, and all had a works council. Approximately 1100 questionnaires were distributed, and 440 were returned completed, giving a response rate of approximately 40 percent. These included 75 percent blue-collar workers and 70 percent women; 25 percent were past or present works council members, 8 percent were union officials, while 17 percent declared themselves formerly active union members. Women were slightly underrepresented (in 1992 they constituted 77 percent of GTB members in the East), while works councillors and union officials were slightly overrepresented. I have no information on the representativeness of the age distribution for textile companies in this area.<sup>11</sup>

Although the response rates may appear low,<sup>12</sup> they are in line with other union membership surveys,<sup>13</sup> and indeed Etzel and Walker (1974) claim that a "normal" return rate for mail surveys of union members is between 10 and 30 percent. It should be noted that most textile jobs involve piecework, which makes it more difficult for workers to complete a questionnaire at the work place, and many (mostly female) textile workers have the double burden of housework, allowing less time to do so at home (an argument I encountered frequently during interviews).

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<sup>9</sup> Both districts comprised 176 firms with over 150 employees (in 1994). From the 176 firms, 76 works councillors agreed to participate in the study.

<sup>10</sup> The eastern district comprised 148 firms with a works council, and 53 agreed to participate.

<sup>11</sup> Twelve percent were under 30 years, 37 percent were between 30 and 40 years, 25 percent between 41 and 50 years, and 20 percent were more than 50 years old.

<sup>12</sup> This does not mean the membership 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 me in person and achieved a response rate of 73 percent, revealed no significant differences in the answers (Frege, 1996:178). These factors increase confidence in the validity of the present survey results.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Fullagar and Barling (1989): 26 percent; Gensior (1992): 45 percent; Kelloway et al. (1992): 36 percent; Kelly and Kelly (1994): 39 percent.

## Results

Means<sup>14</sup> and significant differences (*t* tests) of the West and East samples are discussed with regard to the three categories of supportive culture: collective values (union and work group identity), participation, and collective instrumentality (instrumentality of works council, union, collective action). In order to control for a possible bias caused by the large share of works councillors and union officials in the West German sample, this analysis was restricted to rank and file members (members who do not have an official works council or union post). The sample size of the rank and file is 285 members in the East and 995 in the West. There also might be a bias caused by the larger share of female members in the East compared with the West. However, if we assume that women have lower union commitment than men of the same occupation, this would induce an even less supportive culture in the East than in the West and thus support the critical character of this survey study. However, the study found no significant differences between the two genders in the East sample (gender played a more prominent role in the West sample).<sup>15</sup>

*Collective values.* It was very clear from the data that members in the East and West identified strongly with their union. For example, 75 percent of the East Germans and 81 percent of the West Germans shared the aims and goals of their union and even more valued union solidarity (80 percent in the East, 84 percent in the West). Only the question about whether one would stay in the union if unemployed did not receive a strong majority, particularly not in the East. Differences were not statistically significant between West and East (with the exception that West Germans were less likely to think about leaving the union) (Table 1).

Similarly, the data yielded strong work group identities in both samples. East Germans were used to working in groups and to accepting group decisions and did not feel isolated in their group. However, compared with their western colleagues, East Germans felt group solidarity to be declining more compared with former times. One reason could be that the solidarity in the East is under more pressure. However, rather than interpreting this as a lower group identification in the East than in the West, it seems more reasonable to suggest that it indicates the continuing importance of

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<sup>14</sup> Likert-scaled: 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Percentages in the text refer to the sum of “strongly (dis)agree” and “(dis)agree.”

<sup>15</sup> Based on various regression analyses for the dependent factors “union identity,” “participation,” “union,” and “works council” effectiveness. Independent variables included gender, age, and a dummy variable “East/West.”

TABLE 1  
 COMPARISON OF UNION IDENTITY AND WORK GROUP IDENTITY IN THE EAST  
 AND WEST: MEANS, *T* TESTS, AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

		Mean	Standard Deviation	Sig <i>t</i>	<i>N</i>
<i>Union identity</i>					
I share the aims and values of the union.	East	3.88	1.03		296
	West	3.88	.99		981
Union solidarity is very important for me.	East	4.14	1.02		297
	West	4.07	1.00		980
I am proud of being a member of the GTB.	East	3.36	1.26		300
	West	3.47	1.23		981
I feel strong ties with the other union members in my plant.	East	3.07	1.24		297
	West	3.14	1.32		981
I seriously think about quitting the GTB in the future.	East	2.32	1.41		303
	West	2.01	1.23	**	974
I would remain in the union, even if I were unemployed.	East	2.98	1.52		300
	West	3.02	1.47		983
<i>Work group identity</i>					
I accept group decisions even if I have a different opinion.	East	3.99	1.01		289
	West	3.99	1.03		967
I prefer to work in groups rather than alone.	East	3.67	1.49		292
	West	3.60	1.36		973
I increasingly feel isolated in my group.	East	2.18	1.34		290
	West	2.07	1.27		973
East: In the old days (GDR) group solidarity was much better. West: Solidarity among colleagues diminishes during the recession.	East	4.00	1.39		294
	West	3.43	1.27	**	961
I identify strongly with my group.	East	3.29	1.38		287
	West	3.45	1.32		964

\*\**p* < 0.01

solidarity in the East. One could argue that it is precisely because they still strongly identify with their work groups that they feel the loss of solidarity so strongly. In addition, perceiving declining solidarity does not mean that workers necessarily behave in more individualistic ways.

In sum, the two dimensions of collective identity presented a homogeneous picture of a strong commitment to collective values in both samples and did not illustrate a marked individualism in the East.

*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. 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 high level of willingness to join organized forms of participation (such as strikes) and a relatively low inclination to become active on one’s own. Overall, East German members were significantly less involved in organized activities than their western colleagues. For example, East Germans were less willing to join a strike (63 percent in the East versus 83 percent in the West), which supports similar hypotheses in the literature (e.g., Fichter, 1994:56), but were similar to their western colleagues with regard to activities organized by the works council. There also were no significant differences between males and females in the East sample (Table 2).

TABLE 2  
COMPARISON OF COLLECTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE EAST AND WEST:  
MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, AND T TESTS

		Mean	Standard Deviation	Sig <i>t</i>	<i>N</i>
<i>Organized participation</i>					
If the GTB were to call a strike, I would participate.	East	3.82	1.34		308
	West	4.34	1.05	**	985
I would take part in demonstrations/rallies during collective bargaining.	East	3.58	1.25		303
	West	3.92	1.18	**	981
I will attend the next works council assembly.	East	4.42	1.12		305
	West	4.51	.97		988
<i>Self-initiated participation</i>					
If asked I would stand for the works council election.	East	2.77	1.50		306
	West	2.60	1.39		989
If asked I would serve on a committee for the GTB.	East	2.19	1.25		305
	West	2.18	1.28		990
I constantly try to recruit new members to the union.	East	2.32	1.33		297
	West	2.63	1.42	**	985
I don't see myself as a union activist.	East	3.85	1.25		300
	West	3.75	1.25		980

\*\**p* < 0.01

With regard to self-initiated (more difficult) activities, there was only one significant difference between the two samples. West Germans were more likely to recruit new members than East Germans. Most of them would not, for example, stand in a works council election, either in the West or the East.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, West and East Germans were not that different in their self-declared activity (31 percent in the West, 21 percent in the East). Both are in line with other West German studies. For example, Weischer (1993) found 20 percent and the Sozialreport (1993:30) found 23 percent of active union members in their representative surveys of West German employees.

In sum, the willingness to engage in collective activities in the East and West depends on the type of activity. Overall, both groups were highly interested in joining organized activities but were less motivated to act on their own initiative. It has to be noted that the survey asked for intentional behavior only and that the structural reasons provided in the literature (such as economic recession) might inhibit actual collective activities. Yet they did not inhibit people's declared willingness.

*Perceived effectiveness of collective institutions.* The three factors of perceived collective effectiveness in most cases yielded significantly different results. The works council was, however, widely perceived to be a necessary institution. Differences between East and West became more obvious when workers were asked about the effectiveness of the interest institutions in dealing with specific issues. West Germans were mostly satisfied with the works councils' work, whereas the East Germans were more divided. For example, 53 percent of West Germans versus 30 percent of East Germans saw the works council as capable of improving working conditions (Table 3).

The items of union functioning did not deal with the acceptance of unions (it was assumed that union members are likely to accept the union as their representative institution) but with its effectiveness regarding specific work place issues. East Germans were more negative than their western colleagues. More than half the East sample thought that the union was not very successful in protecting job security and also failed to secure the wage adaptation to the West German standard. Overall, union effectiveness was thus perceived more negatively than works council effectiveness. However, studies in West (e.g., Morgenroth et al., 1994:109) and East Germany (e.g., Mickler et al., 1992:17) revealed

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<sup>16</sup> However, females were less likely to stand for a union or works council post than their male colleagues (in both samples), which is plausible due to female workers' double burden of work and family.

TABLE 3  
 COMPARING PERCEPTIONS OF INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS IN EAST AND WEST:  
 MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, AND T TESTS

		Mean	Standard Deviation	Sig <i>t</i>	<i>N</i>
<i>Perceived effectiveness of works council</i>					
We don't need a works council as management cares enough for us.	East	1.48	.91		308
	West	1.36	.81	**	992
I can solve my work problems with my supervisor alone; I don't need the works council for that.	East	1.94	1.26		306
	West	1.99	1.28		988
The works council does not oppose management strategies strongly enough [to improve job security].	East	3.15	1.43		304
	West	2.74	1.40	**	979
Our works council is not powerful enough to negotiate better working conditions.	East	3.38	1.36		307
	West	2.56	1.35	**	986
<i>Perceived functioning of union</i>					
GTB not putting enough pressure on employers [to secure jobs].	East	3.72	1.29		304
	West	3.31	1.31	**	981
East: The GTB is not doing enough to secure the adjustment of East German wage levels. West: GTB is fighting more for its East German members; we lose out.	East	3.94	1.30		308
	West	2.94	1.22	**	979
<i>Perceived effectiveness of collective action</i>					
Works council and GTB will only be effective if they get active support from the workers.	East	4.21	1.19		304
	West	4.18	1.13		988
Strikes are an effective means of strengthening the union during collective bargaining.	East	3.98	1.25		308
	West	4.38	.97	**	983

\*\**p* < 0.01

similar perceptions of the union's relative unimportance regarding work place issues such as job security.

Finally, collective action as such was considered to be highly effective in the East and the West. There was no difference in their acknowledgment that active member support is necessary for the institutions to function. However, West German union members were even more positive about the effectiveness of strikes than their eastern colleagues (90 percent of West Germans and 74 percent of East Germans who had no strike experience in this industry).

## Discussion

In the majority of cases, both samples yielded similar results (despite the larger share of females in the East), and these were generally supportive of the new institutions rather than nonsupportive (Table 4). However, it is impossible to classify either the West or the East German groups as purely supportive (because some displayed mixed responses when confronted with different issues). In comparison, union members in the East were, on average, less active than their western colleagues, but there was no clear indicator that their attitudes were generally more individualistic and nonsupportive than those of their western colleagues. In some cases the East had more supportive attitudes than the West. Particularly striking was the similarly strong degree of union identity. However, the effectiveness of the institutions was perceived less positively in the East than in the West. This seems plausible, however, because job losses were far higher in the East than in the West.

People's negative perceptions of their labor institutions are in line with similar findings on the effectiveness of the new political institutions in East Germany (e.g., Fuchs and Roller, 1994; Seifert and Rose, 1994). For example, Fuchs and Roller (p. 42) found in their representative sample of the East German population in 1992 a high degree of support for the institutions essentially constituting the structure of liberal democracy, a high degree of democratic cultural values, but less confidence in the performance of these institutions. The authors argue (p. 10) that the evaluation of the institutions provides a feedback that might stabilize or erode collective values and behavior and people's perceptions of the institutions' legitimacy. However, their conclusion that a positive feedback is less likely to develop in the coming years is not shared by

TABLE 4  
ATTITUDINAL AND BEHAVIORAL DIMENSIONS AND RESULTS

Dimensions	Results
Union identity	East as more collectivist than West
Work group identity	East as more collectivist than West
Willingness to engage in	
Organized participation	East less active than West
Self-initiated participation	East as active as West
Necessity of institutions	East as convinced of necessity of institutions as West
Instrumentality of trade unions and works councils	East more negative than West about institutions' effectiveness with regard to specific issues
Instrumentality of collective action	In one case East as positive as West; in the other, East less positive than West

me. Multivariate analysis<sup>17</sup> in both samples revealed that the factors of institutional effectiveness were not major determinants of either union identity or perceived necessity of the institutions or participation. Thus, for example, respondents who thought unions did not fight hard enough for them were not less likely to identify with their union than colleagues who believed in their union's effectiveness. One might infer therefore that East Germans' perceptions of the functioning of industrial relations institutions are not likely to have a major backlash on their general support.

In a nutshell, judged on most of the dimensions of workers' attitudes and behavior toward the new institutions, the normative institutionalization was successful. The study found no evidence for the scenario suggested by some writers (e.g., Mahnkopf, 1992) of individualistic, apathetic, alienated union members in the East, who hinder the institutionalization process of their new interest representation. The expansion of West German interest institutions in the East was accepted and supported by the workforce. As a result, the study's null hypothesis is not supported.

How do these findings relate to the literature's explanations for a lacking supportive culture? First, the strong level of collective identity measures challenges the view that people were not morally affiliated to their former union and had an entirely instrumental approach to their membership. The data also conflict with the argument that unions have not yet succeeded in creating or continuing a culture of solidarity and commitment in the East or that a strong union identity can only be expected in critical situations (e.g., Eidam and Oswald, 1993; Fichter, 1994). Furthermore, the findings indicated that the postulated East German "identity crisis" regarding public institutions and the virtual elimination of social identities in favor of individualistic attitudes have not affected this sample (yet). Obviously, we cannot evaluate trends over time, but the relatively strong level of union and group identities suggests that these affiliations have not been affected by an identity crisis.

Second, despite the structural conditions (i.e., small firms, economic recession, nonmilitant union) and certain communist legacies that should inhibit collective activities, members were not as passive and reluctant to strike as predicted in the literature. In contrast, the mobilization potential seemed to be rather strong. Moreover, with regard to the instrumentality of collective activities, the argument in the literature that East Germans do not perceive it as effective mainly because they lack experience in

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<sup>17</sup> Multiple regression analysis was conducted for the three factors of participation, union identity and the necessity of works councils. Regression tables are available from the author.

“voluntary” collective action cannot be supported by the data. It seems rather more likely that workers have learnt over the last few years that their interest representation needs active support and that strikes can make a change (e.g., the first large-scale strike in the East, the strike of the metal union, IG Metall, in 1993 that lasted two weeks and involved some 100,000 East German workers; see Hyman, 1996:612).

Third, with regard to works council and union instrumentality, one needs to address how the findings (i.e., strong acceptance of the institution, albeit with scepticism about its current effectiveness) relate to the widespread argument that East German workers are highly disillusioned over the effectiveness of works councils and unions in representing workers’ interests. In this sample, East German members were realistic about works councils’ limited resources in the given economic circumstances. This might be disillusioning, but it did not lead people to reject the institution itself. Thus, although the findings do not suggest highly effective and powerful institutions, members apparently conclude that this is related more to the economic conditions than to the design of the institution as such.<sup>18</sup>

With regard to the overall success of the transfer of labor institutions to East Germany, it can be concluded that it is not union members’ attitudes and behavior that are to be blamed for current institutional problems (i.e., limited scope of action for works councillors and unions). The current problems of the workers’ institutions are far more likely to be caused by structural factors (e.g., recession, restructuring of the industry) or by institutional actors’ strategies or attitudes rather than by a lacking complementary culture on the workers’ part.

## Conclusions

To what extent can the findings be generalized? The current study provides only a snapshot, and the two samples are certainly not representative of the entire East and West German union membership. It also should be remembered that the existence of a complementary culture among unionized workers does not per se guarantee a successful functioning of the labor institutions. It is a necessary but not a sufficient condition (i.e., cultural conditions also include union and works council officials and managers). There also may be doubts about the extent to

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<sup>18</sup> This is also supported in a study about workers’ attitudes toward the works council by Heering and Schroeder (1992) and in a study of 291 workers (union and nonunion members) of the largest apparel firm in Saxony (Frege, 1996).

which the experience in the textile/apparel industry (with their traditional Taylorist production system) can be generalized to other industrial sectors.

However, as argued earlier, this industry presents a critical case study. As a consequence, the substantive degree of supportive attitudes and behavior in the East in a case that one expected to be associated with a rather low degree of a supportive culture has particular weight and strengthens the argument that similar patterns of normative support for the labor institutions can be found in other sectors of the East German industry.

Moreover, it can be argued that the former GDR differs greatly from the other postcommunist countries in central eastern Europe by virtue of the weight and salience of the exogenous (i.e., West German) factors impinging on its transformation process. But the similarities between the former GDR and these other countries may be substantial as far as the salience of the endogenous (cultural) elements is concerned. Thus, if the rapid and radical institutional transfer in East Germany did not produce significant incidences of rejecting and resisting the new interest institutions (at least in this particular sector), one might suggest that similar cultural conditions are also likely in countries with a more gradual process of institutional borrowing. Clearly, comparable data of other central eastern European countries are needed to substantiate this hypothesis (see Frege and Tóth, 1998).

Finally, the findings leave us with the question of why East German textile union members revealed such a considerable support for their new labor institutions after such a short period of time and despite the institutions' limited scope of action in a depressed labor market. Workers' loyalty in these circumstances might be partly explained by the fact that there was no real alternative at hand and anything was better compared with their past experience (i.e., no real interest representation by the former communist unions). The data unfortunately do not allow final conclusions about whether there was already a supportive culture in former times (for the communist unions) or whether this is a new development or a mixture of both. The results, however, let us suggest that a supportive culture existed in former times that the West German institutions were able to draw on.

What are the lessons learnt for a theory of institutional transfer? A crucial finding is the fact that workers seem to have welcomed the western institutions with much goodwill rather than with resistance to change. The likelihood of a vicious circle of disappointed members and absence of support having a backlash on the institutional performance is therefore less probable at this stage. A necessary proportion of goodwill is clearly

something that is difficult to plan or predict when designing institutional transfer. Assuming that the sociocultural context can have either a positive or negative impact on the institutionalization process of new labor institutions, a task of future research should be to examine the structural conditions under which trust and goodwill toward new institutions can be expected to develop and prosper.

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