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**How I Became a Trade Unionist:
Comparative Study of Life Stories of Young Trade
Union Members in Georgia and Germany**

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MA Programme Euroculture Declaration

I, Nino Natroshvili hereby declare that this thesis, entitled "How I Became a Trade Unionist: Comparative Study of Life Stories of Young Trade Union Members in Georgia and Germany", submitted as partial requirement for the MA Programme Euroculture, is my own original work and expressed in my own words. Any use made within this text of works of other authors in any form (e.g. ideas, figures, texts, tables, etc.) are properly acknowledged in the text as well as in the bibliography.

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Abstract

Trade unions are experiencing membership erosion. To what extent they will manage to stay relevant will depend on attracting underrepresented groups of people, including and particularly young people. Engaging them can be decisive for trade unions' survival, as they are going to be the main contributors in the future working world. The purpose of this study is to explore the young trade union members' life stories, their motivations and worldviews which inspired them to get engaged. We investigate the experiences of Georgian and German youngsters through semi-structured in-depth interviews. A variety of influences can be identified, such as: their social context, labour experiences and socio-political views. They have strong sense of social justice and willingness to contribute to positive changes. It is evident that trade unions need to reinforce their participation at decisive phases of young peoples' lives, such as first labour experiences and at educational institutions, as well as they need to strengthen support for youth trade union organizations.

Keywords: Trade unions, Young activists, Life stories, Georgia, Germany

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Preface

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Introduction

In times of global restructuring and expansion of precarious work, the importance of identifying problems the trade union movements are facing is increasing. Precarious labour is expanding and the membership base of unions is eroding. The private sector, which has very weak unionization, is growing rapidly, and manufacturing is shrinking. Especially evident is the disengagement of young people from unions. After 1945, labour market volatility was not as much of a problem since young people would finally end up in unionized workplaces.¹ This is no longer the case. The previously prevalent view that young people's transition to unionized workplaces would automatically incorporate them in trade unions' structure should not be expected as probable anymore. This is because of large increase in nonstandard employment and "pluralization of pathways into the labour market," where many young people instead of traditional vocational training, either enter the jobs directly from higher education institutions ("skilled young workers"), or else enter into the ever growing precarious employment ("unskilled young workers").² Considering trade unions' power erosion, union revitalization literature suggests as one of the main recommendations attracting underrepresented groups, certainly young people included.³

Young people specifically are pressured by labour market insecurities. Their engagement and attitudes towards trade unions which solidify with age can be decisive for the survival of these structures. According to Lowe and Rastin's findings,⁴ who used their four-year panel study among high school and university students in three Canadian cities to create a longitudinal panel design, young people's views towards trade unions are becoming already apparent in early stage which are later reinforced with age and further experience. Noticeably, organizing young people has become increasingly challenging for trade unions along with growing precarious employment. Incorporating young people has been identified as a challenge not only in Germany but many other countries.⁵ As Vandaele illustrates,⁶ data from European Social Survey shows that median age of union members in Europe fluctuates from 40s to 50s. Inverted U-shaped development is visible, where the early and mid-40s are the highest likely age for

¹ Simms et al., 'Organizing Young Workers Under Precarious Conditions', 421.

² Holst, Holzschuh, and Niehoff, 'YOUnion Country Report - Germany', September 2014, 4-5.

³ Hodder and Kretsos, 'Young Workers and Unions: Context and Overview', 2.

⁴ Lowe and Rastin, 'Organizing the Next Generation'.

⁵ Simms and Adam, 'Precarious Solidarities: Unions, Young Workers and Representative Claims', 3.

⁶ Vandaele, 'How Can Trade Unions in Europe Reconnect with Young Workers?'

unionization. Consequently, Berry and McDaniel conclude⁷ that even if at an early stage young people hold less favourable views, with time there is a high chance that this will change. But observation is too optimistic, as the path to trade union membership is not linear for young people. Because of the large increase in non-standard employment and less young people represented in these structures, it is more probable that their interests will also be ignored.

There is extensive research exploring different determinants of individual's choices regarding trade union membership. Mostly of quantitative nature, studies frequently deal with different independent variables and theoretical approaches.⁸ The large-scale surveys are useful to observe general tendencies, however they are prone to "miss the subtleties of shifting attitudes" or "fail to notice important contradictory tendencies."⁹ Existing qualitative studies on the other hand don't deal with exploring conditions of young people's engagement in trade unions, rather they mostly research young people's general attitudes to unions. Therefore, it is useful to see what motivated young people who are currently involved in trade unionism. The study explores life stories of young trade union members from Georgia and Germany. These are two structurally different countries, one is Europe's strongest economy with comparably strong trade union structures, the other, a country from the European Union's eastern neighbourhood, which tries to harmonize its standards to the EU. The main purpose is to explore from both country samples, how young people make sense of their realities and what episodes from their life story contributed to their active engagement in trade unions.

First, we will look at the previous research on the topic of young people's engagement in unions to build a foundation using existing empirical literature, as well as define the research questions. The next section discusses methods I applied to answer my research questions. The background chapters review the current state of trade union-youth relationships and school-to-work transition systems in given countries, to create a frame for an analysis of the following section: the research results.

⁷ Berry and McDaniel, 'Post-Crisis Precarity', 4.

⁸ For an extensive review in the US context please see: McClendon, Wheeler, and Weikle, "The Individual Decision to Unionize"; For brief description of theoretical models please see: Premack and Hunter, "Individual Unionization Decisions."

⁹ Berry and McDaniel, 'Post-Crisis Precarity', 6.

Literature Review and Research Questions

There has been no study conducted which explores young trade unionists' life stories and their decision to engage in these structures from qualitative approach. Although there is a paucity of the research regarding young people's engagement in unions,¹⁰ previous literature has identified several important aspects which contribute to their participation in trade union structures. Even though they are of mostly quantitative nature, it still lays useful ground and help to determine concepts. We can separate them in two broader categories of attitudinal and structural conditions. They are tightly related to each other but for explanatory and analytical purposes I will separate them and systematize them under these two groups. The first group is structural:

- Social context
- Embeddedness of trade unions at the workplace
- Labour experiences

The second, attitudinal grouping:

- Political Inclinations
- Instrumentalist approach

Social Context

The influence of social context on young people's perceptions is an empirically proven, well researched topic. Gomez et al. consider¹¹ young people as "black boxes," who are pliable, and their union attitudes can be influenced by their social surroundings. The role of fathers especially is accentuated in the context of trade unions, as unionization rates among men are traditionally higher. Blanden and Machin identified¹² significant correlation between unionization of young people and their fathers, especially in the reported active involvement of the father in the union. At the same time, many studies point out the influence of parent's occupation on the child's professional choices,¹³ as well as their general influence in the child's career decisions.¹⁴ Waddington and Kerr also

¹⁰ However, there is a growing interest since financial crisis and labour market restructuration and expansion of precarious work, where young people are primarily affected.

¹¹ Gomez, Gunderson, and Meltz, 'Comparing Youth and Adult Desire for Unionization in Canada', 525.

¹² Blanden and Machin, 'Cross-Generation Correlations of Union Status for Young People in Britain', 392.

¹³ See for example: Chevalier, 'Just Like Daddy: The Occupational Choice of UK Graduates'.

¹⁴ See for example: Ulrich, Frey, and Ruppert, 'The Role of Parents in Young People's Career Choices in Germany'; Saleem et al., 'Career Selection: Role of Parent's Profession, Mass Media and Personal Choice'.

found¹⁵ that family networks (especially fathers) impact the unionization of young people, although the cross sectional data they used did not allow them to observe the phenomenon over time, but it can be speculated that decreasing unionization rates also weaken the importance of this socializing factor.

Freeman and Diamond estimated¹⁶ transmission probabilities of unionization from parents to children and identified strong links. However, they noticed that throughout the time period they analysed (1990-2000), transmission rates were decreasing. The conclusion was that decreased unionization rates of young people posed a significant challenge for trade unions and attracting this segment would be of crucial importance for their revival.¹⁷ Their findings align with results of other contemporary studies.¹⁸

Oliver also found¹⁹ in the context of Germany and Australia, that union status of respondents and their parents were the best indicators of their desire to join the union after graduation. Similarly, Griffin and Brown using Social Learning Theory, identified²⁰ positive influence of parents and friends on young people's attitudes towards unions, However, in their results friends had a bigger impact. Consequently, they concluded that previous studies could overestimate the parental role, since they usually were not taking into the account influence of peers. At the same time, they explored to what extent these positive attitudes were affecting their willingness to join unions and found a positive correlation.²¹

Some scholars underlined that union membership of parents as such might not be a good predictor of its effects on children. Barling et al. stated²² that despite membership, parents could be expressing negative views, while non-union parents might be the opposite case, therefore parent's general attitudes towards organized labour could serve as a better predictor. They concluded²³ that children's perception of their parents' union related activity, or attitude towards unions significantly affected adolescents and young

¹⁵ Waddington and Kerr, 'Unions Fit for Young Workers?', 303.

¹⁶ Freeman and Diamond, 'Young Workers and Trade Unions'.

¹⁷ Freeman and Diamond, 35.

¹⁸ Freeman and Diamond, 34.

¹⁹ Oliver, 'University Student Employment in Germany and Australia and Its Impact on Attitudes toward Union Membership', 253.

²⁰ Griffin and Brown, "Second Hand Views? Young People, Social Networks and Positive Union Attitudes," 96.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Barling, Kelloway, and Bremermann, 'Preemployment Predictors of Union Attitudes', 726.

²³ Barling, Kelloway, and Bremermann, 729.

adults' own attitudes. Kelloway et al.'s findings²⁴ are consistent with research results of Barling et al. On the one hand, students' reported attitudes are in line with the perceptions of their parents' attitudes and participation in unions, on the other, these perceptions were strongly connected to parents' self-reported attitudes and participation.

Gomez et al. also confirm²⁵ the importance of the social norms' influence on shaping preferences of young people. In family circles, where the attitude towards unions was evaluated as positive, the union preference was 0,41 higher for youth, but only 0,29 higher for adults, compared to family circles without this attitude. In case of a family member being a unionist, the probability of union preference was 0,37 higher for youths, while 0,29 higher for adults, compared to non-unionized households. It fits the model which implies that young people are malleable and much more easily influenced to change their preferences than adults.²⁶ These results are consistent with the "impressionable years hypothesis," which maintains that attitudinal change is prevalent in late adolescent and early adulthood and influences experienced during this time affects person for the rest of their lives.²⁷ Krosnick and Alwin confirmed²⁸ the latter as opposed to "increasing persistence hypothesis," which states that people throughout their life slowly become unsusceptible to external influences.

The "experience-goods" model, which was introduced by Bryson and Gomez,²⁹ applies mostly to new entrants in the labour market who have no familiarity to trade unions, and it is considered that they would be introduced to it at their workplace. This model comes into play in the period when the decision is to be made whether unionize or not. The experiential framework first accentuates the risk undertaken by newcomers in the union as the knowledge about experience-goods is incomplete and more time is needed to become acquainted to it.³⁰ Since this process is demanding, involvement is expected to be lasting, once the decision is made.³¹ During the decision-making process, the importance of past experiences, experience of family and close social circles is also

²⁴ Kelloway, Barling, and Agar, 'Preemployment Predictors of Children's Union Attitudes'.

²⁵ Gomez, Gunderson, and Meltz, 'Comparing Youth and Adult Desire for Unionization in Canada', 533.

²⁶ See Gomez, Gunderson, and Meltz, 525–26. for self-concept formation model.

²⁷ Krosnick and Alwin, 'Aging and Susceptibility to Attitude Change.', 416.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Bryson and Gomez, 'Buying into Union Membership'.

³⁰ Unlike "search good" – "a good whose quality is observable upon simple inspection" (Bryson and Gomez, 74).

³¹ Bryson and Gomez, 'Buying into Union Membership', 74.

underlined.³² Vandaele also suggests³³ not to put too much emphasis on an “experience-goods” model, since social contacts serve as an indirect source of information. Additionally, because of the decreasing trade union membership rates across generations, the factor of social learning has also “*relatively* lost its importance [emphasis in original].”³⁴

Embeddedness of Trade Unions at the Workplace

Social agents are expected to lose influence when young people enter the labour market where “norms and influences at the workplace” gain more importance.³⁵ Lowe and Rastin look at “the decision to join a union as being embedded in the context of an individual’s work history.”³⁶ A “social custom” theory of union membership highlights two aspects: first, instrumental reasons for joining a union and second, social customs, which lead workers to join a union because of reputational considerations or so that they don’t feel isolated.³⁷ Ebbinghaus et al. also underline³⁸ as an important aspect of “social custom” theory, in relation to trade unionism, a “critical mass of members” - a precondition prompting an employee to unionize, consequently “union friendly social networks” are essential from this approach. The stable presence of the union at the workplace, with enough levels of unionism, is a pre-requisition for the aforementioned motivations to work. According to Payne, “the most important single predictor of union membership” was the recognition of union in the workplace.³⁹

The body of research which identifies factors of unionization usually assumes that there is a union presence in the workplace and explores conditions from that point. The opportunity (easy access to unions), as one of the major preconditions for this decision, needs to be accentuated on its own. Because of rising “never-membership,”⁴⁰ flexible work arrangements and young people concentrated at workplaces, which are not traditionally unionized, make the “exposure effect” (being exposed to unions after

³² Charlwood, ‘Willingness to Unionize amongst Non-Union Workers’, 56.

³³ Vandaele, ‘How Can Trade Unions in Europe Connect with Young Workers?’, 669.

³⁴ Ibid., 670.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Lowe and Rastin, ‘Organizing the Next Generation’, 217.

³⁷ Visser, ‘Why Fewer Workers Join Unions in Europe’, 406.

³⁸ Ebbinghaus, Göbel, and Koos, ‘Social Capital, “Ghent” and Workplace Contexts Matter’, 109.

³⁹ Payne, ‘Trade Union Membership and Activism Among Young People in Great Britain’, 120.

⁴⁰ Bryson and Gomez, ‘Buying into Union Membership’.

transitioning to employment) a “less reliable means of increasing union membership among the young.”⁴¹

Tapia and Turner’s observation on the German context is a relatively positive example which illustrates the importance of strong presence of trade unions. They explore the necessary conditions for active participation from the side of young people. In the case of Germany, the established institutional structures play an important role in young people’s activism. They present examples of Ver.di⁴² youth trainings in cooperation with youth councils⁴³ and trade union funded campaigns for young people,⁴⁴ in addition, initiatives from young workers to establish youth councils on precarious workplaces with the help of the IG Metall.⁴⁵

According to Freeman and Diamond’s findings in the British context, young people, before entering the job market and getting in touch with trade unions themselves, have only a vague understanding or expectations about trade unions’ function.⁴⁶ Despite the “blank-slate” hypothesis being supported by a couple of other surveys, Griffin and Brown concluded⁴⁷ that, regarding attitudes towards unions, young people cannot be considered “blank slates,” since their opinions about unions are affected by their social circles. In addition, in the context of Australia, Oliver also found out⁴⁸ that around 20% of graduate workers already had experience of trade union membership and thus can’t be considered “blank slates.” However, this statement is still context-related; in certain countries, where trade unions’ presence is very weak, even the adult population can be regarded as “blank slate.”

Freeman and Diamond’s estimations also show that the lower unionization of young people is not necessarily fully connected to the nature of jobs they take, as in unionized workplaces their unionization rates are lower than that of older workers. They explained it through the fact that “union representatives give them less time and attention than the older workers.”⁴⁹ Workers aged less than 30 report much less contact with union

⁴¹ Lowe and Rastin, ‘Organizing the Next Generation’, 205.

⁴² United services union, second biggest trade union in Germany after IG Metall.

⁴³ Tapia and Turner, ‘Renewed Activism for the Labor Movement’, 18.

⁴⁴ Tapia and Turner, 14.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁶ Freeman and Diamond, ‘Young Workers and Trade Unions’, 36.

⁴⁷ Griffin and Brown, “Second Hand Views? Young People, Social Networks and Positive Union Attitudes,” 95.

⁴⁸ Oliver, ‘Union Membership among Young Graduate Workers in Australia’, 516.

⁴⁹ Freeman and Diamond, ‘Young Workers and Trade Unions’, 43.

representatives than workers aged 30 and over. Similarly, the proportion of young workers who have never been asked to join a union was relatively high (64%).⁵⁰ At the same time, a 2019 Europe wide survey from European Public Service Union shows that the main reason for non-membership among young workers was either that they were not asked, or that “they had not got around to it.”⁵¹

Waddington and Kerr’s results do not report⁵² any significant influence of lack of knowledge on union non-membership. However, a myriad of authors stress the importance of education, starting with school children, to raise awareness regarding trade unions from a young age.⁵³ At the same time Oliver found a connection⁵⁴ between the propensity to join a union and the faculty where the students were studying: arts, social sciences and humanities students had a higher propensity than business and law students. Griffin and Brown also explored this correlation⁵⁵ and found that business students had more negative attitudes towards unions, where a possible reason could be that they are trained from a managerial perspective. However, whether students already have inclinations towards certain study programs because of internal desires and personal characteristics, or they are adopting the “values of the study major” is yet to be explored.⁵⁶

Cregan and Johnston agree that “the greatest weapon for unions might lie in education at school, so those youngsters ... become members when joining the work-force, regardless of union presence or power at any particular work-place.”⁵⁷ Despite the importance of education, the main reason remains the absence of trade unions from workers’ everyday life and workplace, which is the cause of trade unions’ power erosion. As Birke and Dribbusch state,⁵⁸ “where there is no trade union, nobody can join one.”

Labour Experiences

Discrepancy between expectation at work and existing reality might push people to unionize. The special theoretical framework, “dissonance theories,” explores this aspect.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 44.

⁵¹ EPSU, ‘Young Workers: Attitudes to Work, Unions and Society’, 10.

⁵² Waddington and Kerr, ‘Unions Fit for Young Workers?’, 311.

⁵³ Hodder and Kretsos, ‘Young Workers and Unions: Context and Overview’, 6.

⁵⁴ Oliver, ‘University Student Employment in Germany and Australia and Its Impact on Attitudes toward Union Membership’, 253.

⁵⁵ Griffin and Brown, “Second Hand Views?,” 96.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 89.

⁵⁷ As quoted in Hodder and Kretsos, 7.

⁵⁸ Dribbusch and Birke, ‘Die Gewerkschaften in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland’, 12.

According to Kochan,⁵⁹ there are two important grounds for “dissonance.” On the one hand, it relates to a lack of satisfaction and fairness at the job, on the other, a lack of influence. Charlwood empirically confirmed⁶⁰ the effect of dissonance on unionization, although it was upheld only for non-manual workers from the sample. Issue of interest from mobilization theory relates to the fairness aspect of dissonance theory. Kelly discusses⁶¹ reasons of origin of “grievance” and states that dissatisfaction is not enough for collective action, as workers might be dissatisfied with the condition, but might still perceive it as impartial or inevitable (for example, if everyone were similarly affected or if a company had to make some decisions because of their financial situation). Therefore, the condition should be perceived as illegitimate and unjust for the collective action to be initiated.⁶² Cregan and Johnston, similar to the “frustration-aggression theory,” propose⁶³ that grievance might lead young people to join unions not necessarily from rational calculation but as a way to “release the tension,” since trade unions exemplify resisting power against employers. At the same time, they also mention that if the release of this tension can be managed individually, for example when an exit is a more convenient option, joining the union is less probable.⁶⁴

According to Gomez et al. young people are much more cognizant of unfair treatment at the workplace. Their findings show that there was a drastic difference in numbers between youth and adults (58% to 13%) when it came to perception of unjust treatment at work.⁶⁵ They concluded that as a result they “are more prepared to support unionization.”⁶⁶ Fiorito et al. research, in context of the US, shows the opposite results, where younger people are perceiving employers’ to be fairer. They ascribe this to worse treatment of older workers at precarious jobs.⁶⁷ According to their recent survey results,⁶⁸ if workers perceive conditions to be precarious, they might be prone to opt for collective measures, at the same time they might have the tendency to think that trade union

⁵⁹ Charlwood, ‘Why Do Non–Union Employees Want to Unionize?’, 469.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 481.

⁶¹ Kelly, ‘Mobilization Theory’, 27.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Cregan and Johnston, ‘An Industrial Relations Approach to the Free Rider Problem’, 98.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Gomez, Gunderson, and Meltz, ‘Comparing Youth and Adult Desire for Unionization in Canada’, 537.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Fiorito et al., ‘Precarious Work, Young Workers, and Union-Related Attitudes’, 18.

members are “better off.” However, in the case of job security, Farber and Saks found⁶⁹ that if a person does not have the availability to easily switch to an equivalent job, they might be less prone to unionization. At the same time, if the employers’ side is strong and managers are expressing anti-union attitudes, it can have significantly discouraging effects on the workers’ will to unionize.⁷⁰

Political Inclinations

According to the “Shell youth study”, administered every four years in Germany, general interest in politics in young people⁷¹ is consistent. Compared to the 2015 study results, the decrease was only marginal (43% in 2015 to 41% in 2019) but is much higher than during previous three studies.⁷² Interest in politics is closely related to educational background: around half of young people with completed or who are planning to complete A levels (school leaving qualification), report having an interest in politics, while only one in four have such an interest in the case of students with lower educational attainment. University students report the highest interest (66%).⁷³ According to Friedrich Ebert Stiftung’s youth study⁷⁴ (based on the model of Shell Youth Study), interest in domestic politics among the young in Georgia is articulated (14 % very interested; 31 % interested), while in non-domestic political issues interest is quite low. Age or employment status were better indicator for the interest: if the respondent was older or employed, the more interest in politics was expressed. Before assessing young people’s political inclinations in the context of trade unions, let’s have a brief look at the development of unions in the political sphere.

Unlike anarcho-syndicalist unions of earlier periods, whose main aim was workers’ direct control, since post-WWII class compromise, trade unions took a reformism path and rights of strike was retained only to work-related issues.⁷⁵ A “social market economy,” which was first advocated by Christian Democrats and later accepted by Social Democrats has become a benchmark for trade unions in Germany. Export-oriented growth, which strengthened the welfare state, was the basis of the new model.

⁶⁹ Farber and Saks, ‘Why Workers Want Unions’, 366–67.

⁷⁰ Charlwood, ‘Willingness to Unionize amongst Non-Union Workers’, 68–69.

⁷¹ In 2019 representative sample was comprised of 2,572 young people, aged 12 to 25.

⁷² ‘Shell Youth Study 2019’, 14.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Omanadze et al., ‘Generation in Transition’, 48.

⁷⁵ Streeck and Hassel, ‘Trade Unions as Political Actors’, 335.

“Socialist class struggle” was replaced by “social partnership” (*Sozialpartnerschaft*), which supposed their common goal to rebuild the German economy, despite social partners’ diverging interest.⁷⁶ However, this transition has not occurred without a conflict.⁷⁷

Despite the moving away from the struggle of capital and labour, trade unions were still expected to be active on general social topics, not just the narrow economic interests of their members. There are many known examples of how they tried to engage on issues of wider implications, like international peace, free abortion,⁷⁸ or the current Fridays for Future demonstrations and protests against racism, but central to their activities still remained the collective bargaining.

Neoliberal restructuring of capitalism weakened trade unions and put an end to the class compromise, however, trade unions are discussing new strategies where two main courses of action are distinctive. The first underlines the importance of the return to the traditional approach and strengthening of unions at a company level, while the second promotes strengthening political power and shifting to more social movement unionism.⁷⁹

To pursue their interests, trade unions are often related to major left or centre-left party on the political arena (e.g. SPD in Germany, Labour Party in UK and Democratic Party in the US).⁸⁰ Streeck and Hassel, relate this⁸¹ back to their common starting point as “labour movements,” which had both political and economic dimensions. Academic research confirms that strong working-class political parties in government are generally associated with higher density of trade unions.⁸²

Although, trade unions in Germany are non-partisan, there has been strong traditional links between DGB affiliates and Social Democratic party, as well as some traditional links of Christian Unions to the Christian Democratic Party and a recent

⁷⁶ Dribbusch and Schulten, ‘German Unions Facing Neo-Liberalism: Between Resistance and Accommodation’, 147–48.

⁷⁷ For detailed overview of social partnership since post-war Germany to early 2000s, please see: Streeck and Hassel, ‘The Crumbling Pillars of Social Partnership’; For social partnership after unification: Turner, ‘Up Against the Fallen Wall: The Crisis of Social Partnership in Unified Germany [Electronic Version]’.

⁷⁸ Streeck and Hassel, ‘Trade Unions as Political Actors’, 336.

⁷⁹ Dribbusch and Schulten, ‘German Unions Facing Neo-Liberalism: Between Resistance and Accommodation’, 158.

⁸⁰ Streeck and Hassel, ‘Trade Unions as Political Actors’, 337.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Lewkowicz and Lewczuk, ‘An Institutional Approach to Trade Union Density. The Case of Legal Origins and Political Ideology’, 39–40.

upsurge in the numbers of unionists who side with *Die Linke*.⁸³ In the context of Britain, Waddington and Kerr found that traditional ideological linkages between trade union membership and voting for Labour for example, stay in place, even if over time it has somewhat weakened.⁸⁴ In some countries, political parties might be exercising influence over trade unions (e.g. France or Italy), while in others, because of the absence of any traditional linkages to political parties and their weak position, trade unions might be trying to advance their interests by themselves creating political parties. For example, in Georgia, the Georgian Trade Union Confederation (GTUC) has recently created the “People’s Party.”

Trade Unions’ orientation towards workers’ rights can be attractive for segments of young people as it has been reported that youth have a stronger propensity to support workers’ political rights. Gomez et al. confirmed⁸⁵ that young people, compared to adults, are more positive towards supporting the idea that workers should have more political power (77% to 61%) and consequently, should be “more prepared to act on it by supporting unionization.”

Although some scholars have discarded political inclinations as major rationale for joining trade unions,⁸⁶ its influence has been confirmed by several pieces of empirical research. For example, Charlwood confirmed the hypothesis: “those with left-wing views are more likely to be willing to join a union,” although with more marked results for manual workers.⁸⁷ At the same time, using the cognitive model, which suggests that group membership for young people might “enhance self-esteem,” Cregan and Johnston concluded that “a union as a social movement dedicated to ideals” might be engaging for young people.⁸⁸

Along with family socialization, Barling et al. also investigated⁸⁹ how work-related beliefs such as Marxist and humanistic beliefs affected young people’s trade union attitudes. By Marxist beliefs they highlighted support for workers’ greater control on the workplace, while humanistic work beliefs accentuated the wellbeing of the individual

⁸³ Ibid., 147.

⁸⁴ Waddington and Kerr, ‘Unions Fit for Young Workers?’, 304.

⁸⁵ Gomez, Gunderson, and Meltz, ‘Comparing Youth and Adult Desire for Unionization in Canada’, 536.

⁸⁶ See for example Adams, ‘Solidarity, Self-Interest and the Unionization Differential Between Europe and North America’, 501–3.

⁸⁷ Charlwood, ‘Why Do Non-Union Employees Want to Unionize?’, 482.

⁸⁸ Cregan and Johnston, ‘An Industrial Relations Approach to the Free Rider Problem’, 97.

⁸⁹ Barling, Kelloway, and Bremermann, ‘Preemployment Predictors of Union Attitudes’, 726.

worker and more harmonious work environment. Their findings showed⁹⁰ that work-related beliefs also had a direct impact on trade union attitudes, similar for both Marxist and humanistic beliefs; however, the magnitude of the coefficient was much larger in case of family socialization.

Instrumentalist Approach

The already mentioned “experience-goods” model is associated with a consumer choice perspective and is incorporated into a cost-benefit model, which states that people join unions simply when net benefits outweigh the costs.⁹¹ In the consumer choice model of unionism, on the one hand it is implied that workers demand for expression is supplied by the unions. On the other, it is assumed that the main purpose is the end goal and benefits which could be reached through this expression, not “any intrinsic desire for unionization itself.”⁹²

As opposed to Shister’s argument which supposes that, compared to older workers, young people might be inclined to join trade unions on the grounds that they are working in worse conditions and change employers more frequently (therefore having less loyalty), Waddington and Whitston’s results show that mutual support played an important role for young people.⁹³ Even though young people were not focusing on payments as much as older workers, other instrumentalist reasons (reasons used as an instrument for satisfying different needs) were further identified, such as industrial benefits,⁹⁴ professional services⁹⁵, trainings and education.⁹⁶ However, a large body of literature states that the new generation gives equal importance to “extrinsic values” such as higher wages and at the same time “work freedoms,” such as a flexible work schedule.⁹⁷ Cregan and Johnston also identified several instrumentalist reasons⁹⁸ for joining unions among young people. In their conclusion, examples such as access to certain social spaces, “camaraderie of its social club” were particularly visible, while other young

⁹⁰ Ibid., 729.

⁹¹ Bryson and Gomez, ‘Buying into Union Membership’, 75.

⁹² Bryson and Gomez, 79.

⁹³ Waddington and Whitston, ‘Why Do People Join Unions in a Period of Membership Decline?’, 526.

⁹⁴ Identified by Waddington and Whitston as dispute benefit, funeral benefit and sickness benefit.

⁹⁵ Identified as indemnity insurance, library access, etc.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Berry and McDaniel, ‘Post-Crisis Precarity’, 4.

⁹⁸ Cregan and Johnston, ‘An Industrial Relations Approach to the Free Rider Problem’, 97.

people had inclinations towards exerting influence, being in power, or seeking the thrill of the experience (such as the experience of a strike).

Concluding Remarks and Research Questions

As noticeable from the presented overview, most research projects have been approaching the questions through large scale quantitative studies of determinants using statistical models and established theoretical frameworks. Even though their methodology can be used for detecting large-scale changes, it is prone to missing the intricacies of everyday reality of young people and creating “a gap in explanatory language.”⁹⁹ In the case of studies which choose a qualitative approach, they are usually concerned with exploring the opinions of a sizable category of young people at large,¹⁰⁰ or narrowing them down to explore the opinions of precarious young workers.¹⁰¹ Since these studies don’t address the conditions of young people’s engagement in unions directly, rather they generally explore their viewpoints, they have been omitted from the literature review. Considering the methodological framing of my work, the aim of this literature review was firstly, to identify what is missing in the existing body of literature, which helped to set a direction to the study and secondly, it was a useful tool to identify certain tentative concepts, which prove useful during the interpretation of the results. My current interest is a detailed analysis of the life stories of young trade union members. Considering diversity of conditions for unionization outlined above, it is important to research the specific aspects of their life, which led to their current position in trade unions.

Research Questions:

How did their views towards work and society contribute to their current stances regarding unions?

Which episodes from their life story, in their opinion, played a major role in becoming active in trade unions?

⁹⁹ Worth, ‘Making Sense of Precarity’, 441.

¹⁰⁰ See for example: Berry and McDaniel, ‘Post-Crisis Precarity’; Kovács, Dias, and da Conceição Cerdeira, ‘Young Workers’ Perceptions of Trade Unions in Portugal’.

¹⁰¹ See for example: Worth, ‘Making Sense of Precarity’.

Methodology

The presented study is exploratory in character. I used an approach similar to grounded theory, which is based on inductive analysis, when one does not impose “patterns, themes and categories” on data, rather they emerge from it.¹⁰² Immersing directly in the empirical data, allows a first-hand study of the world without preconceived beliefs. In my research I’ve dealt with young trade unionists’ decision to enter that path. As Stryker and Vryan explain,¹⁰³ choice is the “part of human condition” and subjective experience of the person plays here the crucial role.

Patton notes¹⁰⁴ that “while the inductive nature of qualitative inquiry emphasizes the importance of being open to whatever one can learn, some way of organizing the complexity of experience is virtually a prerequisite for perception itself.” While reviewing the previous research, to have a general direction, certain “sensitizing concepts” have been formulated. Sensitizing concepts introduced by Blumer, are viewed as starting point of qualitative research and according to him, they offer us “a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances.”¹⁰⁵ Charmaz defines them as “those background ideas that inform the overall research problem.”¹⁰⁶ But ultimately, the data is decisive, and sensitizing concepts can be disregarded by “emergent concepts.”

I had to build an open-ended interview guide, which helped me to have more structure, as I am a novice researcher, at the same time it also helped in the cases when interviewees were reluctant during the first narrative inducing question. It was also useful to collect reliable and comparable data, containing same first narrative inducing question for everyone and third structured part. However, in most cases during the conversation in the second part, a vast majority of third part topics were covered usually.¹⁰⁷ In-depth, semi-structured interviews were a useful methodological choice while the attitude formation is not easily observable, for example one cannot point to a specific establishment or some other single specific external factor, as they are forming throughout long time period. Using semi-structured interviews proved to be an effective tool to adapt

¹⁰² Bowen, ‘Grounded Theory and Sensitizing Concepts’, 14.

¹⁰³ Stryker and Vryan, ‘The Symbolic Interactionist Frame’, 4.

¹⁰⁴ Patton, ‘What to Observe: Sensitizing Concepts’, 359.

¹⁰⁵ Blumer, ‘What Is Wrong with Social Theory’, 7.

¹⁰⁶ As quoted in: Bowen, ‘Grounded Theory and Sensitizing Concepts’, 14.

¹⁰⁷ Please, see Appendix 1 for full interview protocol.

the talk to the respondent's individual experiences and to allow the common themes to emerge.

Case Selection

Comparative analysis of Germany and Georgia will contribute to a deeper understanding of the researched phenomenon. Germany is perceived as one of the exceptions where young workers union membership numbers have reversed.¹⁰⁸ Georgia being from the EU's eastern neighbourhood is in the association process with the EU,¹⁰⁹ which entails political and economic integration and tries to approximate its legislations and labour conditions to EU standards. School-to-work transition systems and labour market conditions are significantly different; Germany is categorized as employer-oriented, while Georgia post-socialist.¹¹⁰ It is beneficial for the research to see what patterns were to emerge from these divergent conditions and sample of young people. Generating the law-like tendencies is not the aim of this comparison; it would be a non-viable task. Rather each case is treated on its own merit while I am exploring the field to identify conditions under which young trade unionists in question got activated. Neither of the cases is treated as "exotic analogy,"¹¹¹ as I tried to balance the perspectives. However, I still share the conviction of Esser and Vliegenthart who state:¹¹²

Comparison prevents scholars from over-generalizing based on their own, often idiosyncratic, experiences and challenges claims to ethnocentrism or naive universalism (relativization); and comparison provides access to a wide range of alternative options and problem solutions that can facilitate or reveal a way out of similar dilemmas at home (alternatives).

Selection of Research Participants

In the selection process for the participants I resorted to non-probability sampling strategies. Purposeful sampling is well accepted strategy in qualitative research directed at determining "information-rich" cases. Mostly I sought typical cases, with certain demanded requirements for choosing participants: aged between 18-30 and currently involved in unions. This upper age limit was preferred as young people currently

¹⁰⁸ Keune, 'Trade Unions and Young Workers in Seven EU Countries', 12.

¹⁰⁹ You can access the EU-Georgia Association Agreement (AA) text, which entered into force in 2016, here: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22014A0830\(02\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22014A0830(02))

¹¹⁰ Vandaele, 'How Can Trade Unions in Europe Reconnect with Young Workers?', 14–15.

¹¹¹ Azarian, 'Potentials and Limitations of Comparative Method in Social Science', 14.

¹¹² Esser and Vliegenthart, 'Comparative Research Methods', 2.

experience longer transition process (because of longer stay at school or getting back to school¹¹³). From Germany I only recruited members who were able to converse in English language to best capture their experiences as my German language knowledge is limited, but I did let them express themselves also in German if necessary. In the case of Georgia, interviews were conducted in Georgian, as it is my native language. Even though convenience sampling is not based on any strategic calculations, I had to refer to it because of time constraints, as I had to arrange the interviews with sections which were responsive. Although I did not have maximum variations, it still included diverse, cross-section experiences. Due to their focus or characteristics, all the approached Trade Unions had young members.

I utilized two main strategies while choosing the participants. First, gatekeepers helped me to establish contacts according to my criteria. Gatekeepers are people who help to secure the access to respondents and they are mediating relationship between researcher and respondents, thanks to “their knowledge, connections with or membership in a research population.”¹¹⁴ In my case trade unions’ youth secretaries served as gatekeepers in Germany, who disseminated my e-mail in their networks, which contained the essential information about the study. That strategy proved successful and I have reached all my German volunteers this way. In case of Georgia, I had 2 contact persons in two of the target unions, who also served as my respondents and I used the so called “snowball technique,” which means recruiting participants through other participants.

As far as my information goes, in the German sample none of the participants knew each other, as a majority were from different regions. In case of Georgian sample, because of the small size of the community, if they were not direct acquaintances, they at least had knowledge of and opinions about other trade union activists, and people from the same unions usually had close relations with each other. From my respondents I had previous communication with, only two people were acquaintances of mine. Belonging mostly to the same age cohort, there was no disparity between me and the respondents. I also have not noticed any impact of the gender of the respondents on overall interviews.

I allowed the participants to choose a suitable time slot through Calendly, an online appointment scheduling software. I created a schedule which also indicated my available time slots, with no more than two participants to be interviewed per day, with

¹¹³ Kovács, Dias, and da Conceição Cerdeira, ‘Young Workers’ Perceptions of Trade Unions in Portugal’, 579.

¹¹⁴ Andoh-Arthur, ‘Gatekeepers in Qualitative Research’.

1-hour periods before and after the interview for preparation and debriefing, and to document my impressions while memories were still fresh.

Biographical Overview of Research Participants

German sample

Name	Age	Gender	Education	Trade Union*
Aris	26	M	VET/higher education (HE)	IG Metall
Marcel	26	M	Abitur ¹¹⁵ /VET	IG Metall
Emma	24	F	Abitur/VET/HE	Ver.di
Luca	26	F	Abitur/VET/HE	Ver.di
Marvin	23	M	Fachabitur ¹¹⁶ /VET	Ver.di
Tim	26	M	HE	Ver.di
Jonas	24	M	Fachabitur/VET/HE	NGG
Lisa	26	F	Abitur/VET/HE	NGG

*Youth sections are considered under each union

Georgian sample

Giga	23	M	HE	GTUC Youth
Lika	22	F	HE	GTUC Youth
Nikoloz	22	M	HE	GTUC Youth
Ana	28	F	HE	Solidarity Network
Davit	30	M	HE	Solidarity Network
Revaz	29	M	HE	Solidarity Network
Ketevan	28	F	HE	Social Workers' Union
Maryam	25	F	HE	Social Workers' Union

Data Collection Procedure

In formulating the research design, Tom Wengraf's book: *Qualitative Research Interviewing - Biographic Narrative and Semi-Structured Methods* was a useful reference. The book covers in detail concepts and approaches for in-depth interviewing and necessary steps before, during and after the interviews. The Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) procedure follows three stages, starting with a single

¹¹⁵ *Abitur* - university entrance qualification

¹¹⁶ *Fachhochschulreife* – University of Applied Sciences (*Fachhochschule*) entrance qualification

narrative question which induces free narrative and telling of their life story by the informant, then follow up on it, and lastly, nonnarrative questions you have prepared stemming from your theory questions. Simply, the general model suggested in the initial phase is to formulate your Central Research Question (CRQ) from the Research Purpose (RP). Central research question is then basis for Theory-Questions' (TQs) production, which on their side induce number of Interview-Questions and other Interventions (IIs). The model looks like this: $RP > CRQ > TQs > IQs/IIs$

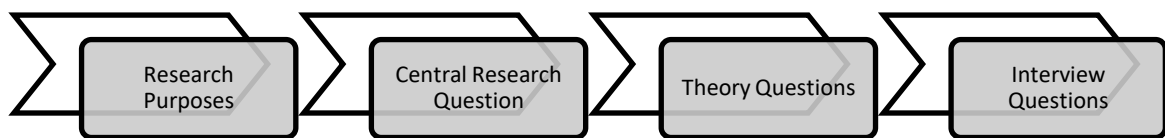


Figure 1. Adapted from Wengraf, *Qualitative Research Interviewing*, p. 73.

My CRQs:

- How did young trade unionists' views towards work and society contribute to their current stances regarding unions?
- Which episodes from their life story, in their opinion, played a major role in becoming active in trade unions?

Stemming from my CRQs, I formulated the first narrative inducing question, as follows:

- “Please, recall any event, experience or influences which at any point of your life could have affected your views towards trade unions, either positively or negatively, be it direct or indirect experience.”

I carried out the pilot test before official interviews. Pilot tests are useful to identify shortcomings in the interview design before implementing it,¹¹⁷ while at the same time, it helps practicing the interview. What's important is that pilot test should be conducted with a qualitatively similar participant. Bernard advises¹¹⁸ to not use close friends as practice informants, because of “role expectations.” Therefore, I approached my acquaintance, young trade union activist who was willing to help me with pilot test. However, no substantial changes have been undertaken as a result.

¹¹⁷ Turner, 'Qualitative Interview Design: A Practical Guide for Novice Investigators', 757.

¹¹⁸ Bernard, 'Interviewing I: Unstructured and Semistructured', 166.

Interviews took place from June 10 to June 26 and the length was ranging from 32 minutes to 115 minutes. Most of the interviews were conducted and recorded through Skype and its call recording tool. In the few cases the informants preferred alternative channels, I used a separate audio recording software.

Before each interview I notified the respondents to take as much time as needed, as well as that any detail they could give me would be appreciated, so that they would not feel constrained. While they were telling me their story, I was not interrupting, just making notes for the subsequent part. Narrations in the first sub session were varying in lengths, from few minutes to more than half an hour. After they indicated that they were done with the story and had nothing to add, I found useful to take a maximum 15 minutes break to prepare the follow up questions on their narration, as Wengraf suggests¹¹⁹ (however, some scholars prefer not to have breaks to keep up the newly developed “co-operation and spirit of trust”¹²⁰). This helped me to fully concentrate on their talk and not thinking what questions I might be asking afterwards.

For the second sub session I was making notes on the printed, simplified version of Wengraf’s proposed table:¹²¹

“Topics in the order mentioned”	“The terms used by the interviewee”	Questions

The second sub session allowed to ask only questions stemming from the narrative of the respondent in the first part and I was following the topics in order raised by the interviewee. It took the form of a dialogue (of course participant was doing most of the talk), where we would cover main topics naturally. According to Wengraf, the third sub session, which is structured part of the interview, should take place on a different date, after the preliminary analysis of obtained material have been conducted. However, because of time constraints I was covering the third sub session during the same day (it should be mentioned that many prepared 3rd sub session topics were usually covered during the 2nd sub session dialogue). Only in case of 4 respondents I decided to conduct

¹¹⁹ Wengraf, ‘Preparing Lightly-Structured Depth Interviews: A Design for a BNIM-Type Biographic-Narrative Interview’, 119.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 126.

the follow up interviews as I noticed that there were certain themes emerging where I needed more time to work on and get back to them with extra questions. I also confirmed with all participants that to capture their story correctly I might have to approach them if during transcribing or analysis there was some misunderstanding. In a few cases I have contacted them through e-mail to clarify certain details.

Semi structured interviews allowed asking follow-up and probing questions, which would permit to explore the individual's personal experiences better. As quoted in Turner, what matters is "...to ensure that the same general areas of information are collected from each interviewee; this provides more focus than the conversational approach, but still allows a degree of freedom and adaptability in getting information from the interviewee."¹²² Even though I was focusing on their unique experiences and tried to make them feel they were in charge of the interview, I had my research and theory questions in mind and tried to cover their important aspects as well.

Data Analysis

After gathering the data, thematic content analysis of semi-structured interviews took place. Content analysis as Leedy and Ormrod define¹²³ is "a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of materials for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes, or biases." According to Evans,¹²⁴ thematic analysis is useful tool if you aim to explore how your respondents make sense of the world and create the meanings, as well as how does it relate to their "material experiences and contexts." I also needed to use categorizing strategy (coding – fracture the data and rearrange it into categories which will allow comparisons) combined in the end with connecting strategy (narrative analysis) to not lose the wholeness of the story and connect back to the respondents.

I transcribed most of the interviews verbatim upon completion to see what themes were emerging and if I needed to make some alteration. Although it would be useful to guide me for subsequent data collection, I did not manage to conduct the initial coding at that point. However, I had identified the parts which were directly answering to my research questions. For example, parts where participants were referring directly to certain significant influences for them to engage in trade unions. I arranged the follow up interviews to further explore certain issues in 4 cases.

¹²² Turner, 'Qualitative Interview Design: A Practical Guide for Novice Investigators', 755.

¹²³ As quoted in: Williams, 'Research Methods', 69.

¹²⁴ Evans, 'Analysing Semi-Structured Interviews Using Thematic Analysis', 3.

Getting myself immersed in the transcripts was the first step of data analysis (transcribing also helped me to familiarize myself with the data). I closely read each transcript and meanwhile I was making notes of any initial impressions, as advised by number of researchers.¹²⁵ I narrowed down the information to identify the most relevant parts. I did not resort to line-by-line coding to not confuse myself with too many elements and went straight to open coding (meaning codes fitting to data; not preconceived), incident by incident. As advised by Charmaz,¹²⁶ I was adjusting the codes to the data, not vice versa. Codes should connect the “described data and our emerging analysis.”¹²⁷ I preferred to do the coding manually, to be closer to data and have it tangible. I had all the transcriptions printed out and was using coloured markers for pointing out the similar codes. The questions I had in mind was: to what category the code was pointing to? Did I have empirical evidence for it? Was it related to my research question? How would I define it? Was it used frequently? Was it somehow surprising? Did respondent say it was relevant? Afterwards, I prioritized which were more important and grouped them under categories and determined relationships between these categories.

Role of Researcher

Taking the role of outsider, as myself I have never been actively engaged with trade unions, young trade unionists could act as experts, having more knowledge of their field and share their personal experiences from this perspective. I was reasserting and valuing their contribution as they shared knowledge which otherwise, I would not be able to obtain. Mostly I tried to stay as neutral as possible during the interviews and didn't show emotional responses while they answered. On the other hand, building trust was important and I was openly answering any question they might have had and in certain episodes I also engaged in brief informal dialogue. I also was careful while note-taking so that respondents would not be affected by it. I was trying to capture the most relevant elements and ask to elaborate on them. As I am a novice researcher and was conducting such a study first time, there have been few moments when after listening to the recordings I realized that I missed some important aspects to follow up right away, therefore I reached

¹²⁵ See for example: Burnard, 'A Method of Analysing Interview Transcripts in Qualitative Research'; Maguire and Delahunt, 'Doing a Thematic Analysis: A Practical, Step-by-Step Guide for Learning and Teaching Scholars.'; Braun and Clarke, 'How to Use Thematic Analysis with Interview Data'.

¹²⁶ Charmaz, 'Coding in Grounded Theory Practice', 49.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 69.

them afterwards and asked to elaborate on those parts. Constant reflexivity is necessary on the researcher's part to ask the most suitable questions and not impose its own concepts on the respondents. I tried to minimize the leading questions, but after listening to the recordings, I noticed in few cases I pushed my discourse on them but fortunately it did not affect their responses as they took the control. Nevertheless, most of my questions were open ended which allowed my respondents to be flexible and express themselves freely. Finally, having a research diary proved quite useful. I started writing it from December and have been noting down all the relevant details related to my thesis. I have also noted there all the fresh impressions after each interview.

Protection of Human Subjects

Two weeks before the interview, I distributed consent forms for signing and pre-interview forms to the participants to gather demographic information and important background details to not lose time on it during the interview. For the consent form, I used the template offered by Trinity College Dublin, specifically designed for qualitative interviews on non-sensitive topics with non-vulnerable groups of people.¹²⁸ I altered it according to my research requirements (please see Appendix 2). Consent forms assured the informants of anonymity unless we agreed otherwise. Out of 16, 12 agreed their first name to be used, in case of 4 informants, I changed the names according to their suggestions.

I was always starting the interview with making clear the ethical issues, that I would treat all the materials confidentially (meaning not sharing it to other people, naturally the parts of it are being used in my work). I was reconfirming that they agreed voluntarily to take part in the interview, that they could stop any time or not respond to any question, without any consequences. Recordings have been saved on my personal computer and uploaded on the cloud as well, before I completed the transcriptions to be ensured against unforeseen circumstances.

Limitations and Strengths

Main strength of the study lies in my approach to conduct in-depth interviews. I had the opportunity to adopt it to personal needs of the participants and uncover their individual biographies. Including samples from two structurally different countries also brought useful insight in identifying common themes which mattered for young people on both

¹²⁸ Template can be accessed at:

<https://www.tcd.ie/swsp/assets/pdf/Participant%20consent%20form%20template.pdf>

sides. Even though on the one hand we have a country with strong economy and trade union structures, criticism and dissatisfaction with the system was no less evident in German young trade union members. Of course, there are also marked differences across individual cases and from sample to sample.

The main weakness stems from convenience sampling I had to resort to. This creates validity problems. Unique experiences of the individuals are to be presented; therefore, generalizability is the greatest limitation. With the number of informants I reached, there will be no possibility to draw any statistical inferences. At the same time, the sample was heterogenous and time to time prone to inconsistencies, making systematic comparison challenging. However, these diversities were illuminating in other sense. For example, I had the opportunity to analyse not only the perspective of volunteers but also of young people who work on workers' issues full time, or compare the standpoints of young people with diverse labour experiences and social context and see that despite these differences, common concerns and aspirations could be observed.

Having resorted to exploring oral history of the respondents was also good decision, as they were sharing not only parts of their own life but also of those around them. They were sharing their "observations of their wider social world."¹²⁹ Even though our main aim is to explore how young people make sense of their surroundings, we still need to also accentuate on certain danger of biographical interpretations, which "may run the risk of underplaying the significance of structure and of taking young people's interpretations at face value."¹³⁰ Therefore, the next section serves the purpose to place their story in the country context they are coming from.

¹²⁹ Wengraf, 'Preparing for Any Interviewing Sequence', 101.

¹³⁰ Furlong and Cartmel, 'The Risk Society', 43.

Trade Unions and Young People

This chapter reviews the current state of trade union-youth relationship in Germany and Georgia to set a stage for later analysis of interviews with young trade union members. It offers contextual details, which are relevant for the later analysis, as those young trade union members exist not in isolation but in specific structures, quite different in given country cases.

For both cases, a short overview of trade unions' current standing in given country is offered at the beginning. Firstly, we turn to the German case where different school-to-work transition routes are briefly examined. First, Vocational Education and Training will be discussed as it is traditional stronghold of trade unions in Germany. The higher education path, because of its growing importance, will be also reviewed even though trade unions are not present in this area. Dual study system is additionally included along with higher education as it is a steadily growing pathway for young people (their growth could be also connected to increased demand for higher education). Precarious employment will be also assessed briefly because of its expansion. Along with school-to-work transition, trade unions involvement in these areas are discussed and evaluated. Later, the Georgian case will be discussed, where higher education is the domineering pathway. VET programs are still a novelty and the least popular choice for young Georgians, however despite its shortcomings it is slowly becoming popular. The employment situation of the young people will be also briefly reviewed, and the fragmented presence of trade unions are evaluated in the last part.

Note on Trade Unions - Germany

In the "Basic Law" - the German constitution - the freedom of association gives workers right to be involved in trade unions and unions' main responsibility lies in collective bargaining.¹³¹ German trade unions are considered the biggest in the world, with considerable influence. The second point which can be an illustration of this perception highlighted by Lehndorff et al. is how effectively the unions handled the 2008 crisis.¹³² During the economic recovery trade unions attracted around 40,000 new members, where the biggest union, IG Metall was particularly successful in North Rhine-Westphalia

¹³¹ Dribbusch and Birke, 'Trade Unions in Germany'.

¹³² Lehndorff, Dribbusch, and Schulten, 'Two Worlds of Unionism? German Manufacturing and Service Unions since the Great Recession'.

among young people.¹³³ However, it should be also noted that the development since the 2000s created varying economic conditions for different unions and put them in dissimilar positions. The weak domestic sector created an unfavourable set-up for unions in private sector services,¹³⁴ and this is the sector which is mostly responsible for job creation.

Generally, one specific characteristic of German model is the dual interest representation: by works councils on the firm level and trade unions mostly in collective bargaining. Trade unions bargain about issues such as wages, working time and legally they are sole responsible for collective bargaining, while works councils deal with work organization.¹³⁵ Germany and Austria were the first countries to introduce works councils in 1919. Currently, already 5 employees can constitute a works council.¹³⁶ Formally works councils and trade unions are independent bodies, although many works council members are also simultaneously trade union members,¹³⁷ therefore participating in its decision-making and collective agreement negotiations.¹³⁸ Additionally, trade unions can also legally refer to labour court to remove any member of the works council or request to dismiss it wholly in case the works council does not perform its duties.

DGB (*Der Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund*) youth is the umbrella organization which unites the youth sections of individual trade unions of German Trade Union Confederation.¹³⁹ Its primary aim is to strengthen collaboration between different sections and support political education of members. In most of these youth sections, members of trade unions under the age of 28 (in case of IG Metall Jugend under 27, Junge GEW- under 35) are automatically incorporated. IG Metall Jugend is the most numerous section (227,000 members), being also the largest youth political organization in Germany. By 2019 Ver.di Jugend had almost 112,000 members, while Junge NGG reports 15,000

¹³³ Schilling and Vanselow, 'Inside the German Miracle', 86.

¹³⁴ Lehndorff, Dribbusch, and Schulten, 'Two Worlds of Unionism? German Manufacturing and Service Unions since the Great Recession', 210.

¹³⁵ Holst, Holzschuh, and Niehoff, 'YOUion Country Report - Germany', September 2014, 17.

¹³⁶ Oesingmann, 'Workplace Representation in Europe: Works Councils and Their Economic Effects on Firms'.

¹³⁷ By 2010 around 77% of works councils' members were organized in German Trade Union Confederation (*Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund – DGB*) Dribbusch and Birke, 'Die Gewerkschaften in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland', 11. However, number of works councils' members without trade union membership is on the rise (Waas, 2014).

¹³⁸ Dribbusch and Birke, 'Trade Unions in Germany', 6.

¹³⁹ For the list and the overview of organisational areas of DGB unions, please, refer to Dribbusch and Birke, 7.

young members.¹⁴⁰ They are represented on local, national and federal level and often support Youth and Trainees councils (*Jugend- und Auszubildendenvertretung – JAV* – youth counterpart for works council) with any inquiries they might have, as well as with educational trainings and materials. Full time youth secretaries are employed at all levels to ensure coordination and contact with volunteers.

School-to-Work Transition in Germany

Germany is currently among the countries with leading positions in low unemployment rates, posing with steady 3,2 %, ¹⁴¹ same as 2019. Youth unemployment (under 25) in Germany with 5,6 % is also the lowest in the EU-27. ¹⁴² Such rates, along with well-functioning economy, is also ascribed to demographic aspects, since 15-24 age group is continuously shrinking and therefore demand increases. ¹⁴³ On the other hand, low unemployment are often ascribed to growing precarious employment and these are the types of jobs young people are usually concentrated in. In the following section we will overview the existing school-to-work transition pathways for young Germans, to better understand trade unions' positioning and the general condition, and opportunities young people are offered on the labour market.

Vocational Education and Training (VET)

Unlike general education system where the process is more straightforward, ¹⁴⁴ full-time school-based VET at upper secondary-level can be categorized in three types: one year preparation for dual apprenticeship training, certification to access HE sector and certification to access healthcare and full-time vocational schools. ¹⁴⁵ The traditional path for the young people in Germany in transition to labour market is the vocational education and training (VET). The traditional German VET system was based on dual apprenticeships and it still remains the most popular path (See Table 1). During post-war times it was supplemented by school-based VET programs, but rarely overlapping with the traditional VET. School-based VET is mostly present in intermediate level white

¹⁴⁰ jungeNKG, 'Über Uns'.

¹⁴¹ Eurostat, 'Unemployment Statistics'.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Youth Employment Magazine, 'Good News for Youth Unemployment in Germany – New Record Low Reached'.

¹⁴⁴ At upper secondary level, *Gymnasium* (university-preparatory school) provides university entrance qualification - *Abitur*.

¹⁴⁵ Graf, 'Germany: Dual Studies and the Transformation of the Dual Principle', 92.

collar occupations, for example healthcare occupations or “assistant occupations.” Both dual apprenticeships and school-based VET are issuing occupational certificates. After 1970s, at upper secondary level, prevocational training programs without issuing vocational certificates were also added.¹⁴⁶

Forms of Vocational Training	Number of New Entrants in 2019
Apprenticeships (Firm-based+school-based)	492,276. 50,7 %
School-based VET	222,582. 22,9 %
Prevocational training (“transition system”)	255,282. 26,3 %

Table 1. Forms of vocational training and distribution of new entrants, 2019¹⁴⁷

The major criticism of VET system asserts that it has become increasingly difficult for low achieving youth to pass the threshold and get into those schemes due to employers’ extended requirements,¹⁴⁸ leading to the risk of unemployment or life of precarious employment. The school education has become the indicator of accessing an apprenticeship. If traditionally students with 9-year school education were the major target group for apprenticeships, now they have much less chance of getting it.¹⁴⁹ The government supports “transition system” (*Übergangssystem*) where vulnerable young people from migrant backgrounds, with insufficient grades or learning disabilities, are offered a preparatory stage with the aim to get them into the company offered apprenticeships.¹⁵⁰ However, many cannot manage to make the transition and on a yearly basis around 150,000 young people leave without qualifications, which makes their chances to be employed very low.¹⁵¹ In addition, the average age to start an apprenticeship has been risen to 20 years, as after completing transition system student apply for apprenticeships year after year.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁶ Jacob and Solga, ‘Germany’s Vocational Education and Training System in Transformation’, 162–63.

¹⁴⁷ Data taken from: Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, ‘Bildung in Deutschland 2020’, 152.

¹⁴⁸ Jacob and Solga, ‘Germany’s Vocational Education and Training System in Transformation’, 162.

¹⁴⁹ Deissinger, ‘The German Dual Vocational Education and Training System as “Good Practice”?’, 560.

¹⁵⁰ Deissinger, 560.

¹⁵¹ Wieland, ‘Germany’s Dual Vocational-Training System’, 579.

¹⁵² Eckelt and Schmidt, ‘Learning to Be Precarious – The Transition of Young People from School into Precarious Work in Germany’, 135.

Trade Unions in Vocational Education and Training

The main stronghold for trade unions to organize young workers in Germany has been vocational training, especially in manufacturing sector which still is retained as important supplier of jobs in Germany. Labour market trends till mid-1980s, namely predominant path of school-to-work transitions being VET, determined unions strategies to be concentrated on apprentices¹⁵³ and still makes up substantial focus.

○ Social Partners' Involvement on Different levels

Social partners are actively involved in all levels of VET structures. The main participants are federal and Land government on the one hand and employers' and employees' representatives on the other. Employers are mostly represented by employers' associations, while employees by different sectoral trade unions. Trade unions are involved on different levels to contribute to the effectiveness of dual system. Trade unions are legally bound to appoint employee representatives at local, Land and federal VET boards, where influence is equally distributed between government and social partners.¹⁵⁴

On the federal level they participate to develop regulations and standards in regard to Vocational Training and Education. They are engaged in formulating National Occupation Standards (NOS), to which all companies involved in VET should abide¹⁵⁵ and along with employers' associations are the main participants in the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) who implements the VET system.¹⁵⁶ On the regional level they moderate coordination between school and firms. On the sectoral level they oversee apprentices' wage agreements.¹⁵⁷

On the company level, the leading organizations are the Works Councils and Youth and Apprentices' Councils (JAV).¹⁵⁸ Traditionally, Germany's largest union IG Metall's main organizing attempts towards young people at company level have been undertaken by youth and apprentices' councils (*Jugend- und Auszubildendenvertretung* -

¹⁵³ Holst, Holzschuh, and Niehoff, 'YOUion Country Report - Germany', September 2014, 24.

¹⁵⁴ Emmenegger, Graf, and Strebel, 'Social versus Liberal Collective Skill Formation Systems?', 4.

¹⁵⁵ Meinecke, 'The Role of Trade Unions in the German System of Vocational Education & Training'.

¹⁵⁶ Wieland, 'Germany's Dual Vocational-Training System', 579.

¹⁵⁷ For detailed report of apprentices' salary change please see: DGB-Jugend, 'Ausbildungsreport 2014'; DGB-Jugend, 'Ausbildungsreport 2019'.

¹⁵⁸ DGB Confederation of German Trade Unions, Executive Board, Department Education, Qualification, Research, 'The Role of the Unions in Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Germany'.

JAV) and union's youth secretaries (*Jugendsekretäre*) who are assisting those councils.¹⁵⁹ JAV is related to works council and are their main contact point. In the election which takes place every two years at the company level, all young employees under 18 and apprentices, volunteers, dual students or students undergoing internship at the company up to 25 years old, are eligible to vote.¹⁶⁰ JAV members are under special protection against dismissals and after training, apprentices should be taken on permanent contracts.¹⁶¹ This obligation is directed to ensure continuity of JAV and at the same time to create security for young people actively participating in this body.¹⁶²

Lot of collective agreements also regulate taking over of the apprentices mostly on temporary basis, after completion of the training.¹⁶³ In this regard, one of the important campaigns in 2009 was organized by youth section of IG Metall, IG Metall Jugend, "Operation Takeover" (*Operation Übernahme*), on the grounds that half of the apprentices who accomplish the training were left unemployed.¹⁶⁴ By 2012 they have achieved permanent takeover agreements in important sectors of steel, metal and electrical industry.¹⁶⁵

Higher Education

Higher Education (HE) participation rates were steadily growing in the past decades, reaching 53,9 % in 2017 compared to 39,2 % in 2000, HE entrants surpassing the number of new trainees at VET in 2013.¹⁶⁶ Nevertheless, it should be also mentioned that HE attainment rates in Germany are still lower than OECD average (in 2018 44,5 % was OECD average and 32,3 % German average).¹⁶⁷

According to Schindler and Reimer, class background plays important role in the academic performance of the students and their decision regarding post-secondary alternatives.¹⁶⁸ Social inequalities are manifested most clearly in case of accessing

¹⁵⁹ Holst, Holzschuh, and Niehoff, 'YOUion Country Report - Germany', September 2014, 24.

¹⁶⁰ 'JAV Portal'.

¹⁶¹ IG Metall Berlin, 'Schutz Der JAV'.

¹⁶² Willing, 'Jugend- und Auszubildendenvertreter'.

¹⁶³ Bispinck and Schulten, 'Trade Union Responses to Precarious Employment in Germany', 54.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 56.

¹⁶⁵ Der Wegweiser Bürgergesellschaft, '»Operation Übernahme«'. For detailed statistics of transition from training to employment please refer to: 'VET Data Report Germany 2016/2017', 97–102.

¹⁶⁶ Ertl, 'Dual Study Programmes in Germany', 82.

¹⁶⁷ OECD, 'Education Attainment - Population with Tertiary Education'.

¹⁶⁸ Schindler and Reimer, 'Differentiation and Social Selectivity in German Higher Education'.

traditional full universities and working-class students often opt for shorter programs which are practically oriented. However, what can be also observed is that growth of the HE sector is also connected to increasing number of young people with vocational attainment entering the Higher Education Institutions and especially Universities of Applied Sciences (*Fachhochschule*). In 2016, number of such students were 22 %.¹⁶⁹ At the same time, many trainees at VET system are already holding the University entry qualifications. Ertl suggests¹⁷⁰ that VET can function as a “steppingstone” for many young people, although motivations behind decision-making could be divergent between groups of people who directly access, HE and ones after VET. Social and educational backgrounds come into play. For example, young people whose parents don’t have HE qualifications might opt for the vocational training first, as a way of “insurance strategy,” especially considering the high dropout rates from universities.¹⁷¹

Dual Study Programs

The dual education is generally part of higher education pathway for young Germans. Dual education combines practical and theoretical knowledge. It has been a hybrid organizational framework as a compromise between Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training. In 2009 after Baden-Württemberg’s dual study programs were merged into universities (Baden-Württemberg Cooperative State University), it has become part of Higher Education system.¹⁷² Dual study programs have spread to other federal states and now it is present in all the 16 German states¹⁷³ with a total number of 1,592. One part of study takes place at the workplace, another at vocational academies (*Berufsakademien*), cooperative universities (*Duale Hochschulen*), universities of applied science, or universities.¹⁷⁴

Introducing the dual study programs was an important institutional change for high achieving school-leavers. Companies try to attract the best students and it is certainly

¹⁶⁹ Ertl, ‘Dual Study Programmes in Germany’, 82.

¹⁷⁰ Ertl, 83.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Jacob and Solga, ‘Germany’s Vocational Education and Training System in Transformation’, 168.

¹⁷³ According to BIBB database AusbildungPlus in 2016 regional distribution of dual study programs: Baden-Württemberg: 275; Bayern: 321; Berlin: 47; Brandenburg: 23; Bremen: 13; Hamburg: 37; Hessen: 127; Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania: 19; Lower Saxony: 102; North Rhine-Westphalia: 311; Rhineland-Palatinate: 81; Saarland: 17; Saxony: 98; Saxony-Anhalt: 34; Schleswig-Holstein: 39; Thuringia: 48 Hofmann et al., ‘AusbildungPlus - Duales Studium in Zahlen 2016 Trends und Analysen’, 21..

¹⁷⁴ Graf, ‘Germany: Dual Studies and the Transformation of the Dual Principle’, 95.

attractive for many promising applicants, as they offer them a salary. The theoretical knowledge they are obtaining at Higher Education institutions, which are mostly universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen*), are also funded by the employers. This way companies are incorporating the promising students in their structures and developing commitment and loyalty towards the employer, while at the same time competing with Vocational Education and Training programs to get the high achieving school-leavers.

Trade unions in Higher Education (HE)

Because of the rising number of university entrants, as there are more college students than apprentices, trade unions also directed their attention to college students and expanding to the universities, which has been far from their main competences. At the same time as Holst et al. highlight,¹⁷⁵ inclusion of “highly educated students” along with apprentices might cause division of workforce as these group have different cultural peculiarities. In the context of dual study program, apprentices had higher acceptance for traditional approach from unions or works councils (having their problems solved for them by the JAV), while the students were more sceptical, asked more questions and wanted to be integrated into the process. However, with the dual studies on the company level, engaging the students should be easier, as they are integrated at the workplace, while in case of classic students, it is a more challenging task. For example, IG Metall and Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (DGB) set up information offices at campuses (*Hochschulinformationsbüros*) to familiarize students with trade unions and labour rights.¹⁷⁶ It should be also mentioned that, in this case density of the students in unions won't be increased right away, as the orientation is on their future work.¹⁷⁷ On the other hand, Vandaele suggests that unions' main focus during school-to-work transition period in context of HE, should be on the student employment, as these is where they first encounter work reality.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Holst, Holzschuh, and Niehoff, 'YOUUnion Country Report - Germany', September 2014, 31–36.

¹⁷⁶ Tapia and Turner, 'Renewed Activism for the Labor Movement', 14.

¹⁷⁷ Holst, Holzschuh, and Niehoff, 'YOUUnion Country Report - Germany', September 2014, 34.

¹⁷⁸ Vandaele, 'How Can Trade Unions in Europe Reconnect with Young Workers?', 671.

Spread of Precarious Employment

In Germany rising precarious employment can be traced back to the deregulation of the market, where the main intention was to decrease unemployment rates and to make labour market “more flexible.” In German public debates notion of “new poverty” (*neue Armut*), which was originally related to 1970s crisis of welfare state was resurfaced along with labour market reforms. Also, terms such as “underclass” (*Unterschicht*) and “working poor” have been actively used.¹⁷⁹ The positive numbers in decreasing unemployment rates are overshadowed by the conditions of so called “low-skilled” (recently relabelled as “essential workers”) labour who are the main contributors for these changes in unemployment numbers. The share of atypical contract forms for them have risen from 3 % in 1985 to 10 % in 2016 in West Germany.¹⁸⁰

Bispinck and Schulten identify 5 types of atypical and precarious employment: part-time work¹⁸¹, fixed-term contracts, training/apprenticeship contracts,¹⁸² temporary agency work and dependent self-employment.¹⁸³ Young people are much more likely to be found in precarious employment and involve all the above-mentioned types. For example, part-time jobs are much more prevalent in young people and substantially rising, part of the reason is simultaneous education and training but not in all cases. In Germany by 2015, 23,6 % of all workers in 15-24 age category worked as part-time workers and 10,1% of these workers were willing to work full-time but could not find the job.¹⁸⁴ Even though young part-time workers’ number has grown since 2008, percentage is lower compared to EU average (32,1 % for part-time workers, and 28,0 % number of people wanting fulltime without opportunity to get the fulltime job). At the same time, number of young people (15-24) with fixed term contracts is higher to EU average, in Germany it is 53,6 % compared to EU average of 43,3 %.¹⁸⁵

¹⁷⁹ Duell, ‘Pathways to Work: Current Practices and Future Needs for the Labour Market Integration of Young People’, 73.

¹⁸⁰ Bilaine, ‘Low-Skilled Workers in Germany - Low Wages, Precarious Conditions’, 4.

¹⁸¹ Discussing regular part-time and marginal part-time, so called “mini-jobs” (where monthly salary is not exceeding 450 euros).

¹⁸² Not directly a precarious employment, but they elaborate on social risks associated with these contracts, which we have already covered in previous section.

¹⁸³ Please see Bispinck and Schulten, ‘Trade Union Responses to Precarious Employment in Germany’. For differentiation of precarious and atypical employment, as well as extended description of their typology.

¹⁸⁴ ETUC | European Trade Union Confederation, ‘Young People and Precarious Work’.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

It should be mentioned that sometimes precarious conditions of young people are not considered as serious as the other categories, since entry level jobs are seen as temporary and just the first stage to more stable employment in future.¹⁸⁶ For example, Eichhorst and Tobsch maintain that there is substantial mobility between different types of jobs and that precarious work can work as a steppingstone for permanent job contract. According to Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) data, they concluded¹⁸⁷ that a third of the workers with temporary contracts had moved to open-ended contracts in following years. However, around half of the workers still could not leave precarious employment. In addition, the open-ended work contracts where third of the fixed term contract holders moved to,¹⁸⁸ included self-employment and vocational education, which are not necessarily guarantors of stable employment.

Trade Unions in Precarious Employment

Even though apprenticeships were traditionally the main place for young people's organization, it decreased in importance gradually after the 1980s¹⁸⁹ and rising precarious employment is one of the major trend trade unions had to face and try to adopt their approaches. Recently campaigns directed against precarious employment slowly have become central in trade unions' activities.¹⁹⁰

According to Simms et al. there are two main innovative strategies trade unions are using to incorporate young people in context of existing bargaining structures. First, extending their representation to new groups, as it was in case of agency workers in Germany¹⁹¹ and second, using existing institutional structure in the workplace to cover less-organized groups.¹⁹² For the illustration of the second strategy, Ver.di's program: *Praktisch. Besser. Jetzt* in health and elderly care sector has been highlighted. Here the youth representatives (JAV), who were approached by the union to organize apprentices, played a crucial role. Leadership training turned out quite fruitful, around 3,500 young

¹⁸⁶ Carls, 'Precarisation and the Crisis. The Growing Challenge of Transforming Precarious into Decent Work', 10.

¹⁸⁷ Eichhorst and Tobsch, 'Not so Standard Anymore?', 17.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Vandaele, 'How Can Trade Unions in Europe Reconnect with Young Workers?', 673.

¹⁹⁰ Keune, 'Trade Union Responses to Precarious Work in Seven European Countries', 68.

¹⁹¹ For a brief overview of IG Metall's Agency work campaign please see: Lehndorff, Dribbusch, and Schulten, 'Two Worlds of Unionism? German Manufacturing and Service Unions since the Great Recession', 224–26.

¹⁹² Simms et al., 'Organizing Young Workers Under Precarious Conditions', 436.

representatives were trained,¹⁹³ reaching 10,000 young people in already early stages of the program.¹⁹⁴

Labour market conditions in different sector or country in general can be fertile ground for workers to feel confident organizing. In case of *Praktisch. Besser. Jetzt*, shortage of personnel gave workers certain leverage for organizing, and this was along with lack of training one of the major complaints from their side.¹⁹⁵ The robustness of manufacturing industry together with skilled labour who are in demand, despite growing precarious conditions, give workers also reason to be assured of their strength. This was the case in Automax, a company active in pneumatic automation technology, where workers resorted to “bottom-up organising” and with the help of the union, they established the works council, the pattern which is not uncommon for East Germany.¹⁹⁶

Note on Trade Unions – Georgia

In Georgia public opinion regarding trade unions is predominantly either sceptical or there is a lack of knowledge on their purpose. According to International Republican Institute’s (IRI) survey in 2009, there was only local Mafia (“Thieves in Law”) from the list which was ranked by trust rate below the Trade unions.¹⁹⁷ In 2019 survey, Trade Unions were ranked as the least favourable institution in the list, where 45 % were evaluating their work as unfavourable, and 33 % had no answer. Only 22% were supporting the institution.¹⁹⁸ The result is consistent with previous surveys; however, support rate is increased by 10 % compared to previous year. It should be mentioned that “no answer” had the largest percentage in case of trade unions compared to other institutions, which reflects the lack of knowledge about their function. Georgian Trade Unions Confederation (GTUC) criticized the results and expressed distrust towards the IRI, on the grounds that they are promoting neoliberal agenda, and that trade unions

¹⁹³ Tapia and Turner, ‘Renewed Activism for the Labor Movement’, 17.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁹⁵ Simms et al., ‘Organizing Young Workers Under Precarious Conditions’, 438.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ IRI, ‘2009 Survey of Georgian Public Opinion’, 79.

¹⁹⁸ IRI, ‘2019 Survey of Georgian Public Opinion’, 43.

should not be compared to the institutions¹⁹⁹ which are financed from the state and have much larger budget than unions.²⁰⁰

These results can be partly attributed to trade unions' Soviet legacy in Georgia, where many people have wrong associations with these organizations. The Soviet trade unions were quite different in their aims and functions from the "western type" of trade unions, which are created by workers themselves to protect their interests. As the Soviet Union was the state of "victorious proletariat," and trade unions were mostly in charge of entertaining activities, solving everyday social issues, or arranging visits to sanatoriums.²⁰¹

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union and the independence of Georgia, where the country experienced massive deindustrialization and economy went in regress, the main concern for the trade unions has become to maintain the property they inherited, which also puts them in a negative light. Since 2005 some reorganization took place in the GTUC under the new administration. However, the labour code adopted in 2006 described as "one of the world's most unfavourable towards employees,"²⁰² was in no way in line with the International Labour Organization (ILO) standards or European Social Charter. It was discriminatory towards workers, especially if they were belonging to trade unions. As SOLIDAR, European network of 56 NGOs working on labour issues, reports, the Georgian Trade Unions Confederation (GTUC) as a result lost around 20,000 members.²⁰³ Neoliberal economic policies of the government created cleavages between state and the trade unions. As Vakhtang Lejava, former Chief Advisor to the Prime Minister of the Georgia, stated in 2011: "Of all post-soviet countries, Georgia has undertaken the most radical reforms in labour relations. On its own accord, without anybody forcing it to do so, the State tore the Trade Unions from its lap and told them to take care of themselves."²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁹ Institutions in the list (listed according to trust rate): Georgian Orthodox Church, Georgian army, Georgian media, Police, Public education system, Local authorities, Office of the President, Central Election Commission, Office of the Prime Minister, Government (Cabinet of Ministers), Parliament, Office of the Ombudsman, Office of the Prosecutor, Courts, National Bank, Political Parties, Governors, Trade unions.

²⁰⁰ 'საქართველოს პროფესიული კავშირების გაერთიანება IRI-ის კვლევას უნდობლობას უცხადებს [Georgian Trade Unions Confederation expresses distrust towards the survey conducted by IRI]'.
²⁰¹ TI Georgia, 'The Georgian Trade Union Movement', 3.

²⁰² Jobelius, 'Economic Liberalism in Georgia'.

²⁰³ Claassens and Zelic, 'Trade Union Violations in Georgia', 4.

²⁰⁴ As quoted in: Muskhelishvili, 'Social Dialogue in Georgia', 13.

Under the new government, the labour reforms took place (however, without consultation with wider public), and Labour Code was updated in 2013 in line with some of the EU directives.²⁰⁵ The Labour Inspection department has been formed although with nominal powers. Currently legislative changes are under discussion in the Parliament, as it is part of the legislative harmonization process with the European Union. However, under the pressure from business lobby, many important clauses were removed (such as parts about upper time limit for overtime, minimum wage and solidarity strikes), and fundamental aspect of strengthening the mandate of Labour Inspection department has been also under attack.²⁰⁶ Trade Unions cannot outbalance the opposition of the business lobby. Without having the tradition of resistance, workers' movements just gaining the momentum, with independent trade unions emerging on the workplaces. Despite their marginal role, they also sometimes try to join forces. For example, in February 2020, three independent trade unions: "Unity 2013" (Subway drivers' union), recently established Social workers' union and Solidarity Network, created the new confederation of independent trade unions.

School-to-Work Transition in Georgia

Massive deindustrialization brought high unemployment rates, from which Georgia still has not recovered. The official unemployment rate in the whole population is 11%. Nearly half of the active workforce is considered self-employed.²⁰⁷ However, it should not be ascribed to prolific small entrepreneurship, rather to hidden unemployment, as underlined by Muskhelishvili.²⁰⁸ Most of these "self-employed" workers are farmers who work on their own land to sustain themselves. Some analysts are highlighting the flaws of the methodology used by the National Statistics Office of Georgia (GeoStat). For example, Khundadze mentions²⁰⁹ that ILO methodology used by the Statistics Office is useful to identify general tendencies regarding unemployment and active workforce, but it is unusable for more specific measurements. According to this method,²¹⁰ Statistics Office

²⁰⁵ The list of directives can be checked (in Georgian) at: Kardava, 'დასაქმებულთა უფლებები [Labour Rights]', 38.

²⁰⁶ See the joint statement of Georgian NGOs: EMC, 'Labor Reform Under Threat'.

²⁰⁷ National Statistics Office of Georgia, 'Employment and Unemployment'.

²⁰⁸ Muskhelishvili, 'Social Dialogue in Georgia', 7.

²⁰⁹ Khundadze, 'უმუშევრობის ნეოლიბერალური "წყევლა" [The Neoliberal "Curse" of Unemployment]'.
²¹⁰ Ibid.

considers individuals employed (over age of 15) by the time of survey, if during the previous 7 days:

- they have worked at least 1 hour with the purpose to get income
- or they helped in a family farm without remuneration
- or they were not present at work for certain reason but were still counted as an employed person there.

Therefore, it is obvious that being considered as unemployed is quite a challenging issue according to the abovementioned criteria. However, unemployment rates have been much higher among 15-29 age group and comprised of around 26,3 % in 2019, more than two times higher than national average.²¹¹ Even though, similar to the case of Germany proportion of 15-29 age group in the population is also shrinking (currently around 20 % of the whole population), demand on the workforce has not risen. One of the reason could be important structural feature of unemployment, which Muskhelishvili identifies: mismatch of skills and demand on the labour market under the conditions of unregulated education system.²¹² Below we will look at the school-to-work transition patterns in Georgia to locate young people in their context. Trade Unions' institutional role is non-existent in the school-to-work transition system in Georgia and is only characterized by fragmented involvement.

Higher Education

Education is compulsory till Grade 9, afterwards young Georgians have a choice to either pursue vocational education or to complete the secondary education and go to Higher Education Institution. As statistics show, the majority makes decision to finish the school and then go to the university, which is accepted as a “social norm” in the country.²¹³ The class background also comes into play in context of education. According to Friedrich Ebert Stiftung's survey,²¹⁴ young people who decide against going to school or higher education institution are mostly from lower social class. It should be mentioned that according to GeoStat data,²¹⁵ higher education attainment in the 25-29 age group is greater in case of women (44,1 % for women, 35,5 % for men) and urban population,

²¹¹ National Statistics Office of Georgia, 'Employment and Unemployment'.

²¹² Muskhelishvili, 'Social Dialogue in Georgia', 7.

²¹³ Diakonidze and Ummuhan, 'Youth Transition to Work in Georgia', 15.

²¹⁴ Omanadze et al., 'Generation in Transition', 27.

²¹⁵ Eelens, 'Young People in Georgia', 38–39.

although it does not translate into higher employment rates, where rather the opposite is truth, men and the rural population²¹⁶ have higher employment rates. In the same age group, rate of inactive females is two times higher compared to males (36,3 % and 16,9 %).²¹⁷ At the same time, influence of the class background has an important effect on the probability of young people being unemployed. Young people with higher education have higher chances of being not in employment, education or training (NEET), if they are from poor background, while once the household income increases, higher education has no negative effect.²¹⁸ Bardak et al. ascribe²¹⁹ this to importance of better social capital of high income families, since “private contacts” are major source of seeking employment in the country.

Conducted research shows²²⁰ that most of the jobs created in Georgia does not require a university education. Survey from Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia showed that high unemployment rates of people with higher education is related to the fact that “jobs requiring higher education labour force are already saturated.”²²¹ On the other hand, according to young people’s own perceptions²²² attained education is irrelevant to successfully make a transition to the labour market.

The World Bank also revealed²²³ the weakness of the education system to develop students’ “cognitive and social skills”²²⁴ and failing of meeting demand for middle-skilled workers. Another issue which is sometimes raised is irrelevance of some of the recent educational programs which are formulated according to western standards and does not fit the Georgian reality.²²⁵ The problem with quality of higher education system would not be so apparent if it was supported with other measures such as strong vocational

²¹⁶ In case of rural population, the high employment rates can be ascribed to calculation methods of Statistics Office described above.

²¹⁷ Eelens, ‘Young People in Georgia’, 43.

²¹⁸ Bardak, Rubal Maseda, and Rosso, ‘Young People Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET): An Overview in ETF Partner Countries’, 38.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Eelens, 43.

²²¹ Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs, ‘The Survey Report of Labour Market Demand Component’, 28.

²²² Omanadze et al., ‘Generation in Transition’, 44.

²²³ Diakonidze and Ummuhan, ‘Youth Transition to Work in Georgia’, 18.

²²⁴ This is confirmed by numerous international student assessment tests such as PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS.

²²⁵ Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs, ‘The Survey Report of Labour Market Demand Component’, 33–34.

education system or easily accessible, quality internships to address the problem of universities' curricula which usually excludes the hands on training.

- Internships

According to survey administered by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Georgia, relatively small number of young people (19 %) had an experience with practicums or internships.²²⁶ From those who had an experience, they usually consider the existing internships as employers' way to recruit them as unpaid workers, since they usually fulfil technical tasks without supervision and educational element is missing.²²⁷ Surveyed young people stated that remuneration is necessary in such cases. However, there has been some positive experiences also reported in context of acquiring professional competences, mostly by the journalists and lawyers, although this was mostly an exception.²²⁸ Many also underlined that they only underwent the internship for the sake of certificate which could be attractive for the future employers.²²⁹

Internships are not regulated through any legal means. In public sector it is regulated through internal departmental documents, while in private sector it is completely unregulated. Youth section of Georgian Trade Unions Confederation states²³⁰ that the learning component should be the major characteristic for the internships and if this component is missing, the relationship should be considered as regular working relationship, which should be compensated.

As for the student employment, most of the surveyed students expressed²³¹ a wish to have the opportunity to earn money through part-time job, but they face a dilemma, as work-study balance is nearly impossible to maintain considering the characteristic of offered jobs. In the words of one of the respondents: "I did nothing but searching for jobs for one year, but I could not find anything that did not actually offer to abandon my studies."²³²

²²⁶ Omanadze et al., 'Generation in Transition', 36.

²²⁷ Applied Research Company, 'Survey on Attitudes, Motivation and Employment Strategies of the Youth', 72.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid., 73.

²³⁰ GTUC Youth, 'პროფკავშირების ახალგაზრდული მოძრაობა: გააღვიძე აქტივიზმი [Trade Unions' Youth Movement: Activate Activism]', 16.

²³¹ Applied Research Company, 'Survey on Attitudes, Motivation and Employment Strategies of the Youth', 70.

²³² As quoted in : Applied Research Company, 70.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs

European Commission's document for Eastern Partnership countries, 20 Deliverables for 2020, determines²³³ as one of the targets, increasing the youth enrolment and graduate levels in VET to reduce the skill mismatch on the labour market. Current statistics show that vocational education is not in demand. Even though young people can go for the vocational education by the age of 15, only 2 % in the age group of 15-19 did so in 2016, while a majority completed the secondary education.²³⁴ One of the reason could be that VET programs do not provide equivalent qualifications to secondary education, therefore, if young people wanted to continue to the higher education institution afterwards, they would not be eligible. We can also observe that enrolment rates in VET is higher among older age groups (after they complete the secondary education or even higher education) and reaches 15 % among the age group of 25-29.²³⁵ Although, it should be also mentioned that enrolment rates have been steadily rising throughout the years.²³⁶

Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs' survey shows²³⁷ that on the labour market number of people with vocational qualifications who are employed is quite low. However, they also report²³⁸ that there is a high demand for qualified staff with vocational education. "Lack of necessary skills and qualifications" were identified²³⁹ as main issue during the recruiting which directs attention to the shortcomings of the existing vocational education system. The highest rate of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) are VET graduates (53 %).²⁴⁰ Bardak et al. also link²⁴¹ this to weakness of the offered VET programs (particularly their unresponsiveness to labour market demands) or the socio-economic background of students enrolled at VET programs. However, according to VET students themselves,²⁴² their career choice was often determined by the positive examples of people with similar careers. They would often

²³³ 'Joint Staff Working Document: Eastern Partnership - 20 Deliverables for 2020', 45.

²³⁴ Diakonidze and Ummuhan, 'Youth Transition to Work in Georgia', 17.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Diakonidze and Ummuhan, 'Youth Transition to Work in Georgia', 17.

²³⁷ Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs, 'The Survey Report of Labour Market Demand Component', 9.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Omanadze et al., 'Generation in Transition', 25.

²⁴⁰ Bardak, Rubal Maseda, and Rosso, 'Young People Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET): An Overview in ETF Partner Countries', 42.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Applied Research Company, 'Survey on Attitudes, Motivation and Employment Strategies of the Youth', 74.

draw comparisons between VET and higher education, considering latter as “imposed obligation,” with less chances to get an employment.²⁴³

Generally, young people don't report negative attitudes towards VET and regard it a feasible alternative to higher education.²⁴⁴ They considered the main factor for the decision regarding the career the person's interest.²⁴⁵ Although, part of them believed that higher education was more related to higher “intellectual capacity.”²⁴⁶ At the same time, employers' attitudes towards VET has been identified as an important challenge, while vocational education has a “less prestigious image,” which may prompt young people to apply to higher education institutions.²⁴⁷

Young People on the Job Market

Among the age group of 15-29, 46,7 % is employed in agriculture, 47,7 % in different sections of service sector and only 5,6 % in industry.²⁴⁸ According to census data, one of the most prevalent occupation is “subsistence agricultural and fishery worker,” comprised of more young people than in the four following occupational categories together.²⁴⁹ This result is in line with the trends of the labour market in general population and most of the young people are “employed” at family farms without remuneration. It should be also mentioned that young people are represented in large proportions in the service sector, occupying both top and bottom positions.²⁵⁰ According to GeoStat census more than 11,000 corporate managers are below 30,²⁵¹ on the other hand, young people have higher share as “personal service workers” and “food preparation assistants.”²⁵²

Personal contacts play the most important role in finding an employment. Most of the surveyed young people (75 %) also regard friends/acquaintances as the main factor in

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Diakonidze and Ummuhan, ‘Youth Transition to Work in Georgia’, 17.

²⁴⁵ Omanadze et al., ‘Generation in Transition’, 33.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Diakonidze and Ummuhan, ‘Youth Transition to Work in Georgia’, 17; Omanadze et al., ‘Generation in Transition’, 34.

²⁴⁸ UNICEF, ‘ახალგაზრდების ეროვნული კვლევა საქართველოში: საქართველოში ახალგაზრდების მდგომარეობისა და საჭიროებების ანალიზი [Youth National Survey in Georgia: Analysis of Current Situation and Needs of Georgian Youth]’, 50.

²⁴⁹ The following four occupational categories are: Other associate professionals; Personal and protective services workers; Other professionals; Models, salespersons and demonstrators. Eelens, ‘Young People in Georgia’, 47.

²⁵⁰ Diakonidze and Ummuhan, ‘Youth Transition to Work in Georgia’, 23.

²⁵¹ Eelens, ‘Young People in Georgia’, 47.

²⁵² Diakonidze and Ummuhan, ‘Youth Transition to Work in Georgia’, 23.

finding the job.²⁵³ Young people from the focus groups also found their jobs mainly through acquaintances.²⁵⁴ ILO also found in 2014 that 64 % of young people got the employment through personal contacts.²⁵⁵ Diakonidze and Bardak explain this by non-existing formal institutions, such as public employment service.

Existing labour market conditions make migration appealing for many young people. One important aspect is that demand on high-skilled jobs are rather low on the domestic market, and it pushes the highly educated people to leave the country, although the positions usually taken abroad are not in line with their qualifications.²⁵⁶ The age group of 25-29 has the highest emigration rates.²⁵⁷ According to the study conducted by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung,²⁵⁸ 21 % of young people have a “very strong desire” to leave the country and 19 % “to certain degree.” Reasons could differ according to age groups, better education prospect is a leading reason among age group of 14-18, while preference to emigrate for “improving living standards” is rising with age.²⁵⁹ For young people Europe is the primary destination. Germany was topping the list, succeeded by the US, Turkey and Russia (the latter losing its attractiveness since visa regime).²⁶⁰

Presence of Trade Unions

The Georgian Trade Unions Confederation has 21 independent sectoral organisations as members. As GTUC itself often reports,²⁶¹ many of these organisations are quite passive and sometimes even operate as “yellow” unions.²⁶² The most active unions are usually connected to the industry sector (e.g. at Zestafoni ferroalloys plant and the chemical and metallurgical plants in Rustavi), with very low employment rates in the general workforce (around 7,7 %²⁶³), and even lower among the youth (5,6 %). Therefore, this path for

²⁵³ Omanadze et al., ‘Generation in Transition’, 39.

²⁵⁴ Applied Research Company, ‘Survey on Attitudes, Motivation and Employment Strategies of the Youth’, 70.

²⁵⁵ Bardak, Rubal Masada, and Rosso, ‘Young People Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET): An Overview in ETF Partner Countries’, 38.

²⁵⁶ ETF, ‘Migration and Skills in Georgia’, 10.

²⁵⁷ Diakonidze and Ummuhan, ‘Youth Transition to Work in Georgia’, 13.

²⁵⁸ Omanadze et al., ‘Generation in Transition’, 87–88.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 42.

²⁶⁰ Diakonidze and Ummuhan, ‘Youth Transition to Work in Georgia’, 14.

²⁶¹ Bekauri, ‘The Situation of Workers and the Trade Union Movement in Georgia’.

²⁶² “A union set up and/or controlled by the employer to prevent the establishment of a genuine trade union.” Definition taken from ITUC Glossary. <https://survey.ituc-csi.org/glossary.html?lang=en>

²⁶³ ‘საქართველოს შრომის ბაზრის ანალიზი [Analysis of Georgian Labour Market]’.

socializing with trade unions is mostly irrelevant for young people, especially that there is no youth representation on the place. GTUC has established the youth section, which is more general in nature and defines broader aims starting from increasing public awareness regarding trade unions ending with conducting analytical activities.²⁶⁴ They have been active in instigating several campaigns and strike actions, but it was not on youth related issues.

On the other hand, there are some independent trade unions, still marginal but more proactive, e.g. “Solidarity Network – Workers’ Center,” established by young people in 2015 as NGO, and since 2017 operating as trade union. At first, they started mobilizing young workers in private service sector and recently expanded their activities to healthcare sector.²⁶⁵ Trade union tries to distance itself from donor organizations to maintain their independence and states as their priority democratic openness and people’s participation.²⁶⁶ Besides organizing young people in private service sector, Solidarity Network was also conducting meeting at VET colleges. They also help workers on individual basis, through consultation and free legal support, although they state that providing service should not be the priority and involving workers in the struggle should be the focus.²⁶⁷

Interesting development is also initiating spontaneous workers’ associations at the workplace, mostly caused by harsh working conditions, as it happened in case of Social Workers’ Union and Social Agents’ Union. Some of the social agents requested help from Solidarity Network and later they motivated social agents to organize inside the workplace. Social workers had a strike before establishing of the trade union. Main initiators were young female social workers. GTUC offered legal help at this stage and offered them to become member organization of the confederation,²⁶⁸ however social workers decided to stay independent and later joined recently founded Confederation of Independent Trade Unions, along with “Solidarity Network” and “Unity 2013” – Tbilisi Metropolitan Independent Trade Union. The priority of Social Workers’ Union is to have

²⁶⁴ Bekauri, ‘The Situation of Workers and the Trade Union Movement in Georgia’.

²⁶⁵ Their description reads: “healthcare, service sector and workers’ general trade union.”

<https://solnet.ge/>

²⁶⁶ Japaridze, ‘რატომ არ ვართ აქტივისტები [Why We are not Activists]’.

²⁶⁷ Information received through interviews with members of the Solidarity Network.

²⁶⁸ Information received through interview with one of the founders of the Social Workers’ Union.

intensive communication with students getting qualifications in social work and they are currently already organizing webinars to explain the importance of trade unions.²⁶⁹

As we could see for young people in Georgia, there are no institutionalized ways on the school-to-work transition system and the labour market to get in touch with trade unions. It can happen either through their accidental participation in some of the spontaneous campaigns of trade unions, either in the framework of organized activities of trade unions, when they receive information from them or when they themselves individually are initiating contact with unions because of their problems on the workplace.

Concluding Remarks

Trade unions and young people's relationship in Germany and Georgia are characterized with stark differences. In Germany during the post-war times, the path from school to work was straightforward, which was compatible with interest representation. Since the 1980s, the labour market has been altered, other than traditional VET, new routes have emerged, and this compatibility started to dissolve. The evidence shows that trade unions' strategies are still mainly concentrated on apprentices. However, they are acknowledging current challenges and try to enter new areas. In Georgia, the Soviet legacy of the unions is the source of misconceptions about their function. Their weak representation in different sectors and specifically in school-to-work transition system, hinder young people's active involvement in their structure. Vocational education and training are in its initial phase and is still quite marginal. Although, tendency of vocational students to enter higher education institutions is similar in both countries.

Effect of class background on choice of education was also evident in both cases. Generally, the higher education pathway significantly increased in importance in Germany, while in Georgia it has been the domineering path because of the "social norm" and lack of alternatives. Dual study programs are specifically characteristic of Germany and nothing similar has been implemented in Georgia.

As for the trade union structure, coming from long tradition, it is much more refined and coordinated in the case of Germany, which has one of the strongest and largest unions, as well as workers' representations at the company level in the form of work councils. Both structures have youth representations across the whole country. Existing

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

confederation in Georgia has also established small-scale youth movement. On the other hand, recently many independent unions have been initiated by young people, although mostly working on non-youth related issues.

Despite German trade unions' relative strength and some of the successful campaigns, neoliberal restructuring had its effect on the unions, and it led to "a growing differentiation in industrial relations between manufacturing and services and to 'fragmented labour relations' at all levels."²⁷⁰ Trade Unions try to curb the effects but find it hard to address broader conditions and root causes of precarious employment.

Labour market conditions are very different in each case, with lowest youth unemployment rates in Germany (although it is ascribed to growing precarious employment), while in Georgia youth unemployment rate is 26,3 % (considering the methodological flaws it's assumed to be even higher); conditions in Georgia are also one of the reasons for propensity for emigration, especially among young people. Trade unions are lacking any institutional power to affect the policies.

It needs to be noted that deliberate policies held by governments cannot be curbed through trade unions. As the president of IG Metall remarked: "Collective bargaining policy is not the repair shop for policy failures."²⁷¹ At the same time, with growing female involvement and flexible contracts, "the world of the 3 Ms of Manufacturing, Manual, and Male," traditionally characteristic for unions has become outdated.²⁷² In case of Georgia, establishing strong workers representations are merely in its initial phase. Along with confederation, there is also steadily growing labour movements with progressive minded young people, who are creating alternative unions at the workplaces. In Germany the trade unions are acknowledging the challenges they are facing, and time will show to what extent they will manage to adapt.

²⁷⁰ Lehdorff, Dribbusch, and Schulten, 'Two Worlds of Unionism? German Manufacturing and Service Unions since the Great Recession', 210.

²⁷¹ Bispinck and Schulten, 'Trade Union Responses to Precarious Employment in Germany', 58.

²⁷² Visser, 'Trade Union Decline and What Next. Is Germany a Special Case?', 107.

Results

I have witnessed multiple realities of participants, overlapping to different degrees; they have constructed these realities in line of their backgrounds, in relations with other people and their environment; They are walking along the unique life paths. Cutting those paths into pieces and presenting it in segments, even though each episode is connected with another, affected by each other, could be justified in light of our aim to make sense of their pretexts, of their hopes and disappointments, their ideals and surroundings, to systematize the acquired information and identify connections. I also unavoidably filter it through my own lenses, through my subjective mind and experiences but still making assertions only according to what I have evidence for.

My central questions were concerned with exploring episodes of young trade union members' life, their socio-political views, which contributed to their activation in and current stances towards the unions. After going through the data multiple times, certain patterns took shape and led me to organize the results according to identified themes. First, we will overview the myriad actors from their social context which had certain effect on young people's trade union attitude formation. Their earlier experiences before their current image of unions were solidified will be also briefly discussed under this section, as this is something they reflected on and serves as a good example of their interaction with their environment. Which are the main actors having impact throughout their lives? We will explore role of parents, peers and other figures on developing their perceptions. The second section deals with significant events in their life which emotionally affected them and left a long-lasting impact. For many, these were types of events when they re-evaluated their beliefs or took certain course of action. The third section deals with the labour experiences of the participants, their attitudes to work and how it could have affected their activism. In the last section we will review socio-political stances participants have expressed which could be explanatory of their engagement in trade union activism.

Social Context

Childhood Experiences

There was no uniform earlier conception of unions for the respondents. But what was common is their blurred understanding, or absence of any knowledge, before their training or later interactions with unions in different context. However, there are certain exceptions. Some of my research participants have been growing up in households with

trade unionist parents and this obviously had an important impact on their earlier perceptions and affected them throughout their life. This realization is in line with the previous literature which asserted the importance of parents' unions status, especially of Barling et al. who maintained²⁷³ that only union status is not sufficient and positive attitudes expressed by parents is a better indicator. For example, Marvin, a young German volunteer from Ver.di, emphasizes the positive role of his parents several times during the talk. They served as socializing actors to unions for him. Marvin recalls:

My parents are in the trade unions and my mum works in the workers' council, so if I'm at home my mum and dad talk what happens in the office, since they worked in the same company. ...So, we talk about what happened, and she was telling me about some positive and negative things that happened there and what they might improve there. I was really interested ... and I was asking them a lot of what they do, how they do, I was asking especially my mum a lot.

Marvin also was inspired to gather more information by himself about history of the unions and differences between them due to his initial confusion, as Germany has multiple. His parents even affected his decision to join the union during his apprenticeship: "After I began my apprenticeship, after few months I get the information that the company I work for are in the Ver.di and after that I told my parents and they told me that being a member of Ver.di could be only good for you. Then I filled in the membership."

Nikoloz, young activist from Georgia who kick-started the youth section of GTUC also reports a big influence of his father, who is very active trade unionist, who as a regular worker battled the ineffective union in his factory and after long struggle, set up the new one. Nikoloz amusingly remarks: "In my case trade unions came to me first."²⁷⁴ He emotionally remembers episodes from his childhood involving his father's activism. He was also often accompanying him on work trips and was emotionally invested in his father's successes and failures during negotiations, even before he had a full understanding of what trade unions were standing for. After telling his father's history, Nikoloz concluded like this:

You see, all of this, that all this struggle is undergone, as it should have happened, a classical case, that he was for 16 years a regular factory worker and he initiated the trade union himself, then got elected as a head of it and so on. I was so emotionally approaching this especially when I was younger, I was thinking my

²⁷³ Barling, Kelloway, and Bremermann, 'Preemployment Predictors of Union Attitudes', 726.

²⁷⁴ Translation of all quotations from Georgian interviews are performed by the author.

father was writing a history. And since then I was also emotionally very invested in trade unions.

However, in case of Lisa, German volunteer from NGG, who was previously elected in youth and trainee representation (*Die Jugend- und Auszubildendenvertretung – JAV*), her mother's union membership had no effect on her. She ascribes this to her being more of a passive member. Lisa recalls: "Even if my mum was being at the strike, I would not know. When I got involved, I got more familiar." Lisa was a very active child in school, being a class representative and later a helping buddy for younger students. She recalls briefly that she was bullied in school and it also strengthened her sense of social justice: "I was bullied in school for a certain period of time, which affected me in a way that I don't want others to get in this situation." Later she would also take a role of protector of younger trainees when she was elected in JAV at the hotel chain she was having her training: "Lot of younger people were just going with the flow and would just do what they were told to do. And I think, I have this social justice thing in me a little bit. So, I was always some kind of a mum to them. I tried to be a little bit more decisive about things that we did not have to do, like doing housekeeping for six months which would not teach us anything."

Briefly we should also underline several other earlier unique experiences of participants, which may not be directly related to trade unions, but might have contributed to their later acceptance of this body. Tim, a young man from Ver.di union, relates many of his stances to Christian upbringing: "The idea that everybody is fundamentally equal and has equal qualities is really, really, central to me and always has been and I think I got this through my Christian upbringing, really. And it's kind of transcended Christianity. I was quite active in a Christian youth group until I got politicized." His girlfriend at that time with whom she was sharing his new interest in politics, introduced him to regional association for school students and they organized demonstrations for students' rights.

Luca also points out importance of her surroundings in her earlier experiences, especially parents, who showed her that the way the society is, could be different:

My parents raised me this way. School, where I was, there were lot of rich people, I don't mind but, if you don't have second dress to prom, what are you even worth, and I am like even if I don't have any dress for prom, I am still worth something. That kind of shaped me, my parents, who taught me everyone is equal, money does not count. I mean, we just talked about capitalism, of course money counts, but generally speaking.

For Jonas, NGG member and young workers' representative in his company, it was the example of his parents, which he remembers vividly and thinks that it could have also contributed to his later socio-political views:

Every day for us it was like you work your job, you barely see your kids, you have to put it all together. It was not really my childhood, it was earlier when the wall came down, my father was building his own business that failed. Then he had to, still living in Berlin, had to go to work down at the Black Forest, Baden-Württemberg. So there and back on the weekend, so like 8-7 hours, which is not good for family. My mother was also working, I was very little, I had to be picked up from kindergarten. So, there was always for my first 7-8 years always some kind of struggle, financially. Yet we lived in the middle class, or I think that's what it is in the middle class or lower middle-class family.

For Davit, young lawyer for Solidarity Network in Tbilisi, Che Guevara's beret has a very symbolic meaning. This hat, which his father brought him from Cuba during his childhood, got his mind engaged first time in leftist ideas. He started exploring the biography of Che Guevara in the public library of his town, which logically brought him to Marxism-Leninism. He was later struggling to translate with his poor English skills the *Motorcycle Diaries*, Ernesto Che Guevara's memoir, into Georgian and for long time was inspired by his personality. Davit recalls his impressions: "This man has travelled and saw that people were living in unequal conditions, they did not have access to education, so on. And he was kind of idealist guy, how can I say, who could sacrifice himself for the idea and fight till the end. And I was really impressed by this in my childhood." He even tried to repeat his experience with his friend during university years: even though they did not have motorcycles, they decided to hitchhike across Georgia with tents and talk to people in rural areas.

- First Associations

Though not directly related to the research questions, it is useful to explore what sorts of union participations were predominantly presented in earlier life of the participants, to have an opportunity to track their later transformation, while identifying the influencing factors.

- Associations with Soviet Union

Majority of research participants from Georgia, recall that their initial associations with trade unions were related to soviet type, old fashioned organization and they had no understanding of its essence and function. Maryam, young social worker, who was one of the initiators of new Social Workers' Union, connects her first associations of trade

unions to soviet type collective institution: “Collective, where everyone should have had the same opinion and it was not allowed to have different position or opinion, where people did not have individuality, it was more like my association, probably, when I remember now, that it was something forced, where freedom of speech was limited.” Similarly, Giga from GTUC Youth, one of the leading figures in the youth movement, tracks his initial perceptions also to soviet type cultural organization, as Georgian Trade Unions Confederation owns old building where different cultural events take place time to time:

When I first heard of trade union concert hall, I immediately got associations to Komsomol, Soviet Union. I had the perception that it was kind of state agency, probably somehow related to culture. ... Everyone was looking at it as something very soviet, something for old people and then well, when I was looking at that building, you know in which condition it is and I was thinking, well, if there are some trade unions today, it is clear that it is something soviet which could not progress and could not be transformed. And these were my initial views. At first, when I heard there was some trade union seminar, I also had a feeling there that in the end there should have been a concert or something. By the way many people have same attitudes even today, even inside this organization.

Lika, volunteer at GTUC youth also had initial understanding of trade unions as a “communist association comprised of old people.” She also underlines that many young people also express the same misconceptions today on GTUC youth social media channels or during face to face interactions.

- Lack of Knowledge

Luca, young nurse from Ver.di union, remembers her first associations to be connected to the DGB seminar space they were using as schoolchildren, since she was very active and tried to participate in everything the school could offer. Naturally, at that point she had no interest or further knowledge what these organizations were for: “I never connected that time. I was like yes, they are unions, they are also doing something when I am done, but for me it was there some pupil thing and I was there for learning. I think my idea of what they do and what they don’t do, actually shaped after when I entered and when I was a member.” However, even after joining, her understanding of unions were still quite deficient at first:

Somehow it was like I go there I pay my monthly contribution and I did not do anything at all. For two years I had this that I pay there and if something happens, I can call them. So, my view of unions was very limited. I had thing of ok, there

is some people somewhere that I don't know, represent me somehow and it's very important, but I did not really grasp a concept.

Jonas did not have any knowledge about unions at school, as according to him it is not a topic there. It was during the gap year, during volunteering, when he first realized what is work and importance of organizing, but without much knowledge of unions:

We did not really have contact with trade unions or even spoke about it. We ourselves just wanted to improve our work. We did not think about that, hey we want to call union. We were like, hey, we are volunteers and we would like extra day off, because we only had one. And we discussed it and basically, we agreed. It was like on a lower level, what I would later experience as collective bargaining. There was no union involved or anything like that. It was just workers, where we were saying that, maybe our conditions could be a little bit better.

Tim also did a voluntary year (*Freiwilliges Soziales Jahr*), which according to him is very common for young people after Abitur. Both, him and Jonas described it as “basically a gap year.” Tim was motivated to continue his active engagement in co-determination process after school and was elected as a speaker for the volunteers. It was here when a group of young people was approached by the person from Ministry of Social Affairs and Tim with his colleagues set up the youth structure which would bargain on behalf of volunteers. However, they still had no knowledge of trade unions. Tim recalls:

We were some kind of a trade union, but we were not at that time conscious of this. We entered the negotiations with employers, kind of, and this was moderated by the organization that is funded by the ... Ministry of Social Affairs again. So, this was kind of a tripartite structure. That I think is very typical for German labour relations in general. But I only realized it in hindsight, I did not realize it at that time.

First associations of Georgian participants turned out to be highly impacted by trade unions' Soviet legacy. They also acknowledge that these stereotypes are very much present in today's youth and sometimes makes their activism challenging. For German participants, there has been no strong commonalities. Blurred understanding of unions and their function in earlier period was uniform for everyone except Nikoloz and Marvin who have unionist parents who were active supporters of unions. Lisa, despite her mother's membership had no clear understanding either, as she was just a passive member. Jonas and Tim have undertaken the voluntary year, which was significant period for them as they had their first touch to work reality this time and also in practice experienced the organizing and collective bargaining.

Later Influences

As was underlined in the literature review, Griffin and Brown maintained²⁷⁵ that role of peers should not be underestimated, as most of the studies were exploring the parents' influence only. According to my observation at the initial socialization phase parents had higher impact on my respondents, while later this impact decreased, and other diverse actors have been identified who affected their views in various ways.

○ Peers

Marcel from IG Metall, who recently joined the union, emphasizes the influence of his friends while joining the union and names the desire to help his friends in company as his prime motivation. Friends were also decisive in his decision to join the SPD (Social Democratic Party) before. Lika also got first closer to union thanks to her friend, who was very active member, sharing a lot in his social media channels and inviting her to the events. She mentions that her colleagues in trade union played very important role for her to stay motivated, especially highlights the role of young woman colleague who was same age as her: "Probably I also got more attracted because of her, among so many males, so many workers, she was so brave, engaged so actively in such a big scale demonstrations. Even now I often tell her that it is because of her I am engaged in GTUC youth."

At the same time, a friendly environment in their office with lot of young people was also important for Lika. There was no separation who would do how much or imposed hierarchical attitudes. Luca from Ver.di also expresses big enthusiasm for her current youth section and points out the importance of having a choice. She talks particularly highly of their youth secretary:

He is very progressive. He is always like, he would never say I don't want to do this, so he would more say: 'you are more into this, do you want to do this?' Not like giving us work. To make it easier he could always do it himself but, he says I know I get paid for it, but you can also do it, so he puts trust in us. Something that changed for me very much from my previous union experiences.

What else was changed for her was the feeling that she could ask questions. Luca is an extroverted person and has no problem asking questions but in her previous unions experience, when she attended several informal meetings, she felt like she was not allowed to ask questions, felt more restricted: "I felt too young and too inexperienced to actually contribute somehow and I never really got active." The new union colleagues

²⁷⁵ Griffin and Brown, 'Second-hand Views?', 96.

were very accommodating and tried their best to make newbies feel welcome. Luca highlighted one of the practices she likes particularly:

Oh my god, what I love now is, what was there problem as well in the past, like you make a list, who is rising the hand, people who have not talked before, they can talk earlier, because someone already said something and so that they don't talk all the time, and it has a quota, and if I'm a new person and I feel like, you know, I cannot say something but if I raise my hand I will be first to talk and they want to hear new opinion.

She especially enjoys when they use this technique to give voice to females as they are not as active and Luca feels frustrated about this, especially in her profession: “I have a feeling a lot of male people are talking a lot. Actually, on that union meetings there were also a lot of male nurses and it made me sad, not because I don't like male nurses but general population of nurses are female and it makes me feel really angry and sad that again there are more active male nurses.”

Emma, Verdi member who has been there in different executive roles, also indicates the important role of her colleague in her activation: “She asked me if I would like to go along for a trade union activists meeting. And because I like her and she was funny and stuff, I joined in and on the meeting, I became a member, because I liked the guys sitting there and the atmosphere was great, and everyone was so welcoming.”

Revaz, one of the founders of Solidarity Network in Tbilisi, previously had experience on German labour market during his student years. It was his colleague and at the same time a person from the same university who helped him join the union. However, he underlines that local organizers on the workplace, so called shop floor stewards have an important role there and are well organized, unlike Georgia. After coming back to Georgia for him it was decisive to meet a like-minded person, who brought with her the USA experience and they together get into the field and kick-started the independent union.

Davit also ascribes to his university circle some of the choices he made and opportunity to ponder upon certain socio-economic questions. He has found like-minded people in his environment, which led him to activism for social justice. Davit speculates:

If I would end up, for example, in the circle of kind of lawyers whose prime aim was to become prosecutors, and of course there were some like that, and if they would manage to impose these desires on me, the lifestyle, their aspirations, probably I would also lead the same way, have prosecutor examinations, become prosecutor and I would consider this a success, but well, it did not happen like

that, it happened otherwise. I don't know now what would be better for my parents [laughter].

Davit considers that he was lucky that he ended up in student circle which started demanding people's social and economic rights against domineering neoliberal agenda.

- Authority Figures

Research participants also mentioned influence of certain figures on their way of thinking or in regards receiving some motivation from them. Revaz and Tim report their lecturers as such. Revaz talks highly of his two former lecturers who were Social Democrats and he had a great respect for them. He even joined the young section of Social Democratic party in Georgia and at some point, he was even elected as a head of the party. As for Tim, before his studies he felt his hard work did not pay off and got demotivated. First were large scale protests he was participating in during the school years, when they realized because of lack of teachers and their absence lot of their classes were cancelled. They even organized a press conference and were coordinating demonstrations, asking for more teachers and social workers at school, but what they received was just the introduction of official statistics how many hours were cancelled. Tim expresses his disappointment: "I realized how much work it needs to change things." During his voluntary year, he again with his peers set up the representative structure for volunteers (with the help of Ministry of Social Affairs) and was bargaining on their behalf, but again disappointment:

This whole structure took again a lot of work, and what we achieved in the end was to set up basic, basic rules, but that was not really changing anything in any kind of way for people who were doing this voluntary year. So, again, a lot of work and results nothing much... so I thought ok, I am going to concentrate on my studies, and just leave this whole thing for some years, to get motivated again.

Tim found his motivation again after meeting one professor during his studies, which he found very interesting:

He really impressed me, and he had a lot of impact on my political standpoints. And his main message is that capitalism is only viable with strong labour organizations because they ensure that people who produce goods can actually buy these goods. That's probably as simple as I can put his theory. And that's quite obviously is connected to trade unionism. And then I became more and more convinced by these viewpoints and then I decided that I should take action again.

Luca had a training as a nurse and afterwards she pursued medical studies, so she does not really come across to socio-political issues that much during her studies. This has become her motivation to seek information and become active on practical level:

I think what shaped me most is always the situations and the current status of wherever I was, school, university, wherever, where I just did not feel right, so I always had this little notion that ok, I like my studies, but they are very theoretical, and where is the society in my studies? Something like that, and it always shaped me, because I thought I want more of this.

The first spark for her was a speaker who came to their class when she was training for a nurse. The speaker was not supposed to talk about unions, he had a different topic to present, but he mentioned the unions, tell them arguments and advised to join in. Luca got intrigued and decided to do some research herself: “I think my picture was shaped by that person, not because he shaped it very much, but he made me think about, ok, that sounds reasonable what he says, that they represent me, and it’s important to organize, why should I not look deeper into it.” Another important influence for her was recent webinars she attended. Luca was actively talking about her attitude shift, first when she was perceiving unions as kind of a service agency and later when she realized it should have been “we are all in this together.” When I further inquired it turned out that this new conception for her was very much shaped by Jane McAlevey, a union organizer who was giving the webinars she attended. She also got copies of her books from her local union section.

Lika was very impressed by the personality of Irakli Petriashvili, head of GTUC:

He talked to us so openly, honestly, I decided that this is what we needed and gives a great motivation to young people. ... He showed us from the start that we can provide some ideas and he is willing to support in every way. He was motivated to attract young people to unions, and it made us very happy. He was always praising us and was including us in everything. This kind of attitude is not everywhere, be it at the workplace, or in my close circles, because you are younger, you should always let seniors speak first and stuff like that.

Lika also underlines that constant communication with her colleagues or older trade union representatives had a big impact on her political views: “When these people which you respect so much are talking to you, you also get under their influence and I think this also conditioned many of my attitudes.”

Ana, from Solidarity Network, got in touch with the members of union through her sister at first. She was very impressed by her colleagues and looked up to them: “When

I was seeing people, very smart people, who do this work and are ready to help, I was so happy, that these people have already set their mind to protect exploited workers and of course it gives you motivation to join. You are proud that you are part of this.”

It is evident that social context still played pivotal role in participants’ later experiences. However, we can see diversity of actors which came into play. For the earlier stages of their life they recall the influence of family surroundings, while later they report influence of other actors mostly. Peers have a particularly crucial role for many of them as a first contact point. At the same time, non-hierarchical and welcoming atmosphere created by their new young colleagues was reported as one of the most appealing qualities in their environment by at least 3 of the participants. Along with peers, some other personalities were identified. These were mostly from the position of authority, people who exercised certain influence, because participants were impressed by their knowledge and viewpoints.

Significant Events

A significant event here is used with Charmaz’s definition²⁷⁶:

A significant event stands out in memory because it has boundaries, intensity, and emotional force. Furthermore, a significant event captures, demarks, and intensifies feelings. ... A significant event freezes and enlarges a moment in time. Because of inherent or potential meanings of self within the event, people grant obdurate qualities to it. They reify it. To them, the event supersedes past meanings and foretells future selves.

There have been couple of vivid examples of such occurrences in the respondents’ stories.

Unity, Solidarity and Integrity

Revaz recalls the turbulent times of his participation in student protests of “Laboratory 1918.” This was a group of people with diverse orientations: radical feminists, anarchists, social democrats (to which he was affiliated that time), and the rest of the “simply good people.” They occupied the University building and fluttered the red flag with inscription: Equality, Solidarity, Freedom. The following year, they organized a big scale 1st of May demonstration which was raided by the police. Already 7 years have passed, and he evaluates the movement from critical perspective: “These were diverse people, always in conflict, and everyone went on their way. Declared was that there is horizontal power, no

²⁷⁶ Charmaz, ‘Theoretical Sampling, Saturation, and Sorting’, 116.

leaders, but in reality, it was based on informal leadership and it is even worse. At least, formal leader has responsibilities, and this informal leadership just breeds nepotism.” However, those days stayed vivid in his memory and helped him define himself as a person with principles and integrity:

This is what I am lacking in others. That is our motto: ‘Unity, Solidarity and Integrity.’ People can so easily sell their principles for example just to simply get a visibility on media, or get invited to some working group in a fashionable hotel, which, in the end, has no impact at all, just to collect some social capital, or build a political career. They often hurt the common cause, out of their mercantilist interests.

From Strike to Union

For Ketevan and Maryam, big scale strike which they initiated among social workers in Georgia, turned out to be decisive to set up the trade union to retain achievements and protect participants of a strike. Organizations working on labour rights issues and trade unions, including GTUC and Solidarity Network were supporting them from legal side and in organizing. Ketevan and Maryam recall all the challenges they were facing, innovative methods they were implementing and emotional toll they experienced during the whole process. They state it was not just an ordinary strike with some specific aim, it united people with lot of differences, with one common trait: love for their profession. Maryam talks about the responsibility they felt: “We had to save our profession, because for years it was being discredited. There was so much misconceptions, it was so humiliated,” then she goes on to remember details of the strike:

Nothing was preplanned, it all happened naturally. What we thought relevant in that moment, that’s how we acted. We did not need to persuade anyone, we were talking about some problems, and they momentarily were understanding what we were talking about. We felt so much trust from other participants. With phones, social media, we were trying to use everything...We were going to every media. We could not sleep properly, because it was decisive that people would know about this and the employer to see that we were not powerless. There was a lot of pressure on individuals. In the end some got weaker under this pressure, but I still think we started with dignity and ended it with dignity as well.

They realized that they needed to further protect their interests and follow up on their strike experience. Creating a trade union seemed like an optimal way out: “It gives you not only the opportunity to protect your rights, but you can create new knowledge and share it with your professional community. You can also apply for some grants, so there are diverse opportunities to work actively.” Ketevan previously only supported the

workers' rights externally, she never thought she could be also part of this: "I was backing those leftist movements, and people working on workers' rights issues from the outside. But I never had a perception before, that I would also need it. I was more giving away than receiving. So, the perception that I was also part of it was not much present." However, after the strike she was also impressed by the solution to set up the union at their workplace: "We unequivocally realized that it is so great every type of worker, at every workplace, to have this kind of union, they all need very, very strong, effective trade union and I was very excited by this idea."

From Agara to Tbilisi and Back

Lika has the event of Agara protest march imprinted in her memory. This was the march of Agara Sugar Factory workers from the town of Agara to the capital city of Tbilisi, who walked 110 kilometres in the protest of closing of the factory, with 500 workers left unemployed. She was emotionally impacted by workers' dedication and she made up her mind to join the GTUC youth movement: "They were coming for 3 days and it made me certain that I wanted to be part of their team. I was more active afterwards." She remembers her emotions during that time: "I had a feeling of pride, I was thinking if I would also join them, all the emotions I see from these live videos will also come towards me and it attracted me probably." When the resolution was achieved, and she travelled to Agara with GTUC youth activists she was further overwhelmed with emotions:

There were so much warm feelings expressed by each worker, they were coming to us and thanking us, inviting us to their houses. ... I realized that there were so much positive emotions coming from people who are in need and are seeking justice and when you try and at least slightly help them. I made up my mind that it would not be just one or two days when I would be engaged and decided to actively participate in GTUC youth.

Occupy Rustavi Azot

For Nikoloz especially impactful was the Rustavi nitrogen factory – "Rustavi Azot" case, when the factory was purchased by Bank of Georgia. As Nikoloz describes, they closed the factory down, fired every worker and later they employed them again with the exception of 350 workers. They started demonstrations in front of factory without any response from administration. Nikoloz tells the story with great detail, how other student movements started to join them and they brought fresh perspective, they taught them to be braver and more radical. Nikoloz particularly underlines the role of "Auditorium 115,"

student movement which was successor of “Laboratory 1918”: “To be honest, when we were more radical, it was all thanks to ‘Auditorium 115.’ Well, probably they were courageous, because they did not have responsibility. What would happen in the factory afterwards would not affect them later in any way. So, it was good for us, because they would not be shy to act.” Nikoloz gets very excited when he recalls those episodes, he also sent me the footage of the action. On the decisive day they warned the administration that in every ten minutes they would get one step closer to the administration building if no measure would be taken. They had to occupy the building:

Director locked himself in the cabinet. I was the one who had to break the lock. Imagine, how emotional all of that was: in some factory, in Rustavi, workers occupied the administration building! In the heat of the moment, my dad announced in front of the media that, we would not leave the place until Prime Minister would arrive. We locked the door, put armchairs in front of it and all the furniture inside, turned on ‘The Internationale’ and braced up!

The police broke in and despite workers’ resistance and setting up a human chain, they one by one took everyone out. Yet, Nikoloz thinks that this was the pivotal moment in matter of protest practice in Georgia. He was also very much personally impacted by it: “In the end it taught me that you should be brave when the truth is on your side.”

...And Then There Was a Strike

For Jonas, strike action he participated was also remarkable experience, however it was not extraordinary in his work environment: “...and then there was a strike. That’s how things should be apparently sometimes [laughter].” In his company they have a long history of strikes. He explained preconditions carefully, that the factory was very famous and historical, then it was purchased by other huge company and workers were not happy with certain conditions. He describes how swiftly everything gets organized there:

The union is quite strong so whenever there is a strike, you don’t really need to mobilize, you are like, we have a strike on this day, for this reason and they go like, yeah, we have a strike. There is a quote from another [company] where I worked, there was this union secretary, was like ‘whenever I tell the people that we strike on the day, they all go outside and then ask why we strike.’ That’s how we mobilize in the [company] [laughter]. ... Basically, it was like, ‘Are we doing it like last time?’ And we were like: ‘Yeah, we are doing it like last time.’

Then he goes on to describe the details enthusiastically: how they did block the entrances, how strategically chose the times and tried to engage other divisions too. He was

representing the young workers in the negotiations and would prefer to have at least one other young worker at the side because he needs to fight for his positions with older workers. While reflecting on the process during the strike, he recalls: “Some go like, ‘yeah, ok, this young man actually has a reason, might be a good idea.’ You still struggle to get support and you rather basically fight to get what you want inside that group, so that they go and bargain for your proposed positions, what you wanted to achieve. That’s interesting, also quite fun and exhausting.”

Take me as I am

For Emma, trade union summer camp she attended was a very stimulating episode. She told me a little back story of those camps, that SPD was doing this in 20s, where there was still a working-class identity and they were sending the children there, to educate, enjoy and realize themselves. Being in the summer camp made her feel she belonged among those people. She experienced acceptance and being in harmony with herself and her environment. It was a radical shift from her previous environment:

As a way of being, it was a total new experience for me, because I have been growing up in a surrounding, a social surrounding of a lot of, well, fighting sort of, because there was always competition around of who’s better. And if you’re not going to university you are missing out and you are a second-degree kind of person if you are doing an apprenticeship. And for being accepted for who I was unconditionally kind of was the thing I sometimes feel like from nowadays perspective has been looking for. ... I was seeking for that kind of being told you’re good and that what you’re doing is good and I think that’s the biggest motivation to sticking around.

Emma started being actively engaged afterwards. Another thing she saw later as an important contributing factor to her activism is that she experienced that she can make a difference. She reached the point in the trade union and her political activism, where she could reach out to people and they would answer to her: “I kind of make a connection to people and make them see different opportunities for society and for workers life. So, this is part of my motivation right now. And I kind of, in German we have a saying *Trage die Früchte meiner Arbeit* and translated it’s I’m carrying the fruits of my work now, so, it’s a good feeling to have that and feel that.”

Significant events have a very special meaning for participants. There is no common occurrence which transformed their way of thinking, rather these were certain

unique episodes from their story where they found themselves emotionally engaged, re-evaluating some of their beliefs or set their mind to a particular direction.

Labour Experiences

Labour experiences of participants or those around them was a motivator for activation for many of them. Therefore, I identified here two categories: lived experiences - labour experiences which were personally encountered and empathetic support, stemming from labour experiences of participants' personal contacts. Support for social justice and workers' rights generally, is not discussed in this context.

Lived Experiences

Luca emphasizes her love of profession while talking about motivations of her activism:

It's one of these jobs you can't just abolish. we can't just say that we don't want to be nurses anymore, because the workplace was bad, let's just stop being nurses. and I always had this idea that there are two options: you can exit, which is fine, I would never be harsh on someone which would make the decision because it is still very harsh and progress is very slow and seems sometimes not to be there at all, but for me personally it was never an option to exit, it was always the option to fight.

Her approach was that, "it just cannot be like that forever." Another important point she makes out of characteristics of her profession is that their conditions directly affect people under their care. This connects to the stances which Maryam and Ketevan, social workers from Georgia, also express: "overworked, unhappy social worker cannot be as effective in helping people, as a social worker who is in good conditions. This was double motivation for us: we can exit the profession, but those people who require our help cannot exit. Therefore, we decided to fight." Luca expresses frustration over systemic problems in her profession and mentions anger as the main stimulating emotion:

You cannot just cross out the responsibility, because it's always there as a doctor, as a nurse. Sometimes it's not that urgent but you can never cross it out and my workplace is telling me that you are responsible for making it better even though the conditions are shitty, kind of... Let me say in the worst way possible: if the patient dies, like that is my problem. The problem is not me; the problem is in the system. and I was so angry that it fuelled all of my work, I think.

Ketevan shares the sentiment:

Our profession is not regulated in Georgia. You have no idea how many cases you are going to have each month. You are not protected by the law. When I had too

many very heavy cases, it created feeling of protest in me, how can I manage it with my physical or emotional resources, especially when you realize that you are hurting people, who expect your help. ... Later some other social workers had the same protest and we decided together to awaken this, I would say, feeling of anger in others. Basically, our main motivating emotion was anger, which on the one hand you experience as an employee and on the other, as a social worker, because with your dire conditions you hurt people, who you are supposed to be helping.

Many participants also expressed concern that personal relations with employer is hindering factor for organizing. Lika had the example on her workplace when her colleague was inquiring about conditions of establishing a trade union. However, on the one hand number of workers, and on the other very close relations with their employer, as it was a small company, “killed” any effort for unionization from the start. Ana also remembers one of her working experience with her acquaintance. She protested her unremunerated overtime and started going to work in the following day as many hours late as they made her work overtime. However, it was an individual action and she mentions that because the employer was an acquaintance, her actions did not have consequences, and on her side, Ana also made lot of concessions. She describes herself as being rebellious and always fighting against injustice. Through her labour experiences she realized the strength of unity:

I saw many labour rights’ violations which I protested. But as it is practice in Georgia, when you protest something, you should leave the job. But I still protested. It was worth it; I could always find a similar job. But practice does not change by this. Only my situation changed: I left one job, started another, again same situation. I left that one too, started another and I understood people who were left there and did not voice their complaints. Only one person cannot change anything. You need a united force for that, or in other words, trade union.

Personal relations happened to be problematic in German sample too. However, in this case problem is not so much being employed by the acquaintance rather it is mostly approach from the employer. Jonas experienced this during his minimum wage “mini-job” period: “We were treated like we are one family, having some team meet ups or something like that. That was nice but nobody really talked about politics there or unions.” Luca also mentions that being familiar with her employer, that it was not some “nameless and faceless organization” had some impact on her will to be vocal about problems. However, she also underlines that at that time she could not really differentiate between employer and structural problems and stresses importance of this: “I think I could

not separate back then between what the employer is and why I am unhappy with certain things. And because I am unhappy with the certain things it does not mean that person as individuals did something wrong.” At the same time, like Jonas, Luca also talks about employer’s approach when they were not openly anti-union but expressing an attitude that problems could have been solved inside and resistance was not necessary. They would always individualize the problem:

They would be like, well not exactly in these words but, like ‘we are big family and we can always talk about things. If something does not work for you maybe we can think of reducing one or two hours of your work in the week,’ so they were always ready to drop some things to individuals, as much as they could. It’s not like that they could do a lot, because thankfully we had the unions who had very strict and very strong contracts which would not allow them to do the little raise here, little raise there, but you know they always find ways.

Luca only realized their strategy in hindsight: “Now when I’m older and I’m working with unions I know that, that is a classic tactic but before I did not identify it as such, because I always made it like a personal issue.”

Lisa, who did her training in hospitality industry, also brought up her love for job and expresses her discontent for the employers’ attitude:

They never really ask you about your personal feelings or your personal requirements. If you work in the hotel you know that you don’t get a salary of someone who works at the Ministry or whatever. You know that. You do that because you like the job, but I think, especially lot of bosses, they don’t see you as that person who actually likes to work there or likes to have leisure time.

She also stresses necessity of earning a decent wage: “With the salary I got in the first and second year, I could not even afford my rent, I had to have financial help from the government, like you can apply for that and show them how much you get so they will kind of fill that up, so that you are able to live. So, that’s quite sad that basically you work but you don’t get the money you need for a living.” Furthermore, Lisa expresses disappointment by her recent work at the association who delivers lunch to old people and those in need at low prices. She started with great enthusiasm, hoping for small talk with these people and make their day a little bit better, because as she mentioned they often miss social contact or do not have a family. But the lack of time and number of required deliveries does not let her do this: “It’s this illusion, that we do something good but, in the end, it is just delivering food like a pizza place or any other restaurant.”

Luca also expresses her discontent because of scarcity of time, which is directly related to lack of personnel. She has no opportunity to practice her learned skills, which should be the aim of the training. For example, she learned carefully how to help lift someone up in the bed, but never had the chance to do so:

I would say it takes 5 minutes more, if I would do it in the beginning every day. So, if I do it 6 months every day 5 minutes more, then I would probably know how to do it. I never had the time to do it because I was always too late to my shifts, I was always not having time to do what I wanted, there was always a lot of decisions that I had to make against what I knew was best for my patient.

Empathetic Support

The missing educational element during internships was also stressed by Davit, using his friends' internships example. However, he underlines issue of access to the internships, which are not remunerated as a rule in Georgia. He brings up the example of his friend who could not take the internship offered by one of the state agencies. When Davit inquired, his friend responded that he had no luxury to work for free for 6 months, as he had to take care of rent, parents in the village, etc. He also remembers other classmates who were doing internships in the court. They had to go through the court documents and cover names before publishing. As if initial idea was to familiarize interns with the content of these documents, but because of time constraints they were hastily just covering names during their whole internship, there was no time for reading. "Now, look," - Davit says, - "Despite the fact that neither intern, nor somebody who is left without internship is going to get any practical experience, those interns already had it in a CV that they do the internship at the Supreme Court and were a step ahead." Davit himself did the internship in the office of his relative and was concerned by unequal distribution of resources there, with employer getting unproportionally larger share, while employees were hardly surviving on 500 GEL (nearly 140 EUR) monthly.

Revaz also remembers his friends' labour experiences during student years: "Many of our friends, who were at that time still students, were working in supermarkets inhumanly long hours, since morning and they could not attend lectures. That's why there was a need for a union in service sector, nothing existed there." Establishing their union was seemingly determined also by this fact. Davit also often met with his friends for beer, discussing various topics. He recalls that everyone shared that they started work and had the experience of some horrid working conditions:

We wake up in the morning and hate to go to work, why should this be like this. We spend nearly 90% of our lives at work. That's why I was like, let's wake up

one day without battling through this day, not abhor my work, not just me, but my friends too. ... People were already on acceptance phase, thinking it is just a temporary, I will leave this job soon or the country and it will get better. That needed to be changed, because as it turned out, those jobs are not temporary, wherever you go you encounter the same and we had an ambition for a better life in our own country.

That's the reason Davit joined Solidarity Network.

Embeddedness of trade unions at the workplace

Under embeddedness of unions is meant their stable presence at the workplace and high numbers of unionization, which makes it a "social custom" for the worker to join. The topic was not mentioned by majority of participants. It was explicit only in case of two German participant: Aris and Jonas. Aris mentions that membership of the union goes "automatically with the vocational training." First, he joined some of their educational seminars, slowly took other responsibilities and started collaborating and participation in youth committees across Germany. Aris tracks his experience: "So, it leads one to another. It's a lot of volunteering, lot of young trade unionists are working voluntarily for IG Metall. So, you take your vocational training, you are at your company, on top you are going to meetings. You go to youth seminars, you go to this councils, you're working with the IG Metall and at one point you are working for the IG Metall." Jonas from the beginning explained that being a member of the union at his workplace was a tradition. That is how he also got there: "Like, everybody who are in production, blue collar workers are all in the union. So, it's basically, you get to the job and they go like: 'You are in the union?' And you: 'What is the union?'" Jonas added later with laughter: "It's more normal to be a union member, than it is if you are not one. I guess, you are getting more problems that way, basically. ... I mean, for me there is no reason to not join union, so I did, so that's how the story goes."

Demand for better work was common topic for the majority of participants. They elaborated on those issue, without me asking an explicit question. It is evident that young participants have strong discontent for various aspects of their work life. For Luca, Ketevan and Maryam, there were interesting similarities identified stemming from characteristics of their jobs. They all share responsibility over their patients or beneficiaries and have a double motivation to fight for improving working conditions which also directly affects other people. Empathetic support, which relates to, support motivated by labour experiences of their personal contacts was explicitly mentioned in

case of Davit and Revaz, who repeatedly stressed this factor. Distinct embeddedness of trade unions at the workplace could be also observed only in two German cases. However, it should be also mentioned that being recruited by contacts at the workplace was prevalent practice in Germany.

Socio-political Views

All participants express dissatisfaction with current social system. Inequality and social justice are the most recurrently used words among participants. However, the perspectives vary. It is not elaborated below as they just briefly stated it during the talk but for the overview should be mentioned that two respondents from Germany were explicitly SPD members/supporters.²⁷⁷ Revaz was also involved in party of young social democrats in Georgia while ago. In addition, many declare that they are not member of the party and do not support any party in particular. Under the common theme of social justice and inequality, I included two categories: “smashing capitalism” and “taming capitalism” viewpoints.²⁷⁸ However, under this theme they should not be strictly differentiated, rather they are diffusing into each other, as all participants did not have invariable and rigid positions, rather their statements could contain elements from both categories, and they do not necessarily exclusively label themselves.

Inequality and social justice

Lisa names social justices as her main concern in the society. She is aware of her “selfish” motives also – financial wellbeing has always been a troubling issue for her. She perceives herself as a “loser” in this system: “I come from a non-academic family background. I did not get guidance about my future work career. I have and had to figure out a lot by myself. I could not afford to study without financial support.” She believes that trade unions should be engaged in issues of wider political implications: “I think it’s really important that trade unions have general political views or broader social political views to show what they stand for. It’s not about being liked by everyone.”

Lika from Georgia finds lack of solidarity in her society worrying:

People’s attitude towards solidarity, towards people in need and homeless is very problematic for me. What I have seen within the work of GTUC youth, young people at the workplaces are so indifferent when we try to mobilize them to

²⁷⁷ I have not directly asked questions to the respondents regarding the party membership or support.

²⁷⁸ They are used according to Erik Olin Wright’s descriptions. Please see:

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/12/erik-olin-wright-real-utopias-anticapitalism-democracy/>

improve some conditions. They always tell us that they are not planning to be at that place for a long time anyway. I think it is very wrong that we never think about others.

Nikoloz shares this viewpoint, however he also emphasizes that solidarity is not purely based on empathy and it is beneficial for everyone:

People cannot understand the idea of solidarity. That German priest's example, you know, when he names the groups of people who were persecuted and meanwhile, he was silent and when they reached the clergy in the end, there was no one left to stand up against it. People cannot realize importance of this that when workers at one place are exploited, you should stand by them because you may also face the same problem at some point. For example, they fired one worker from Rustavi Azot and his friend they kept in the job, and he did not support the fired worker. You know what happened? Next year he was fired too.

Nikoloz tells me the story of his political development. The problems in the society are so visible that he does not think there is anything surprising that he carries those views: "You should not treat human like animal, right? It need not even be discussed, but they do. It was so easily visible, I was astonished. Business has such a strong lobby; they are themselves sitting in parliament. What else can you do; you can only demand some leftists to enter the parliament." He feels economic impoverishment everywhere, which he ascribes to unequal distribution of wealth and social injustice: "For example when we go to this mining town Chiatura, it has such an astonishing landscape, I think it should be one of the richest cities in Georgia, nice resort, but you go there and it is so hurtful, everything looks so miserable."

Giga tracked his re-evaluation of beliefs. He was interested in human rights, history and politics from early age. However, at first his civic activism was limited to its domineering liberal understanding. However, after ending up in trade union structure, his activism gained depth:

The idea which fuels trade unions is so wide, that it is not just this superficial trade union idea, this is idea of social justice. We could similarly have gone to that point through socialist or social democratic party. In this case for us trade unions happened to be a bridge to the idea of social justice and their structure was very well linked to that whole idea, so it was attractive for us.

While reflecting on societal issues, Giga underlines cultural conflicts in the society:

People in Georgia are born in social and economic pits. There is such a novel 'The woman in the dunes,' where people are living in the pits and to not be buried in sand, they have to every day throw out sand from those pits. On the other hand,

we have this economic elites, socially irresponsible capitalists, banks, casinos who are deepening those pits. These people in pits cannot develop themselves, stay there and make many mistakes. Some enlightened society, with education, resources are looking at those people and tell them to internalize the ideas which are coming from some core or whatever, colonialism centre. And then there is nonsensical conflicts and main issue, issue of economic exploitation stays behind.

Ketevan who is not engaged in unionism for a long time, recalls her earlier interests. She was always curious in workers' rights issues and was following the activities of leftist groups. However, she was not particularly attracted to any of them. Social inequality is her biggest concern. She realizes that it is a complex issue with many different consequences: "I consider it as the biggest problem in our society and generally everywhere. Social inequality, puts people in such positions that it strips them of prospects, sense of hope and at the same time, inequality is what divides us."

Luca also remembers that even before unions she already had certain political convictions, for example regarding equality of men and women, or need for fighting for better lives for everyone. She was realizing that some problem there might have been at work, could be connected to bigger political problems of racism or homophobia. What has changed afterwards is that trade unions showed her that these problems could be tackled with their help:

It showed me that it's not an individual problem or it's not that we have this one seminar but union really gave me the feeling that there is structurally something behind me that says that you are in the right to not feel good about I don't know, about racism or any kind of discrimination. I think that has not changed but empowered me a lot, empowerment would be the word, I think.

Further talking of union's role, Luca mentions that it also helped them to properly express themselves and have a space for a discussion: "I saw that we all [volunteers] share the same idea about how work should be, about idea in general, what should work be and what is work, and what is not work, and kind of work do we want, and I would always say that union gave us the space to talk about that and union gave us the words how to talk about that." Jonas similarly mentions that unions were having an important role in orientating him: "Basically, they channelled it [political activism], it gave a direction, you could say. I have or had potential you know, now I have a way where I can go." Tim also has a feeling that most of his political activity is related to his trade union engagement: "Mostly my activism was channelled through trade unions, but sometimes when I see demonstrations interest me, I participate."

“Smashing Capitalism” camp

Emma was actively engaged in politics from the young age. Even though her family was apolitical, they were discussing it a lot, also with Emma. She tells me her troubling relationship with her father, about their conflicts, mostly on political issues. She believes her political activism and left-leaning views, emancipated her from her father’s point of view, that’s where the source of conflict also lies. She tells me with enthusiasm how she found out later in life that her maternal grandfather was actually a communist, KPD member! Mother did not tell her that before:

She didn’t feel it should be relevant before because it wasn’t relevant in that surrounding and that community my family was in. ... it’s not really a thing, because everyone’s wealthy. They do not have to follow up on their interests, because they have quite a comfortable situation. Therefore, she never really talked about it, but then it was kind of her memory coming up again seeing my experience.

“To create more equal society” – that is the goal of her activism. “Being equal, being one of the others and being accepted” – that is what she experienced in the summer camp and that is what kind of society she would like to live in. She was raising up in quite a wealthy region (thanks to Volkswagen), however her parents were not on par with others. That created a sense of injustice in her. She blames capitalism for all the ills in the current society. Abolishing capitalism could be the only solution:

As long as we live in a capitalist society there cannot be a fairness and equality. And this is part of my motivation of political organization fighting and it is a kind of radical point of view because it’s connected to all the other topics. Since as long as we have a capitalist society, I do not see patriarchy to be dissolved. As long as we have capitalist society, I do not see that we will get across racism in any kind of sort.

However, in everyday activism she realizes that she needs to have more careful approach towards the young people who have not reached that point yet: “So, in my everyday political practice I always aim for activating and making young people political and see things politically. Encourage people to appreciate their own biography basically, like I appreciate my own biography. ... [and then there is] that bigger aim of creating a new society.”

Jonas talks about his family’s legacy. His parents were born in east side of Berlin, educated in Moscow, therefore he claims: “It was never really an option for me to come

up with now called liberal ideology, like what the FDP stands for, being like everything is for the businesses, freedom. I mean, freedom is nice, but it should be all levelled in a way, everybody should have chance to success.” He particularly identifies the influence of grandpa on his political stance calling him “old communist” and smiles warmly on memory of him: “He always told me about how good it would be if communism would work, socialism. When I started to work, I saw that he is actually right, it’s kind of unfair that I have to work, and somebody earns so much more and have much better life than me. That’s not very fair.” Jonas expresses his frustration for the current situation, he sees it as inherently unjust:

If you look at the world and go like we all pay taxes, and there are multibillionaire dollar companies with the richest man on top, and he pays probably less tax than I do and still gets rescued, all the banks who are too big to fail and then I go outside and there is a little shop selling baby clothes, this one has to shut down now, because it is allowed to fail. I am looking for fairness.

He is certain he will stay loyal to unions for a long time, as obviously he is going to work for a long time. He expresses gratitude for all the previous generations who fought for better conditions for workers. He sees this as a “lifelong process.” Recent period shows that trade unions are all time under attack, things they thought would be secure, does not seem such anymore. He sees the necessity to stay strong and keep fighting: “We should keep on the work in solidarity with the ones which came before us, and also the ones who died on the streets for 30 minutes break we have now, and stuff like this which cannot be forgotten, that’s why I am committed to it, because I don’t want to see my children have only 15 minutes break by law, or something like that.”

Luca sees the necessity to look at things in a bigger perspective. For her during her activism it is very important to have that big picture in mind: “Union work is still the answer to the question to what kind of future do I want to live and what kind of future do I want to give to people after me. I know this sounds like, at some point we’re all happy and future is there, but I really think that we need to think that big, that big idea and then you change a little bit and a little bit everyday but without this big ideas I could not work.” Her biggest concern is capitalism. She hates the confusion she gets, if she says she is anti-capitalist:

They have an image that I am burning down houses, but this idea of everything has to be profited of, in anyway like humans are resource of profit, nature and planet is resource of profit, and I really, really hate the idea that everything is always growing and we have to grow, grow, grow and at some point, we can’t

grow anymore and I think, that's one of the major roots why lot of things are not working the way should, and lot of people want and let it happen. This is how it works. When I say capitalism, I mean capitalism.

In these kind of discussions she experienced many people just withdraw, considering her views radical: "and then my radical opinion is like let's pay the workers so that they can survive, for me that's not a radical opinion [laughter], can we please just do that?!" Continuing talking on current crisis, she remarks: "The whole system is already a crisis, sorry for that radical opinion [laughter]."

After starting his higher education, Davit immersed himself in theory and through discussions with his peers, he realized that his views were on the left side of the spectrum and was aligned with Marx's philosophical writings. He started thinking about inequality, its causes, ways to fight it. Familiarizing himself with the reality of working people, made him a dedicated labour rights' activist and he joined the Solidarity Network trade union. Davit reveals difficulties of their activism: "I'll be honest with you, in Georgia, if you work on these issues fulltime, as your heart tells you to work, not some donor organization, you are destined for either hunger or you try to survive. There is some membership fee, the budget is very low, and just with this budget it is impossible to make it work, unless you have people around you who believe in the idea." Despite many disappointments, he carries on with determination, he is even writing a book currently on workers' problems in Georgia and believes in people's power: "After all, Che Guevara also was saying the same [laughter], that he was not any kind of liberator, people liberate themselves. Whoever takes the credit, Misha, Grisha,²⁷⁹ has not made the revolution. People made the revolution. It is always people who make the revolution."

Reflecting on labour experiences, Ana expresses her dream to see the workers' revolution one day: "It is my big wish that, one day everyone will go out, no one should stay home, even people in public service jobs and stand together in solidarity." Nikoloz emphasizes current need for workers to stand together and demand what is theirs: "Law gives you the right to demand fulfilment of those rights, if you don't demand, no one is going to give it to you. At least, this is how it works in capitalism. We have a long way to go to change the system."

²⁷⁹ He means Mikheil Saakashvili, leader of 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia.

“Taming Capitalism” camp

Ketevan while talking about unjust economic system, stresses that she does not believe there is some conspiracy theory behind all these inequalities, poverty and social divisions: “No one is conspired so that part of us would overwork and get exploited and some minority feeds on it, rather, I think we are somehow going with inertia to this direction, and if we formulate better strategy, this inertia can change slowly its course.”

Maryam thinks that trade unions’ positions should be integrated with the interests of the employer and show them some arguments so that they will compromise: “There is so much psychological research, for example, that it is so important to have a satisfied employee, who likes the work, so much more profitable it can be for you. If we approach them this way and communicate, I am sure we will get a compromise.” Maryam also thinks that in social policies there is no left or right positions and you cannot really have radical approach: “It needs studying, experience and research.”

Aris believes that being political is not unions’ “core business,” but it might be useful for what he considers “core business”: “to educate workers, to help them when they need help and to represent their interests.” Tim maintains, that trade unions main function is to improve working conditions and make capitalism work: “Trade unions are really basic for working capitalist system, because they ensure not only that everybody is living a good life but that companies don’t get too big and don’t get too much power, don’t get too much money and this is why they ensure that capitalism work.”

Revaz recalls the reality where he was forming his political identity. Between the cleavages of conservative-traditionalist and liberal groups, he could not find the answers on any side. They were not sufficient for him to perceive the socio-economic structure. Even though, leftism is stigmatized because of the Soviet Union, he slowly moved to that direction: “Neither A nor B, requires some third alternative, that’s how I ended up in social-democracy.” He believes that strong unions are essential to secure welfare for the people and to influence the asymmetric employment relationships.

As we can see, the participants’ have a strong sense of social justice and perceiving inequality as the major problem in society. They have different ways of approaching these issues. Two main larger stances have been identified. Those who promote having a bigger perspective in sight for the systemic change, and those who are seeking for reformist options with more practical outlook.

Discussion

Conditions of participation in trade unions, which were underlined in the previous research, mattered in different degrees for my research participants. Gomez et al. maintain that young people are pliable and easily influenced by social surroundings. Social context evidently had a huge role for them. We could observe two cases when along the findings of Barling et al.,²⁸⁰ household with parents holding openly positive views of trade unions had a strong impact on the respondents' future choices. Lisa's case also strengthens this conclusion. Despite her mother's union membership status, she had no preconceived ideas of unions and did not even know about her mother's activities because of her passive membership. We also had interesting case of Emma, whose father had a negative attitude towards unions, but after her first interactions with young union members in the summer camp, it affected her substantially. However, this is tightly linked to her personal biography, her detest of earlier social surrounding, constant competition and feeling of not being good enough. Her case relates to Cregan and Johnston's findings²⁸¹ who maintain that group membership for young people might "enhance self-esteem." Emma's new environment showed her acceptance and support.

Apparently, there were other important actors in my respondents' lives who affected their way of thinking. Parents' or earlier social surroundings slowly faded, and their new realities started to matter substantially more, be it higher education institution or first steps in the work environment. These needs to be particularly highlighted, since obviously participants are attributing great importance to those transitional phases. That's when they first started engaging themselves with ideas of social justice and experienced first work realities. These are the crucial stages trade unions need to concentrate on for reaching to young people, making themselves visible and vocal at student jobs, at university classrooms.

Significant events are unique experiences of my research participants. These events are essential components which guided them, emotionally connected them even closer to union work or simply let them re-evaluate their convictions or identity. Revaz got closer to find his standing and principles after going through those turbulent times with other young people. Ketevan and Maryam realized the necessity of trade union through their strike. Lika was impressed by the dedication of common people who were

²⁸⁰ Barling, Kelloway, and Bremermann, 'Preemployment Predictors of Union Attitudes', 726.

²⁸¹ Cregan and Johnston, 'An Industrial Relations Approach to the Free Rider Problem', 97.

seeking justice and it set up her mind to get more active. Nikoloz was already in the struggle but the case of the Rustavi nitrogen plant made him even more loyal to the cause and made him realize to always fight for what he considers is right. Jonas has tested his skills as a representative in negotiations during the strike and realized he is “quite good at it,” while Emma found acceptance in her new environment during the summer camp which transformed her attitudes and made her more engaged in activism. These events we cannot generalize, there is no common transformative happening for them, which matters for wider relevance, but this is part of their unique story.

Cregan and Johnston maintain²⁸² that “release the tension” can be important motivator for young people to join unions. Labour experiences, be it their own or of their peers, obviously played large role in participants’ current engagement. I identified two categories of lived experiences and empathetic support. For most, of course, their personal experience has mattered in shaping their views, however Davit and Revaz consistently stressed importance of their friends’ experiences, worrying also about the problem of migration. Embeddedness of trade unions were particularly underlined only by two German respondents. What should be mentioned here is that other motivating factors seem to fade when trade union has a strong presence and there is a social custom to be a member. Jonas reports, that he did not have any reason not to join, why would he decline the offer, especially that he might have received negative attitude from other workers. The question arises here, whether he would still be able to get active in union only out of his other convictions, such as political inclinations or experiences at the workplace. It seemed to work all together, in his case. Anger is also stimulating emotion mentioned by the participants of both samples. They want to enjoy their work, have a time for leisure, feel appreciated, they don’t want to hate waking up in the morning just because they have to go to work. They perceive orientation on profit, which is the priority for business, hindering in fulfilling abovementioned requirements and in hindsight express negative attitudes to their employers’ approaches. Therefore, the “release tension” argument, apparently has a foundation, according to the research results.

Discontent with current social system was probably most noticeable, commonly referred theme among the participant. As Gomez et al. results showed²⁸³ young people are more positive towards supporting the idea that workers should have more political

²⁸² Cregan and Johnston, 98.

²⁸³ Gomez, Gunderson, and Meltz, ‘Comparing Youth and Adult Desire for Unionization in Canada’, 536.

power and consequently are more prone to support the unions. Charlwood also showed²⁸⁴ that workers with more left-wing inclinations were more willing to be engaged with trade unions. Although, my respondents were differing in their expression and political tendencies, they all felt concerned with social injustice and inequality. Some had more reformist approach, while others were hinting to systemic changes and necessity to “abolish capitalism.” Student protest movements, who are fighting for people’s socio-economic rights were reoccurring in the narratives of all Georgian male participants. They were either directly participating in their actions or collaborating with them during the strike actions organized from their side. In German case, participants were mostly reporting supporting Fridays For Future campaign, against racism or AfD party, however not independently, rather mostly in the framework of supporting campaigns organized by their unions. It was obvious that lot of political activism for German respondents were channelled through trade unions, while in case of Georgia they were initiators of political action. These can be explained by structural weakness of the unions in Georgia.

In the end, I should also underline two issues I have not discussed in the results part. The first relates to participants earlier experiences. Without my inquiry, many of my respondents from both country groups underlined the importance of earlier substantial education on trade unions or wider socio-political topics while reflecting on their earlier experiences or of those around them. These relates back to the Cregan and Johnstons suggestion that “the greatest weapon for unions might lie in education at school, so those youngsters ... become members when joining the work-force, regardless of union presence or power at any particular work-place.”²⁸⁵ Young people I have talked to strongly believe that having a better understanding of challenges at the workplace and organizing would help them before they personally got engaged in the unions. A slight difference is that many Georgian respondents were talking about trade union inclusion in context of higher education, which is stemming from their experience and school-to-work transition structure in the country. German students promote a much earlier start.

Another issue is of the instrumental approaches which I could identify but have not covered it in separate section. Waddington and Whitston, as well as Cregan and Johnston indicate variety of instrumental reasons for young people to be engaged in unions. Mutual support, access to social spaces, thrill of experience, and higher wages all

²⁸⁴ Charlwood, ‘Why Do Non-Union Employees Want to Unionize?’, 482.

²⁸⁵ As quoted in Hodder and Krestos, 7.

played role for many of the participants, however training and education seemed to matter in case of German sample, since unions are systematically offering those opportunities there. While in case of Georgia, thrill of the experience was more evident in some participants, for example Lika believes she would not want to do any bureaucratic work there: “I will be there probably until this spark exists.” It is not surprising, since most participants from Georgia are not necessarily engaged out of the interest of their own working conditions, but rather try to support and mobilize other workers.

Conclusion

In my study, I explored the life story accounts of young trade union members. The results of my study revealed a diversity of influences on the research participants’ engagement in trade unionism. For some their labour experience was decisive for their activation, for some their ideals and visions for the new society, yet for the others strength of the trade unions’ presence on the workplace mattered over everything else. What unites them is dissatisfaction with current social system and strong sense of social injustice and they found trade unions to be space where they collectively try to bring changes. As Marvin said: “I am participating others to see that I’m not the only person who thinks like that.” Young trade union members feel motivated by autonomous youth sections, where they have space for collaboration, innovation and bringing ideas into reality. Therefore, supporting and strengthening these types of organizations are essential from trade unions’ side.

There have been several issues coming up which are out of the scope of this study, however in further research will be beneficial to analyse. The first, engagement of young people in trade unions from the lenses of activism and, in wider context, from the study in social movements is important, as “the traditional distinction between the new social movements, focusing on post-material issues, and the old ones, linked to class politics...seems more and more misleading.”²⁸⁶ Young people consistently reported their interest in socio-political matters, engagement or collaboration with various social movements. Another interesting direction could be facing towards the topic of gender dimension, namely young females’ participation in trade union structures. Several of my female respondents, from both samples, underlined either their frustration for lower representation of women or their enthusiasm when they saw active young women

²⁸⁶ As quoted in: Cha, Holgate, and Yon, ‘Emergent Cultures of Activism’, 3.

engaged in trade unionism. It would be worthwhile to investigate this issue further and identify challenges they confront and visions they have for the future of trade unions. Finally, young people elaborated on the internal challenges they face, some cleavages between them and older workers on the workplaces and critically evaluated structural problems inside the unions. I have not covered them in detail as it was out of the focus of my research purposes, but it is certainly beneficial to scrutinize these themes in detail in the future.

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Appendices

APPENDIX 1. Interview Protocol

Introduction

I am interested in exploring young trade union members life stories and their views. Thank you for your participation. Please, reconfirm that you agree to take part in the interview voluntarily. You can stop the interview at any time. You can avoid answering any question without explanation. Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

Sub session 1

Initial question:

Please, recall any event, experience or influences which at any point of your life could have affected your views towards trade unions, either positively or negatively, be it direct or indirect experience.

Take your time in answering it. Any detail you can give me will be appreciated. I'll listen first, I won't interrupt, I'll just make some notes as I don't want to miss anything you say.

Sub session 2

Follow up questions depended on their narrative. I only ask questions about what they told me. Follow chronologically as they were mentioned. I can miss certain topics and focus on ones which are of more interest to me.

Topics in the order mentioned by the interviewee	Terms used by the interviewee	Questions 'pointed at narrative'

Table used to note the topics and come up with questions for this sub session 2

Sub session 3

Sub session 3 constructed in a way that considers sub sessions 1 and 2 to not answered and elaborated on any topics. If during the interview process certain topics will be

covered in sub session 1 and 2, naturally, similar questions won't be asked in sub session 3 anymore

Labour experiences:

- Early labour market experiences (norms & influences at the workplace). Trade unions there.

Trade unions' main role:

- Personally to you

Main concerns in society:

- To what extent are you politically active?
- Main influences on your socio-political views?

Do you have something to add?

Ask them to contact me in case they want to tell me something more, or send me written comments, etc.

APPENDIX 2. Consent Form

Life Stories of Young Trade Union Activists

Consent to take part in research

- I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves semi-structured interview where I have to elaborate on my personal experiences.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous unless agreed otherwise.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in Nino Natroshvili's master's thesis.
- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm, they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in Nino Natroshvili's personal computer until the exam board confirms the results of her master's thesis.
- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained in Nino Natroshvili's personal computer until the exam board confirms the results of her master's thesis.

- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Researcher:

Nino Natroshvili, Euroculture (M.A.), Palacký University Olomouc, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, nino.natroshvili@stud.uni-goettingen.de

Academic Supervisors:

Names, Affiliations, Contact details

Signature of research participant

Signature of participant

Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

Signature of researcher

Date