

# Trade Union Powers:

*Implosion or Reinvention?*



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By

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# INTRODUCTION

This book is a result of the research project “Rebuilding trade union power in the age of austerity: a review of three sectors,”<sup>1</sup> carried out from June 2016 to March 2019. When, in late 2014, the project first began to take shape, Portugal’s labor context had already been swept by a profound economic and social crisis that was caused, on the one hand, by outside influence linked to the intervention of the Troika (European Central Bank, International Monetary Fund, European Commission) following the May 2011 request for financial rescue, and on the other by the domestic adoption of austerity policies (implemented mostly during the 19th Constitutional Government). And although the research focuses on a time period that came after the institutionalization of austerity in the country, its inevitably intended purpose was to look at that recent past in order to detect the disruptive impacts on labor and the trade unions. In addition, we sought to map the paths of union rebuilding and recovery, especially after the great impacts of the coronavirus. Also, we will include one final addendum in which the impacts of the pandemic crisis will be considered.

Just a few months after the beginning of the current covid-19 pandemic (exactly at the moment that we closed our book) it is still impossible to foresee the level of changes in the economic field. On the other hand, it will be even more difficult to assess the capacity of the unions to respond in the wake of the resulting new crisis. However, despite that political uncertainty and the fact that economic recovery programs are still unknown – both at national level and within the European Union –, the effects on the labor market have already started to be devastating. Unemployment, underemployment, precariousness and fragmentation of forms of work are increasing rapidly. The sectors analyzed in this book (telecommunications, air transport and the

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automotive industry) are particularly vulnerable to the economic downturn and the brutal health crisis that the world is experiencing. As a matter of fact, to this date, trade union organizations have had to deal with consolidation and renewal challenges brought about by the crisis processes, both those that have been imposed on them from the outside (along with austerity) and those resulting from internal problems (deficit in terms of representativeness, aggregation of interests, or efficacy of union action). Hence our dual goal: to make a critical assessment of the historical legacy of Portuguese trade unionism, but first and foremost, to map the possibilities for its affirmation in such sectors as metallurgy, transport, and telecommunications, which themselves have undergone processes of transformation and restructuring.

In line with previous studies by the authors (Costa, 2008; Estanque and Costa, 2011; Silva, 2007b), the present book acknowledges the centrality of labor in society and its importance in building the social model that was to become predominant in Europe. See, on the one hand, the welfare state and the entire legal edifice that has served as the basis for labor law and enshrined the capital/labor link as guarantor of stability and security with regard to wages, working hours and working conditions; on the other hand, one must not forget the historical role played by trade unionism in allowing vast sectors of the working class to reach living standards close to those of the middle class. In our view, the struggles and democratic achievements of trade unions stand out as a decisive force in the response to the vitality crisis with which unionism is currently faced. In this capacity for reaction and for making proposals lies the potential for vital contributions toward the opening of new paths for society in a post-crisis environment.

In view of the overwhelming impact of the pandemic, an addendum to the analysis we have developed on the union field became inevitable. So, when considering the covid-19 implications on the overall society on labor relations and trade unions, we are now strongly convinced that the main line of the analysis remains updated. It is less sure now that we are living in a "post-austerity" environment, but in spite of that, we think the changes that are running now in the world are more likely to accelerate the trends that were already increasing along recent decades, as we argue throughout our book. The overcoming of some of the barriers created by the process of "internal devaluation" (Silva *et al.*, 2017) to which the Portuguese economy has been subjected, the prevalence of forceful market "laws" and

obligations *vis-à-vis* the European Union (EU) show that the removal of the hurdles in our path has been but partial. Now that structural options in Europe are at stake, many alternatives will be discussed in the labor world, including trade unions. These trends are what justifies the need to rethink the role of trade unionism, its various modalities of concrete social intervention and possible articulations with other social, cultural and political forces, at a time when the decline of social mobilization goes hand in hand with the steady weakening of the working class' collective identity. In addition to the global health shock, the medium-term social and economic effects will certainly be profound, and this will directly affect the union field. Rethinking the vulnerabilities of unionism, and its eventual reinvigoration, requires that we bear in mind the critical reading of global capitalism. Of course, this will continue beyond the crisis and may even be strengthened. But that does not mean underestimating the loopholes that have opened up in the system and its growing erosion, at least in the way it was erected by the neoliberal narrative (Wright, 2019).

The first part of our book (chapters 1 and 2) presents and discusses some of the recent debates on trade union powers and restructuring. On the one hand, it involves a broader debate on the notion of "social power" as it relates to work contexts and organizational logics and cultures. On the other hand, however, and as one might expect, it basically amounts to a more detailed analysis of the powers, that is to say, of the dimensions in which the field of trade unions can obtain the power resources it needs for its revitalization. Although it may appear contradictory – mainly because trade unionism's socio-historical trajectory owes a lot more to the notion of "counter-power" than to that of "power" –, we will not fail to go over a number of "power resources" approaches, with a view to a systematization of proposals with the potential to point to new theoretical directions. Albeit implicitly, we will also be discussing the well-known "class-market-society" triangle proposed by Richard Hyman (2001) at the beginning of the century. When faced with crises (such as the one caused by austerity), unions can be: "class" actors, in that they go on mobilizing/fighting on different professional fronts and organizing strikes and protests in various contexts, both national and international; "society" actors, because they adopt strategies of negotiation and social dialogue on broad economic, social and cultural matters; and "market" actors, in that they operate in increasingly complex, competitive and international labor markets, which they seek

to influence in multiple ways and according to such criteria as workforce skills or adaptation to business innovation processes.

Finally, in this first part we address the "analytical criteria" we've selected to guide our analysis of the above-mentioned sectors (metallurgy, transport, and telecommunications). Thus, we set out to study trade union performance in these three sectors, taking into account the following six analysis criteria (some of which are presented as dichotomies): representativeness; skills; conflict/negotiation; national/international; public/private; innovation. These six criteria amount to as many conceptual angles, which will inevitably be combined with the trade unions' concerns and with the specificities of each sector. Whereas some of these avenues of inquiry are clearly marked by union-related concerns (as is the case with the representativeness, conflict/negotiation, and national/international criteria), others seem to involve sectoral specificities (relating to such criteria as skills, public/private, or innovation). And again, we make sure to combine these criteria with the forms of power analyzed in Part I.

The second part of the book (chapters 3, 4 and 5) comprises the case studies that bring together the sectors in question. Each of the three cases is combined in turn with the analytical criteria (mentioned in Part II), in light of the transformations and restructuring undergone by three Portuguese benchmark companies: Autoeuropa (metal sector), TAP-Air Portugal (transport) and Portugal Telecom/Altice (telecommunications). Although these companies and sectors tend to be primarily associated with certain analytical criteria, in each chapter of Part III we hypothesize that conceiving of trade unions as "class", "society" and "market" is not something that is exclusively linked to a single sector of activity. That is why we find forms of negotiation in sectors where struggle has been historically predominant, conflict strategies in sectors where social harmony was to be expected, and sectors that are geared to markets of non-tradable goods, which is to say that they are protected from external competition when greater international competition was to be expected.

Although our premise, as we have said, is that they are an inescapable force upon which society's cohesion (and the advent of an economy more consistently based on the well-being of workers) largely rests, the hardships and barriers that trade unions have had to face over the last few decades can hardly conceal the immense perplexities the future holds, both nationally and internationally. Recognizing and identifying the structural constraints currently afflicting the trade

union field means highlighting the conflictual arena trade unions continue to occupy in the midst of an economy that is more and more resigned to the forces of the market and financial capital. But the responses to the difficulties ahead will have to consider, before anything else, which resources and initiatives the unions will be able to muster on their own. The other side of the coin will be to develop assessments that, while committed to the strengthening of the trade union field, still pursue objectivity as a primary goal and critical capability as an undisputed principle.



## **PART I –**

# **REBUILDING UNION POWERS: THEORY AND ANALYTICAL CRITERIA**

# CHAPTER 1

## FROM THE DISCOURSES ON THE CRISIS OF TRADE UNIONS TO THE DISCOURSES OF POWER

This chapter reflects on the notion of “trade unionism crisis”. In order to do that, one will have to take into consideration the “varieties of trade unionism”, so that from such diversity a clearer picture may emerge of the weaknesses and strengths of the trade-union field as we know it. But the main focus of the study that gave rise to this book concerns the difficulties – the crisis, barriers, weaknesses, setbacks and various vices – with which the trade union movement has been faced for several decades, particularly in Western countries and Europe as a whole. Needless to say, by stressing those difficulties we are in no way overlooking the full potential of the achievements of trade unions toward the advancement of modern societies, nor the decisive, irreplaceable role they still play as pillars of democracy and the rule of law when it comes to defending workers’ rights. It is in fact because of this role that trade unions continue to be indispensable to the defense of rights, freedoms and guarantees in a society that is cohesive, fair and pluralist, in consonance with the humanist values of the most advanced democracies.

Thus, the conceptual framework and the theoretical currents pertaining to trade unionism that are discussed below aim at elucidating the reader about the options and benchmarks that guide our thinking as scholars who have been working on this theme for decades. Our presentation of the theoretical legacy on trade unionism and labor relations shuns rigidly entrenched stances, which is why at several points it opens itself to other views, as is the case with organizational theory. In taking a cross-scale view of the phenomena of power, such a connection can lead to a broader, richer outlook. The approach based on informal “sources of power” in organizations, for instance (Bernoux, 1995), has proved its adequacy with regard to the analysis of case studies where – as is plainly the case with Autoeuropa – the organizational and “corporate culture” variable occupies center



stage. Based on these theoretical premises, we will draw explanatory hypotheses leading to an analysis of the case studies that make up the present project. Although primarily focused on the Portuguese situation, we never lose sight of the broader European and international backdrop.

The main approaches based on the "power resources" of the trade union field seek to systematize some of the proposals and perspectives that have animated contemporary sociological debates in this area. Without this problematization of the crisis and of trade union power it would have been impossible to grasp the feasibility of the renewal of the trade union movement, given the current tendencies in the economic and labor sphere as we near the end of the twenty-first century's second decade. Thus, in the last section of the present chapter we point out the fact that, if carried out, the revitalization of trade unionism will have repercussions in a number of domains, from the most structural aspects of society and the economy to those closest to the internal functioning of trade unions as organizations that are both complex and permeable to the transformations occurring in society at large.

### **1.1. Problematizing the notion of a trade union crisis**

The problem of the crisis of trade unionism has long been identified by various experts. But the depth of the current structural changes in the world of labor forces us to ask: *does the trade-union field remain entangled in a crisis it can escape more or less easily? or has it plunged into a structural entropy it is no longer capable of shaking off?* At the beginning of this century, Peter Waterman (2002) described its weaknesses in several domains, notably its tendency to strongly resist change, which by then was already widely seen as quite necessary. In fact, trade unionism had long shown signs of weakness. This was largely because of the impact of globalization and the free movement of capital, goods and services on a transnational scale, but it was also a consequence of deindustrialization, of the technological revolution and the growth of the service sector. With capital and capital flows operating at the global level, trade unions kept focusing on the national scale, because, things being what they are, demands and dialogue with partners remained circumscribed to national states.

Whereas at first sight this might appear to favor the trade union movement's mission of internationalist solidarity, that has not been confirmed. Quite the opposite, actually. Notwithstanding the

developments in network interconnectivity, as well as in communication and dialogue based on the digital media, made possible by the fourth digital revolution, trade unions do not seem to know how to extract the full organizational potential offered by these novel means. They are encountering obvious difficulties in making the transition to creative action and the establishing of new repertoires and new networks of digital activism based on the new ICTs, for example. Salary issues continued to be high on the agenda of trade union action – and in fact became even more relevant –, but that did not lead to any improvement in the articulation with the wider community, with other socio-labor movements nor with non-union or non-unionizable groups.

On the other hand, the very notion of trade union crisis and the debates around it in recent decades demand that we focus not only on the economic and labor context but also on trade unions *qua* organizations. A trade union is a structured social reality made up of a multiplicity of dimensions – from highly visible forms of behavior to tactics to power games, alliances and strategies in which the actors involved claim for themselves a degree of autonomy –, with the main leaders and protagonists taking center stage in the media. Leadership is not just the outward manifestation of the skills and attributes of leaders in defending the interests of a professional "class". It is also the outward sign of a performance which society can identify, recognize and value, and such recognition is in turn transformed into symbolic capital for the benefit of those who stand in the limelight. Leaders are also the embodiment of power; not just the power that is directly delegated to them by the union members, but that which comes from the strength of the machines and the internal resources under their control. A leader's status is reinforced when he or she steps up to stand for the many, particularly if such gesture proves successful. Also, in this regard we may invoke Max Weber's words to the effect that the meaning of social action is not to be confused with the intentions behind it and that a person's status cannot be unaware of the aesthetic-expressive component emanating from his or her public visibility.

One can use two complementary but equally adequate phrases to investigate the notion of crisis as it affects the trade union world. On the one hand, it is appropriate to speak of a "crisis of trade unionisms" (in the plural), because the notion of crisis has affected union organization throughout the world and had an impact on a wide variety of currents. On the other hand, the phrase "crises of trade unionism" not only suggests that there are a number of different factors that explain the downturn, but also indicates that countries in general have

been differently affected by this diversity of stress factors and dynamics of change besetting the job market (Costa, 2008; Estanque, Costa and Silva, 2015).

No less than a quarter of a century ago, Richard Hyman, one of the most prestigious researchers of European trade unionism, argued that only a small number of trade union movements had experienced a real unionization crisis (Hyman 1994: 9-10). But labor market conditions have gone through substantial changes in recent decades. In contrast to the old communist slogan according to which the transformative vanguard is made up of those who "have nothing to lose but their chains," most analyses agree that the most vulnerable ended up suffering the most, whereas generally speaking the stronger ones put up a greater resistance and made more enduring achievements. Thus, the decline in unionization – one of the main signs of the crisis – is not so much an indication of the rejection of trade unionism as the product of structural changes in employment. On the one hand, the tertiarisation of the economies, particularly in Europe, has led to the disappearance of jobs in sectors where union density is high (blue-collar work). On the other hand, new jobs have emerged in sectors and occupations (such as private services or white-collar work, where historically trade unionism has shown to possess greater weaknesses) that have undergone profound changes since the second half of the twentieth century. In fact, one should heed other approaches, notably from British sociology, which since the 1960s has been stressing the growth of union strength in the service sector and middle-class professions (Giddens, 1973; Parkin, 1978). These professions have gained considerable strength thanks to the expansion of the welfare state, taking on an increasingly dominant role and juxtaposing in a more direct manner negotiation and conflict, the neocorporatism of industrial action and its impact on the structural transformation of societies, including the processes of social mobility (Goldthorpe, 1969, 1989).

Although there exists a certain consensus about the tendency toward a decrease in unionized workers and in their mobilization capability (especially with regard to strikes), one has to consider the multiplicity of situations worldwide (Ross, 1996). In Germany, for instance, trade union action not only has historically favored co-management and institutional compromises of the reformist kind, but has also allowed for the linking of high wages to productivity increases and ensured the technological upgrading of the processes used in the organization of work, despite the setbacks in working conditions of this

century's first decade. In a more recent context, union pressure has been essential in introducing the minimum wage (since 2015) and a new regulation of the extension of collective agreements (Däubler, 2014). This is in contrast to what happened on the periphery of the Eurozone, especially during the tougher years of the austerity period (between 2011 and 2014) in countries like Portugal (Costa *et al.* 2017).

There is no doubt that the trade union movement went (and is still going) through a slump on an international scale, even if this is a non-homogeneous and uneven or even mixed trend (Crouch, 2017). In some countries things turned direr: in the US and in France, unionization remained low; early in the century, countries like Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, or Bolivia also witnessed a decrease in unionization rates and the number of strikes (Boito, 2003; Santos, 2006). Conversely, there were countries where trade unionism made progress, either because it remained more or less stable (see Canada) or because the conditions were created for the flourishing of unions (in Eastern European countries) or even for greater autonomy in the trade union movement's organization (in a number of Asian countries faced with industrialization processes in recent times) (*idem*).

This scenario had been taking shape during the last two decades of the last century and became worse with the advent of the new millennium. Despite a number of experiments whereby old union practices were converted into innovative strategies (Kloosterboer, 2008), the trade union crisis became very real, even if its manifestations, causes and effects can vary from one country to another and in spite of the "institutional arrangements" involving union participation (Stoleroff, 2013). The discourses on the trade union crisis bring into question not only the identity of labor and the worker (Catalano, 1999), but also the regulation mechanisms made possible by collective bargaining or the strategies of solidarity and worker protection (Rosanvallon, 1988; Castel, 2008).

In recent studies on the European context conducted by our team, we've summarized some of the ongoing debates on the trade union crisis and identified the main factors leading to trade unionism's current tendency to become more and more fragile (Estanque, Costa and Silva, 2015: 123-124): 1) the fragmentation of interests in and around the working class, caused by the differentiation, segmentation and flexibilization of labor markets brought in by neoliberal globalization; 2) the significant preponderance of the financial economy over the "real economy", a fact that has downgraded and subverted the value of productive labor and compromised pay rates

and skill levels alike; 3) the structured and reiterated constraints on trade union activity; 4) weakening of the bonds of worker solidarity and of union loyalty, as a direct consequence of individualism and the unravelling of modern-day societies; 5) decline in union representativeness and the resulting deficit in terms of mobilizing workers for union action initiatives; 6) the modest scope of trade unionism's transnational struggles, which makes internationalism a "metaphor in waiting" (Costa, 2008) as it takes a back seat to national priorities; 7) the excessive proximity to, and even dependence on, party strategies, notwithstanding the proclamations of autonomy (in relation to political parties and other external factors) enshrined in the very statutes of trade union organizations; 8) the fragile nature of the policy of social alliances established between the trade unions and other socio-labor actors (networks, movements, etc.) or other non-union publics (Rosanvallon, 1988; Waddington, 2005; 2014; Silva, 2007a; Kloosterboer, 2008; Costa, 2008; 2017b; 2018a; Estanque, 2012; Sousa, 2011; Estanque and Costa, 2011; 2013; 2014; Costa and Estanque, 2019).

Of course, we cannot dissociate these multiple facets of the trade union crisis from the wider structural tendencies and the global economic circumstances that have marked this last decade. Together with austerity, the crises that swept Europe gave rise to a process of "divisive integration". Hence the widening gap between trade unions in the same group of countries and between countries as well (Paugam, 2000; Dubet, 2014; Lehdorff *et al.*, 2017), a process that in fact is developing into what we might now term "debilitating exclusion" and has proved to be especially acute in southern Europe's peripheral countries. The political consensus on trade unionism has been eroded in Europe and North America alike, not just at the level of political practice but also at the level of programmatic or discursive proposals (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman, 2013). In Latin America, this phenomenon has taken on very singular, but still worrying, features. Such is the case in Brazil, where, on the one hand, there occurred a pronounced institutional strengthening of the trade union field during "Lulism", but on the other hand trade unionism became discredited precisely because the Single Central of Workers (in fact the most representative in the Brazilian context) let itself be confused with the state apparatus and removed from the more authentic popular movements. Thus, in spite of the high degree of informality, poverty and exclusion that characterize the country's working class and despite even the increasing "proletarianization" of precarious workers in the

service sector, Brazil's social struggles were disconnected from unionism and were often instrumentalized by populist currents and vested interests (Antunes, 2013; Braga, 2012; Ferraz, 2013; Oliveira *et al.*, 2014).

Globalization has created challenges that destabilized the national systems of labor relations – based on the triangular relationship between trade unions, employers and governments –, thus weakening the regulatory capacity of unions at the domestic level. Organizational changes and transformations in the production process, such as the replacement of stable jobs with a precarious labor force, have contributed toward a structurally fractured working class, thereby undermining the traditional foundations of workers' bargaining power. However, it is important to point out, with Silver (2003), that while trade unionism has had setbacks in some parts of the world, elsewhere it has shown signs of vitality, following productive capital in its shift to more appealing climates. Thus, Silver's interpretation calls into question one-sided views of the impact that these changes in the organization of production have had on labor and the trade union movement, at the same time that it acknowledges that, by amplifying the geographical ramifications of disruption, such transformations are likely to make capital more vulnerable and, consequently, to increase the bargaining power of workers.

The truth is that the union movement, faced with various external challenges in a number of European countries in recent years, has been affected in different ways and varying degrees, according to the organizational structure and political culture of each trade union and to the specific kind of capitalism and welfare-state model of which it is a part. (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman, 2013; Bernaciak, Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman, 2014; Visser, 2012). Trade union density has diminished significantly, especially over the last three decades, and this trend cannot be dissociated from the massive decline of that traditional bastion of trade unions, the manufacturing industry. The trend towards privatization was felt in still another important sector, that of public services, and this fact has had a rather negative impact in terms of the availability of financial resources, inevitably resulting in further budgetary pressure on the unions. The negative repercussions were also manifest in collective bargaining, as evinced by the lower levels of coverage, and in the shrinking political clout of unions. Furthermore, the relocation of production centers to low-wage regions – characterized by poor social protection and little trade union tradition –, together with the outsourcing of key activities, among other

factors, put trade unions under additional pressure. But they still had to contend with other effects, namely those caused by their own internal structure (Frege and Kelly, 2003). As mentioned above, bureaucratic phenomena are part and parcel of the life cycle of organizations or associations, and the trade-union field is no exception. The effects of the internal structure are made plain in the assuming of a “disabling” conservatism that often turns trade unions into inward-directed, change-averse bodies. By the same token, one should not forget that the circumstances in which communication and “negotiation” are carried out within organizations are determined at all times by the power relations existing inside them.

## **1.2. Varieties of trade unionism**

As suggested in the previous section, the trade union crisis situation is now predominant, but not in a uniform manner across borders. Hence, it makes sense to conceive of the role of trade unionism in a variety of ways. Four models are thus often said to exist within the framework of Western Europe’s varieties of trade unionism: those of Nordic, Central, Southern, and Anglophone countries (Bernaciak *et al.*, 2014; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman, 2013; Costa, 2018a; Costa and Estanque, 2019). The main challenges vary from one country to another, with the resulting impact being mediated by the institutional context, strategies, power resources, and the interrelationships among the key players (governments, employers, and unions). Table 1 shows the main features of the four models, which the literature has treated in more or less sustained fashion. But we have added a fifth group, concerning the configuration of trade union structures in Eastern countries (commonly known as “models in transition”).

The Nordic countries (Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland) possess the highest union membership rates in Europe – the Ghent systems being a strong incentive to join a trade union, alongside custom and social tradition, as Visser argues (2002). The labor relations system is based on a firmly established class commitment between strong, broad organizations of workers and employers. The trade union context has no ideological divides, but is rather organized according to sectors and occupations: manual workers, white-collar workers, professionals or workers with a higher education.

The countries of central Europe (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Belgium) follow a strong tradition of social

dialogue, materialized in tripartite institutions. Trade unions get involved in formulating and administering public policies, and notwithstanding the relatively low density, collective bargaining coverage is wide-ranging and applies to non-signatory employers/companies as well. The private sector unions are especially weak and work councils tend to be dominated by trade union representatives, under the looming threat of internationalization and decentralization. Unions in general benefit from strong institutional support and are therefore less exposed to the erosion of the associational and organizational power<sup>2</sup>.

The model of trade unionism in Southern European countries (France, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece) is the product of a very specific context: late industrialization processes, high self-employment, the predominance of small and medium-sized enterprises, and a tradition of strong Communist parties and ideologically divided labor movements and unions, among other aspects. Labor relations are highly politicized, marked by conflict and geared toward negotiating with the government. Job regulation depends less on collective bargaining than on existing laws. The financial resources of trade unions derive mostly from indirect state subsidies.

In the Anglo-Saxon countries (England and Ireland) the legislative basis is weak with regard to employment and trade union rights, and the trade unions themselves have to fend off hostility on the part of governments in general. The institutional strength of trade unions is therefore limited and they end up depending mostly on their associational and/or organizational and societal powers. Ideological divisions are not relevant in this group of countries. The trade union field is organized in terms of occupation and industry, with a predominance of large, general unions. Multi-employer collective bargaining at the sectoral level is all but nonexistent, which means that trade unions have to win recognition on a company-by-company basis.

One final set of countries comprises the Eastern European countries, which are characterized by weak and fragmented representation structures. This group is divided into two subgroups: the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) and the four nations known as the Visegrad countries (Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia). The countries in the former group have very low union density. Trade unions and other representative structures are excluded from policy formulation, and collective bargaining coverage is scarce. The Visegrad countries are characterized by weak tripartism,

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<sup>2</sup> The resources of union power will be addressed in detail below.



conflictual labor relations and decentralized collective bargaining. There are very few sectoral agreements and extensions are rarely used.

As argued by Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman (2013), the manifestations of the crisis of trade unionism are mediated by the interaction between, on the one hand, the various types of capitalism and unionism, and external factors on the other – to which we would add the internal factors resulting from the very functioning and trajectory of trade unions. The relationships in which trade unions are inscribed are relevant and can be of four types: (a) relationships with their own members and supporters, which raises issues of democracy and responsibility (the logic of membership); (ii) with employers, which raises the questions of recognition and distribution, but also of profit-making (the logic of influence); (iii) with governments, which entails issues pertaining to the economic and legal framework of labor relations, as well as the status of trade union representation in the formulation of policies (the logic of influence); and (iv) with civil society – or public opinion –, which have become increasingly important as trade unions saw their internal resources decline and sought external legitimacy and alliances with other nongovernmental organizations, thereby overcoming the gap between the logic of membership and the logic of influence.

**Table 1: Varieties of trade unionism in the European context**

Context	Nordic countries <sup>3</sup>	Central countries <sup>4</sup>	Southern countries <sup>5</sup>	Anglo-saxon countries <sup>6</sup>	Eastern countries <sup>7</sup>
	Ghent System; Strong social democratic parties; Egalitarian welfare states.	Multi-party coalitions; Not so egalitarian welfare states; Trade unions participation in formulating/administering public policies	Late industrialization, important agricultural sector, high percentage of self-employment and of often anti-union small entrepreneurs; influence of the Catholic Church (an obstacle to modernization); dictatorships (Portugal, Spain,	Liberal market economies; weak legislative basis (labor and trade union rights);	Transition models (capitalism and market economy) <i>Baltic States</i> : hard restructuring, rising wage inequalities and unemployment; EU integration (implementation of social provisions set out in European legislation); wage levels and public spending below the European average.

<sup>3</sup> Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland.<sup>4</sup> Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Belgium.<sup>5</sup> France, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece.<sup>6</sup> England and Ireland.<sup>7</sup> Baltic States (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia), Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Visegrad countries (Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia).

			Greece); tradition of strong Communist parties		<i>Visegrad countries:</i> intermediate position (mature market economies in the communist phase); preserving the welfare state; foreign investment; renewal of the industrial base.
<b>Model of labor relations</b>	Institutional class commitment; Strong, broad organizations of workers and employers; Manual, white-collar and professional	Tradition of social dialogue and tripartite institutions; Work councils (dominated by trade union representatives)	Ideologically divided workers' movements and unions; Confictual, politicized labor relations; Primacy of labor law over collective bargaining;	No ideological divides; Unions: by sector and occupation; Predominance of large, general unions.	Weak and fragmented representation structures State has leading role in formulating and implementing socio- economic policies; Weak tripartism; Slovenia (exception): importance of trade unions; tripartite agreements and social pacts.

	worker trade unions;				
<b>Unionization rates and trade union density</b>	The highest in Europe (Sweden and Denmark)	Relatively low union density;	Low or very low (as in France)	Relatively low union density	Extremely low trade union density (excepting Slovenia)
<b>Collective bargaining</b>	Employment regulation instrument articulated by trade unions (Sweden and Denmark)	High (sectoral and/or intersectoral) coverage	Institutional collective bargaining but lower coverage and decentralization	Low coverage of collective agreements; Bargaining mostly at company level	<i>Baltic States:</i> Extremely low coverage; <i>Visegrad countries:</i> decentralized collective bargaining, few sectoral agreements, extensions rarely used; Slovenia: broad coverage of collective agreements

Source: Authors, based on Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman (2013)

### 1.3. Power resources approaches

The notion of "power resources" presupposes the existence of a social relationship of asymmetrical interdependence among different social actors. Rather than a "thing" or a fixed resource, power is a dynamic relationship. From a Weberian perspective, it is a social relationship between actors, one of which "is in a position to alter the behavior of others, regardless of their will and the basis on which such possibility rests." Max Weber's types of legitimacy or authority – tradition, the rational-legal basis, and charisma – are well known. They are conducive to acceptance or consent. As ideal types, however, they are usually associated with coercive power, *i.e.*, the kind of power that can ultimately resort to the use of force in order to get its way. Given that this approach has to do primarily with the understanding of group dynamics, it is worth remembering that – in what concerns the production field in particular – the capitalist economic system sets out to draw a rigid structural asymmetry that pushes the wage-earner to the subordinate position in the hierarchy that is placed at the service of capital. We may situate Weber accordingly in Marx's theoretical framework, so as to better understand the complexity of power and the variety of games it prescribes in terms of social relationships at different levels of analysis.

It is from this broader conception of power as social relationship that the resources of trade union power need to be approached. It is true that trade unionism was originally created as a "counter-power" (in the political sense of the word, mind you). But throughout its history, be it in order to advance toward new achievements and the rights it steadily built, be it to overcome the crises and the repression that sometimes struck it, trade unions always had the capacity to reinvent forms of action and consolidate new sources of influence and power. The overcoming of the "crisis" can be achieved by revitalizing trade unionism's "shaken power" (Costa, 2008). In that manner, the power resources approach leads us back to the genesis of the labor movement, that is, to the basic premise that says that the labor force can successfully stand for its own interests through collective mobilization (Lehndorff *et al.*, 2017). The concept of "trade union power" has originated a number of problematizations and ramifications: (a) trade union capability as being dependent on the skills of the actors; b) the institutional arrangements according to which the latter operate (a reflection of past power relations); c) (economic, political and organizational) opportunity structures; and d)

the capabilities of other actors within these relationships (Lévesque and Murray, 2002, 2005, 2010).

A first proposal is the one put forward by Richard Hyman, who sees trade union power as involving three aspects: a) attainment of the goals set out by the trade unions in a context of resistance; b) a legal and institutional framework to legitimize the actions envisaged in the trade union agenda; and (c) the ability to influence the attitudes and perceptions of entrepreneurs and governments, as well as those of the wider public and the union members themselves, with a view to creating an ideological climate that is favorable to the union's actions (Hyman, 1994). Jelle Visser (1995), on the other hand, sees the presence of trade union strength in three types of power: organizational, institutional and economic power<sup>8</sup>. Organizational power consists in the ability of trade unions to: a) mobilize and recruit members; b) bring together the operational, technical and supervisory personnel, as well as the direct and indirect production of workers, under the same organization; c) avoid the breaking up of trade unions; d) contain ideological divisions; e) work with party structures without becoming dependent on them; f) build a wide external organization, with branches that reach to the company level and centralized control of the decision-making processes.

Other currents of thought (Jensen, Madsen and Due, 1995) tend to emphasize specific aspects of the whole issue of power, by making a distinction, for instance, between conflictual and political power. The former denotes contexts marked by tension, combativeness, protest, collective action or strikes. This form of power was very much present during the period of austerity, when social rights suffered a setback in the peripheral countries of the Eurozone (Campos Lima and Artiles, 2011, Costa, Dias and Soeiro, 2014). The other form, political power, is also inextricable from union action and manifests itself in terms of pressure and influence over the institutional political actors whenever they devalue a variety of factors (wages, careers, working conditions, etc.) and in doing it bring instability upon the system of labor relations. We believe that the two are complementary forms of power, although one is more visible in the

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<sup>8</sup> Visser's typology is mirrored by other authors: so according to Schmalz and Dörre (2013), for example, economic power corresponds to marketplace bargaining power, whereas institutional power corresponds to workplace bargaining power, which in turn takes us to the status of workers in the production process.