

## The changing nature of labour protest: Comparing the fragmentation of protest rituals on May 1<sup>st</sup> in Berlin and Budapest

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### Abstract

The transition from industrial to post-industrial society has changed the conditions for labour protest in Europe fundamentally. In this paper recent forms of labour protest are explored in two European capital cities, Berlin and Budapest. In the context of growing job insecurity, flexibilisation and fragmentation of labour markets, the motivations and class positions of protest participants are scrutinised, along with the diversified geographies of protest events. Building on empirical results by means of a survey based on structured mini-interviews, the paper argues, first, that a fragmentation of labour protests on May 1<sup>st</sup> is observable. This fragmentation is driven by an overall change of Labour Day celebrations from trade union oriented demonstrations towards segmented party zones of protest in both cities. Second, neither traditional forms of labour protest is nor newly created, more festive forms of labour celebrations attract a significant proportion of people suffering from precarity or unemployment. Thus, most marginalised people in the service-dominated economy do not have a voice in labour protests today.

**Keywords:** protest, labour, urban social movements, Berlin, Budapest

### Introduction

Who engages in labour protest today? We know from the literature that the transition from industrial to post-industrial society has induced a fundamental restructuring of social class divisions, labour markets, and labour politics (BELL, D. 1973; McDOWELL, L. and CHRISTOPHERSON, S. 2009). Under the reign of a service-dominated economy, labour market precarity has risen and labour market polarisation drastically deepened in most countries of the European Union, almost irrespective of their geographical location. As a matter of course, these new conditions of labour and labour regulation are by no means unproblematic and have been

criticised by a wide range of commentators in academia as well as in politics and the media (FAINSTEIN, S.S. and FAINSTEIN, N.I. 1985; HARVEY, D. 2001; GIBSON, C. and KONG, L. 2005; NOVY, J. and COLOMB, C. 2013). Yet, in spite of the continual necessity for intense labour protests that address the new risks and vulnerabilities of employees in the service and knowledge economy, we know from a rich set of literature that today it has become far more difficult for trade unions and labour parties to mobilise people for protests about labour issues (ROSE, N. 1996; TAYLOR, G. and MATHERS, A. 2002; ERNE, R. 2006; TURNER, L. 2009; RUCHT, D. 2010; SULLIVAN, R. 2010; BÖDEKER, S. 2012; DOELLGAST, V. 2012; LARSSON, B. 2012; FULTON, L. 2013).

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In this paper we explore the changing forms of articulations of labour protest on May 1<sup>st</sup> in two peculiar contexts in Europe, Budapest (Hungary) and Berlin (Germany). Both capitals appear as a stage and also experimental laboratory for changing forms of the articulation of labour protests that currently came along with a new lively worldwide (SILVEY, R. 2003; MCCARTHY, J. and MCPHAIL, C. 2006; STAEHEL, L.A. 2013; LEE, Y. 2015). Empirical work on labour protest on May 1<sup>st</sup> in Budapest and Berlin is particularly interesting because there is an enormous research gap in the literature concerning the modification of traditional European forms of labour protest beyond fashionable protests against global capitalism like occupy that are rather unique in character (SALMENKARI, T. 2009; FRENZEL, F. *et al.* 2013; BABER, Z. 2015; DISALVO, J. 2015). Whereas most sources of articulations of labour protest in Europe are especially interested in explaining its decline (MCDOWELL, L. and CHRISTOPHERSON, S. 2009; STANDING, G. 2011; BURGI, N. 2014), we set out to examine those modifications of labour protest that are still able to draw a crowd, and ask for the reasons and typical venues of participating, as well as the demographic constitution of the participants in order to explain their future trajectories.

The paper argues that a partly depoliticised fragmentation of labour protests on May 1<sup>st</sup> is observable. At the same time, as our empirical research in Budapest and Berlin shows, new forms of protest are capable of drawing a young, responsive mass audience into more festive forms of protest. However, this fragmentation and at the same time growth of depoliticised forms of protest is not only driven by an overall change of Labour Day celebrations: it is even further more embedded in wider trends of societal restructuring. Because it is only through the scrutiny of ongoing modifying forms of labour protest and effective mobilisation practices that we can learn about the concurrency of the advent, decline, and diversity of contemporary labour protest in Europe (BACCARO, L. *et al.* 2003; GAJEWSKA, K. 2008).

The paper is organised as follows. The next section introduces the transformations of labour protests in Europe today. The third part discusses the comparative research design. The fourth part recounts information about the two different contexts of research concerning labour markets and protests. The fifth section presents the findings and discussion. The final part concludes by presenting three interlinked arguments resulting from the analysis.

### **The transformation of labour protest**

A lively debate has arisen about the reasons for labour protest transformation towards depoliticisation and decline. There is a wide consensus that due to the advance of neoliberalism and managerialism, worker protection in Europe has been eroded dramatically (BURGI, N. 2014). Yet, there is much controversy about the accompanying passivity and consequential erosion of labour protest. It is argued that trade unions have suffered from the process of deindustrialisation because they have not proven to be capable of benefiting from the growth in the service economy. Henceforth, labour unions are struggling for public attention because workplaces in the service economy are barely organised (DOELLGAST, V. 2012; LARSSON, B. 2012; HAMANN, K. *et al.* 2013).

As much as the economy has altered through the rise of the service economy, the societal conditions for labour organisations and labour protest have hardened. Union membership has been assessed as an outdated model based on industrial notions of labour politics and workforce representation in a manufacturing-oriented society. It is even claimed that unions have experienced an unprecedented descent due to their inability to react appropriately to the flexibilisation of the workforce. Especially the needfulness to broaden the normative and social scope of trade unions in order to widen their potential for political support has been the issue of much debate. It has been suggested that there is a growing “*need for unions*”

to express more innovative policy approaches and types of protest, and to expand the field of associative power by moving beyond the workplace within civil society, may be increased correspondingly" (FLYNN, M. et al. 2013, 49).

At the same time, other commentators look beyond trade unions and see alternative responses, e.g. in the rise of urban protest. "Since the 1970s strikes and work stoppages have been increasingly ineffective in the USA and Europe" (SULLIVAN, R. 2010, 149); hence, other forms of unrest are possible and should be taken into account (SULLIVAN, R. 2010; STANDING, G. 2011 and 2014; FREGONESE, S. 2013). There is also a growing debate on the rise of "social movement unionism" (UPCHURCH, M. and MATHERS, A. 2012, 265) as an inspirational model for labour politics and protest: here, a revitalisation of unionism is envisaged through the expansion of labour politics into realms of culture, lifestyle and consumption beyond the workplace. Other authors suggest it is not only the trade unions that are to be blamed for labour protest erosion because a more fundamental, and henceforth, general trend towards the atomisation in society interferes (ROSE, N. 1996). They claim – at the most extreme – that the immense stress of work insecurity has brought about an "anomic social configuration" in most European societies (BURGI, N. 2014, 13).

Altogether, theoretical perspectives on what labour protest means today, who should organise it and which forms it should take, are at least multiple if not unclear. One of the major complications in this debate is the category of "labour" itself. In postindustrial society the political as well as normative and economic concept of labour has become a fuzzy one. Once a solid centre of political organisation and protest, the understanding of labour has fragmented and multiplied. Notions, practices and geographies of labour have become differentiated into many new forms and formulas of work contracts and terms of employment. Furthermore, transformations of labour have contributed to the rise of low wage jobs and insecurity in spite of the often praised so-called "in-

formation economy" (McDOWELL, L. and CHRISTOPHERSON, S. 2009; McDOWELL, L. et al. 2014). What once used to be a massive working class has turned into various new fractions like the precariat, minimum wage urban poor, or part-time workers unable to obtain full-time employment. Besides them, better-off groups such as freelancers, yuppies, bobos and other "creatives" are also far from the former (relatively homogeneous) working class and its social needs (SCOTT, A.J. 2007; DONALD, B. et al. 2013). The rise of the creative economy has fostered new "figurations of labour that blur the lines between self-fulfilment and social mobility on the one hand and exploitation on the other" (BERNDT, C. 2012, 347). Today, we know little about the labour force representation of workers in the creative economy (BERNDT, C. 2012; DONALD, B. et al. 2013). Thus, for labour-oriented political parties and organisations like trade unions, it has become increasingly difficult to address and mobilise a former mass audience.

Furthermore, the already complex picture of the state of labour protest today becomes more complicated when taking the research results of social psychology into account. In this field, research on the motivations of people to protest has a long history; one of the major results from a psychological perspective is that people do not only protest out of grievances but at least as much because they have the opportunities and resources to do so (VAN STEKELENBURG, J. and KLANDERMANS, B. 2013, 887). We also know that efficacy impacts on the inclination of people to protest. If the individual's expectations are high that it is possible to alter politics and have an impact on social structures, protest is more likely to occur. The same holds true for collective identities and feelings of belonging to certain groups or organisations; these might foster protest participation as well (SIMON, B. et al. 1998). Moreover, emotions also play an important role in the perception of protest events, for instance the degree to which one feels comfortable with the protest venue and form. Emotions might, thus, function as "accelerators und amplifiers" (VAN STEKELENBURG, J.

and KLANDERMANS, B. 2013, 892), just as identities (KLANDERMANS, B. 2014). Consequently, the emergence of protest is an undoubtedly multidimensional phenomenon.

## Method and methodology

### *Comparative research*

In order to explore the changing nature of labour protest in service-dominated economies, we scrutinise the state of the art of labour protest in the capitals of two postindustrial, yet markedly different European societies. It is apparent from the literature that the condition of decline as well as the strength of labour movements varies highly among different countries. The welfare-regime theory of ESPING-ANDERSEN, G. (1990), as well as the varieties of capitalism approach point towards the path dependence of national development. Likewise, just as capitalism might not be conceptualised as a uniform construct, socialism also had – and postsocialism still has – multiple national and regional varieties (FASSMANN, H. 1997; GRESKOVITS, B. 2004). Therefore, different nations in Europe have developed different approaches in the relationships between state, capital and labour. Consequently, labour protest and the transformation of industrial relations have also followed different routes in European countries (CLASEN, J. et al. 2012). In addition, due to the limits of international employee representation, labour protests often address explicitly national issues (NEIDHARDT, F. and RUCHT, D. 2001, 52).

In our analysis, Germany and Hungary are compared, since they represent complementary as well as overlapping trends. Germany is a particularly interesting case because once it was the bedrock of industrialisation and collective bargaining in Europe (HEYES, J. 2013). Thus, scrutinising labour protest in Germany takes a paradigmatic European case into empirical account, where formerly very strong “unions in a context of global liberalisation have confronted declines in member-

*ship, bargaining power, and political influence (...). For too long, German unions have rested on their institutional laurels even as the ground has been slipping away”* (TURNER, L. 2009, 294). Especially the erosion of nationwide tariffs is growing. Whereas in 1996 in West Germany still 70 per cent of all wage settlements were negotiated nationwide by national trade unions, this number had diminished to 56 per cent in 2009 (GÖDDEKE, A. et al. 2011, 143). Along with the principle of only one collective bargaining agreement within a firm, the homogenous political representation of the labour force in Germany is shrinking as well. In Germany, we focus our case study on the capital because Berlin represents a quintessential industrial society. Even within Germany the city of Berlin has undergone an enormous amount of rupture and change. A dual track change not only from industrialism to post-industrialism but also – in the Eastern part – from socialism to post-socialism has produced turmoil and the immense restructuring of the local labour market.

Hungary serves as a complementary case study because of its interesting parallels as well as contrasts with the German case. On one hand, Budapest shares with Berlin the legacy of an early heavy industrialisation in high modernity. On the other hand, both cities faced rapid economic transformation especially after the fall of the socialist system. Thus, deindustrialisation and postsocialist transformation occurred simultaneously. Budapest, like Berlin, witnessed rapid growth in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, both being the national showcases of modern industrialisation. Later on, both cities continued on comparable pathways during the socialist post-war period and both were, then, sites of rapid societal transformation from the 1990s onwards (Izsák, É. and SCHULZ, M. 2006).

Hence, “globalisation was complicated by major political and economic transformation during the past two decades” (BODNÁR, J. and MOLNÁR, V. 2010, 789) in Berlin and Budapest. Yet, in Budapest the market economy is even younger than in Berlin which profited from the West Berlin experience and its strong

connection with West Germany. Therefore, BODNÁR and MOLNÁR suggest that a “*balanced comparison*” (ibid. 794) is possible between the two cities. This comparison also fits into the broader current of international urban studies referred to as “*comparative urbanism*”, recently propagated by scholars including ROY, A. (2009), McFARLANE, C. (2010), ROBINSON, J. (2011, 2015) or, in the case of post-socialist cities, TUVIKENE, T. (2016).

### *Motives for protest on Labour Day*

In both cases, we are especially interested in the fragmentation of audiences and protests, and the new gestalt labour protest assumes. Our research focuses on the sites and participants of labour protests in both cities: Who is protesting today and where? Which motivations to engage in labour protest today are detectable? And in which forms is a fragmentation of labour protest occurring in times of fragmented labour markets? For this purpose, we examine traditional and new forms of labour protest on May 1<sup>st</sup>, the International Worker’s Day. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, May Day has served as the best known celebration of the international labour movement, worldwide. Labour Day is a nationwide and international event that takes the political components of labour issues to the street and tries to mobilise civil society. It is therefore a highly significant event; May Day celebrations, we argue, provide an excellent instance to scrutinise the diverse geographies of labour protest today.

In both cities, we explore the key venues, as well as the class positions, demographics and main motives of people who engage in such protests. Through the comparison of multiple labour protest forms, this article aims to shed empirical light on the acute change of labour protest in the present time. Particularly, we both look at old traditional forms of labour protest organised by trade unions and labour parties, and at new forms of resistance that emerge from different actors and different needs, and address a dif-

ferent audience. We presume that the fragmentation of the labour force will also lead to a growing fragmentation of protest forms, protest sites and protest events.

### **The context: Changing labour markets – changing protests**

#### *Changing labour markets*

Deindustrialisation and tertiarisation have changed the labour markets of formerly industrialised Western (as well as Central and Eastern) European countries profoundly. In Germany, once a centre of industrialisation in 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe, the share of manufacturing in total GDP declined from 28 per cent in 1980 to 21 per cent in 2005 (BACHMANN, R. and BURDA, M.C. 2009, 38). With only about one-fifth of total GDP generated by manufacturing, the rate of manufacturing employment also dropped. Within 15 years, the number of industrial workers dropped from 9.1 million in 1990 to 6.8 million in 2005 (ibid. 38). Especially in the 1990s, the dynamics of deindustrialisation and labour market restructuring were very rapid, and the drastic structural changes in the labour market had a massive impact on employees.

Due to the way in which the German labour market operates, laid-off manufacturing workers could not smoothly find new places of employment in the growing service sector. Rather the opposite happened: the unemployment rate rose, and large parts of the German population simply stopped participating in the labour market during the height of deindustrialisation. This was possible due to specific labour policies in Germany, since trade unions’ responses in the steel industry, for example, massively promoted early retirement. Just like their British counterparts, unions, employers and the government pursued social compensation plans (FLYNN, M. *et al.* 2013). Although this peacekeeping strategy worked more or less successfully in the 1990s in Germany by securing the union’s clientele and safeguard-



ing former manufacturing workers relatively smooth transitions into early retirement, the long-term costs of this retirement approach have been very high.

The decade of the 1990s marked another major turning point elsewhere in Europe; during the first years of the post-socialist transition, Central and Eastern European countries witnessed a massive – and extraordinarily rapid – industrial transformation and hence, labour market realignment (CLASEN, J. et al. 2012). Whereas the first signs of widespread deindustrialisation appeared in the 1960s and 70s in Western economies, large state-owned and state-run industrial companies of socialist Central and Eastern European countries were (artificially) maintained until the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, causing an even more serious crisis during the period of the politico-economic transition. As a consequence, labour markets witnessed extremely rapid, almost shock-like changes after 1990. Superimposed and reinforced by the processes of globalisation and neo-liberalisation, this transformation has not only meant a sudden shift from the system of socialist command economy to market economy but at the same time also a transition “(f)rom the system of standardized full employment to the system of flexible and pluralized underemployment” (BECK, U. 1992, 140).

After 1990, owing to the collapse of the Hungarian heavy industry and the mining sectors (along with the breakup of large, Soviet-style agricultural cooperatives), masses of workers lost their livelihood. The socialist era’s (officially-artificially) almost zero unemployment rate rose dramatically within only a few years above 10 per cent. Hence, in the case of Hungary, the most dominant flow by far was from employment to unemployment. Subsequently, even though there were also other trends in Central and Eastern European countries during the transition (such as reindustrialisation – LANDESMANN, M. 2000; BARTA, G. et al. 2008), the key transformation process was definitely tertiarisation. A significant number of former industrial and agricultural work-

ers have been absorbed by the booming service sector. Afterwards, with a considerable delay compared to Western countries, new capitalist forms such as part-time jobs, workforce recruitment and labour hiring agencies started to appear, and their number is still on the increase. As in the case of Germany, using the terminology of BECK, U. (1992, 142), “the boundaries between work and non-work are becoming fluid” in post-socialist Hungary as well, and “(f)lexible, pluralized forms of underemployment are spreading” in both countries.

#### *Changing labour protest movements in Germany and Hungary*

As a consequence of the restructuring of industries and labour markets, the preconditions for labour protest have also massively changed (CLASEN, J. et al. 2012). It seems – not only in Germany and Hungary but in many other European countries – as if the trade unions, who have their origins in the industrial period, are intensively struggling with their political (in)significance. Not only is “union membership throughout Europe (...) older than the general populations” (FLYNN, M. et al. 2013, 46) but also the participation quota of employees in labour protest on International Labour Day and the membership rate of unions have dropped dramatically (Figure 1).

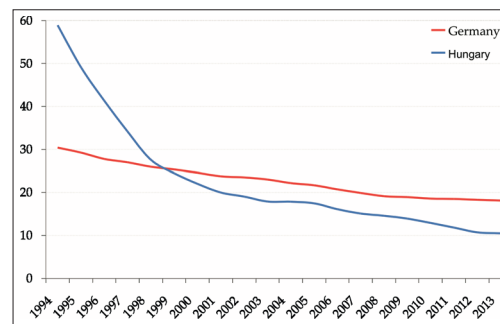


Fig. 1. Trade union density in Germany and Hungary (% of employees, 1994–2013). Source: OECD trade union density data

This negative development in trade union membership is partly consistent with an overall pattern of political participation. In Germany, an alarming signal stems from a study on youth behaviour and youth perceptions. The so-called “Shell Study” shows that while in 1991, 57 per cent of young people had an interest in politics, this number decreased to 47 per cent in 1996, and to 39 per cent in 2006. The turnout of voters for federal elections has also decreased from 90 per cent in 1970 to 70.8 per cent in 2009 (RUCHT, D. 2010, 3). In Hungary, the enormous decline in trade union membership might in part be traced back to specific historical reasons. During the socialist era, trade union membership was compulsory for all employees, and SZOT (the National Council of Trade Unions) was widely considered as the servant of state power. As a result, large masses of disillusioned workers left the union movement after 1989. While in Germany the terms and conditions of 62 per cent of the employees are negotiated through collective bargaining, this coverage rate is only 33 per cent in Hungary (FULTON, L. 2013). The decreasing influence of Hungarian trade unions is indeed embedded into a deeper moral crisis (STUMPF, I. 1995; SZABÓ, A. 2011); according to a related survey, Hungarian’s trust in trade unions was only 3.8 points on a scale ranging from 0 to 10 points (TÓTH, I.G. 2009). In the same survey, however, it was also revealed that the trust in the political sphere was – not that surprisingly – even lower, with the category “politicians” receiving 2.4 points and the government receiving only 2.3 points.

In sum, the shrinking relevance of trade unions and their traditional labour protest can be interpreted as just one indicator of the changing politics in postindustrial society. Whereas traditional mass institutions from the industrial age (such as political parties or trade unions) are in decline, new forms of activism like nature conservation organisations and the ecology movement in general are *en vogue* and attracting new members (NEIDHARDT, F. and RUCHT, D. 2001, 40; BÖDEKER, S. 2012). According to Jürgen

Habermas, in a post-industrial economy new political conflicts no longer emerge around issues of distribution but around values, grammars of life and lifestyles (cited in LASH, S. and URRY, J. 1987, 219). Therefore, a new “territory of government” (ROSE, N. 1996, 331) emerges. The social transmutes – or even dies – with the end of national economies and national societies: ROSE, N. (1996, 330) claims that it is now individuals – and no longer social groups – that are being governed. As a result, an anti-political climate emerges.

Nevertheless, it is reasonable to argue that labour issues in general have not gone away just because of post-industrial transition. New labour markets with new regimes of part-time contracts, minimum wages, precarious work contracts and income polarisation have created new risks like youth unemployment (BECK, U. 1992; PONGRATZ, H.J. and VOSS, G.G. 1998; BOURDIEU, P. 2003; ILO 2013). Thus, the end of industrialism does not necessarily imply the end of social struggles about labour relations. Yet, due to the flexibilisation of the workforce, some commentators argue that political protests should likewise be more oriented towards individual needs. The classic labour movement, however, is oriented towards the masses. In the following, we empirically scrutinise this conflict and the relationship between traditional, collective political protest and innovative, individualised political festivals. We use the various staging of Labour Day celebrations in Berlin and Budapest as lenses through which to look at the state of labour protest (Table 1).

*Local contexts: The venues of protest in Berlin and Budapest*

## Berlin

Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the emergence of labour protests has been accompanied by an intensive debate on how strictly political or festive the rituals shall be. This antagonistic debate is reflected in the dual character

Table 1. Key issues of the Berlin and Budapest case studies

Key issues	Berlin	Budapest
Key transformation process since 1990	Deindustrialisation, tertiarisation	
Influence of trade unions	Slowly declining	Heavily declining
Worker representation	Stronger and more unified	Highly fragmented
Level of political participation	Declining but still significant	Very low

Source: Compilation by the authors.

of May 1<sup>st</sup> celebrations in Berlin. May Day protests in Berlin today are separated into two distinct events which take place at two different venues: the DGB Demo in central Berlin near the Brandenburg Gate and the MyFest in Kreuzberg around the Kottbus Gate (Figure 2).

The protest traditionally organised by the confederation of German trade unions, the DGB (*Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund*) has never been attended by huge masses, except during the heydays of protest in the early 1950s and the 1960s. A considerable peak in participation is observable in the early 1990s due to a general mobilisation after the fall of the Iron Curtain. The numbers of demonstrators has declined every year since and stagnated at an average of 10,000 during the 1990s (RUCHT, D. 2001). In the 2000s the number declined significantly. Labour union protests in Berlin

are highly ritualised. A march of labour unionists starts in the morning and ends around midday at symbolic, politicised places like the Brandenburg Gate. Here the visitors await political speeches held by union leaders, followed by live music acts on stage. In front of the stage, visitors find information booths and a respectable culinary choice of food and drinks from German Bratwurst to Brazilian cocktails (RUCHT, D. 2003). The number of participants is constantly shrinking. In the period from 2002 until 2010 only around one third of the expected visitors to the DGB events could be mobilised.

In stark contrast, participation levels for events on 1<sup>st</sup> of May in Berlin Kreuzberg are rising. In 1987, Kreuzberg protests were the most radical and violent in German history after WWII, as several thousand leftists lighted more than 30 local shops and burned several police cars around the Kottbus Gate, known as the heartland of leftist activists since then (HANNAH, M.G. 2009). As a consequence, from then on several left-wing groups use Labour Day for their own revolutionary march (“Revolutionäre 1. Mai Demo” or Revolutionary 1 May Demo) through Kreuzberg every year at 6 pm. This demonstration – organised by various groups from anti-globalisation movements and migrant organisations to local radical leftists – is attended by about 10.000 people on average every year. Although tensions run high between police and demonstrators during this “radical ritual” (LEHMANN, F. and MEYERHÖFER, N. 2003, 56) in Kreuzberg, the level of violence has changed significantly, since the introduction of the so-called “MyFest” in 2003. This street festival is a deliberate anti-violence strategy and, thus,



Fig. 2. Survey venues in Berlin. 1 = Brandenburg Gate (Borough “Mitte” – DGB); 2 = Kottbus Gate (Borough “Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg” – MyFest). Source: Design by the authors.



mainly organised by the inhabitants of the neighbourhood and promoted by the local municipality. The neighbourhood festival attracts between 25,000 and 30,000 people every year, and is staged in Kreuzberg in order to counterbalance and contain the violent protest of the revolutionaries.

## Budapest

In case of Budapest surveys were made in four different venues: *Városliget* (in District XIV), *Vérmező*, *Tabán* (both in District I) and *Hajógyári-sziget* (in District III) (Figure 3).

In Hungary, the first official May Day protest was held in Városliget (City Park) in 1890, only four years after the violent Haymarket affair in Chicago. Since then, if possible, all commemorations ended up there. Consequently, this venue plays an important symbolic role in the history of Hungarian trade unions and labour parties. After WWII, the ruling socialist party entirely appropriated the event in Hungary. In the beginning, it was a small-scale mimicry of

Soviet celebrations with distant tribunes and military parades taking place in the adjacent Felvonulási tér (Parade Square). However, based on the semiotic analysis of socialist era May 1<sup>st</sup> celebrations, VOIGT, V. (1994) points out that the Városliget events became more and more individualised over the decades of state socialism, almost completely losing their original meaning and scrupulously planned choreographies by the end of the 1980s. (Nonetheless, according to VOIGT, these May Day celebrations still attracted 100,000 to 250,000 people during the 1980s.)

After 1989, Városliget remained the venue of the May 1<sup>st</sup> events of MSZP (the Hungarian Socialist Party, successor of MSZMP, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party) and most of the Hungarian trade union confederations. In spite of the widening range of entertainment programmes, this venue still preserved its strong political character, interwoven with an increasing Kádár era nostalgia. At the same time, the number of attendants constantly decreased; throughout the past years, even according to the estimation of the organisers, it could only mobilise "a few thousand" visitors.

As a counterpart to this traditionally left-wing and trade union related location, Tabán is a pure leisure-oriented venue. This recreational green space, situated on the northern slopes of Gellért Hill, has always been out of sight from the repressive gaze. Thus, partly illegal beat and rock concerts were held between 1968 and 1987. From the mid-1980s, however, it started to lose its significance, which eventually led to a ten-year hiatus. Since 1997, it is organised again under the name "Tabán Fesztivál" (Tabán Fest), with open-air rock concerts and a clear non-political message. Owing to its festive and fully apolitical character, this programme is more weather-sensitive compared to other venues; as a result, the organisers' estimations of the annual number of attendants vary between 3,000 and 15,000 people.

Besides Városliget and Tabán, two smaller samples have also been selected in Budapest, in order to grasp the high-level political fragmentation of post-socialist Hungary.

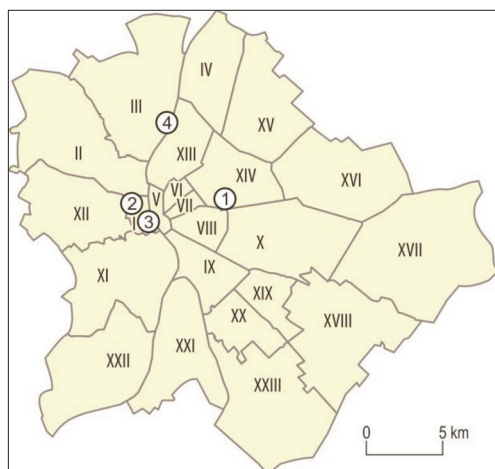


Fig. 3. Survey venues in Budapest. 1 = Városliget (City Park, small urban wood); 2 = Vérmező ("Field of Blood"); 3 = Tabán (so-called "Raitzenstadt"); 4 = Hajógyári-sziget (Shipyard Island). Source: Design by the authors.

These were the May Day celebrations of two relatively new, albeit completely different political parties; Hajógyári Island provided the venue for the May 1<sup>st</sup> events of Jobbik, Hungary's extreme right-wing party (founded in 2003), while the green liberal party, LMP (Lehet Más a Politika = Politics Can Be Different, founded in 2009) organised their May Day commemoration on Vérmező (Field of Blood). At both locations, political speeches were framed with cultural programmes and leisure activities, creating a bizarre pastiche of protests, political rallies and a peculiar festive atmosphere.

### Findings and discussion

The leading hypothesis of the analysis is that traditional trade unions draw on a labour force that is not part of the modern flexibilisation of labour. The change in society, in Germany as well as in Hungary, shapes new forms of street protest. First, we assume that the traditional mass demonstrations of the German trade union confederation (DGB), as well as the events of the Hungarian trade unions and that of the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) do not reach broad parts of the actual labour force because their aims, rituals, and protest forms are relicts of a bygone era. Second, these traditional mass demonstrations also do not reach socially excluded, unemployed, or disabled people either.

The study consists of 507 standardised mini-interviews (each taking 10 to 15 minutes), which were carried out at six venues in Berlin and Budapest during May Day 2011. The selection of the respondents was based on random walk technique, with prefixed starting and ending points in the case of each venue. The questions were predominantly focused on the main motives of the interviewees to visit that particular event, their views on its possible political impact, the number of people they were accompanied by, and the amount of time they were planning to spend on the event. In addition, it was also asked whether or not they were always visiting the same venue. Questions on age and highest educational attainment provided information on the socio-economic status of the attendants, whereas the de/politicisation of May Day was supposed to be grasped through their membership in any trade unions and/or political parties. Eventually 287 interviews could be realised in Berlin and 220 in Budapest. First similarities and differences are presented in the descriptive statistics (Table 2).

The two samples vary in regard to demography and attitudes. The people interviewed in Berlin are younger (t-test value \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ) and slightly longer educated (t-test value \*  $p < 0.05$ ) than the Budapest sample. The difference regarding the degree of politicisation and the level of organisation in trade unions is more descriptive. In the Budapest sample,

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the Budapest and the Berlin sample

Indicator	Berlin		Budapest	
	%/Ø	n	%/Ø	n
Age	38.0 (SD 15.8)	286	44.2 (SD 17.0)	218
Years in education	14.0 (SD 3.0)	287	13.4 (SD 2.8)	217
Member of a trade union, %	33.4	286	19.5	219
Member of a political party, %	16.4	286	15.9	219
Motive: cultural framework programme, %	38.7	286	35.0	220
Motive: unionised, %	19.2	287	9.5	220
Motive: political engagement, %	21.6	287	42.7	220
Will the event have a political impact? %	47.0	285	37.7	219
Size of group*	3.8 (SD 6.8)	279	5.6 (SD 13.8)	219
Attendance in minutes	261.0 (SD 139.3)	286	266.2 (SD 200.4)	220

\*Without the extreme values 300 and 634. Source: Own survey.

people are more interested in politics and to a lesser extent in trade unions, presumably because of the abovementioned generally weak position of Hungarian trade unions. In the Berlin sample, members of trade unions are more frequent than members of political parties, indicating that May Day is a traditional trade union event. In Budapest people visit the events with more companions than in Berlin (t-test value  $* p < 0.05$ ). The tendency towards a higher degree of politicisation in Budapest might explain this. Smaller groups are an indicator of the higher motivation for hedonism in Berlin because people here visit MyFest with friends, whereas in Budapest, membership in an organisation could be a motivation. The higher standard deviation of the variables *size of group* and *attendance in minutes* in Budapest permits such an interpretation.

A specific affinity of trade union members in Berlin to traditional labour issues indicates the significant link between the tendency to always visit the same venue every year and being member of a trade union. Trade union members more frequently visit the same event every year, as a chi-squared test indicates ( $** p < 0.01$ ). This result shows a kind of tradition among organised workers. In Budapest this tradition does not exist at the same level of intensity as the same test is not significant in this case, which could be interpreted as another indicator of the immensely fragmented Hungarian trade union movement. Concerning the age of members of trade unions and non-members participating in May Day events, a significant difference exists between these groups in both the Berlin and the Budapest sample.

In both samples, members are older than non-members (t-test values Berlin  $** p < 0.01$ ; Budapest  $* p < 0.05$ ). These findings correspond with the hypothesis that traditional trade unions do not have much to offer to the new labour force. Traditional labour organisations experience difficulties in responding adequately to the flexibilisation of labour markets, and subsequently, do not reach the “next generation” of workers. As Hungarian

trade unions themselves regularly report over the past few years, they can only retain their otherwise rapidly declining membership numbers by trying to mobilise retired members as well (SZABÓ-MORVAI, Á. 2010).

An analysis of gender and age aspects in the Berlin sample shows a coherence between these two variables and the venue of the interview, which leads in the same direction as the results displayed above. On the one hand, as expected, the German trade union confederation venue is more male ( $* p < 0.05$ ) and older ( $** p < 0.01$ ). On the other hand, MyFest is more female ( $* p < 0.05$ ) and younger ( $** p < 0.01$ ). These figures make clear that young urban milieus prefer a more hedonistic May Day event. The connection between trade unions and their ideologies and the young urban milieu seems to dismantle in Berlin.

In Budapest, there is a significant connection between the particular May Day venue and gender ( $** p < 0.01$ ). The event of the extreme right-wing party Jobbik is more male, whereas the venues of the open-air music festival (Tabán) and the green party (LMP) are more female. These findings are affirmed by studies of extreme right-wing movements in Hungary: according to BERNÁT, A. et al. (2012), the majority of Jobbik voters are male (66%), which is different from those of other parties that exhibit a larger proportion of female voters (56%). Younger generations are also overrepresented among them: 25 per cent of Jobbik sympathisers are under 30 years of age, and 52 per cent are under 40 years (BERNÁT, A. et al. 2012, 361).

The significant connection between the venue of the interview and age ( $** p < 0.01$ ) in Budapest is similar to Berlin. The chi-squared test indicates that the participants of the venue of the socialist party/trade unions are older, in contrast to the visitors to the public festival who are younger than statistically expected. Obviously, the tendency is similar in both cities: traditional forms of May Day protest only mobilise older people. The new milieus of the urban labour markets and the disadvantaged and excluded people

choose different forms of protest or political amusement. The comparative perspective is informative in this regard.

The attitude of the visitors towards the venue was measured on a Likert scale with eleven items representing opinions and impressions. To construct the attitudinal dimensions, a principal component analysis was calculated: in both samples, Berlin and Budapest, two dimensions are obvious. The first component can be interpreted as a dimension of “politicisation” because the factor subsumes active political statements and attitudes. The second dimension is a hedonistic one, subsuming more pleasure-seeking, fun-oriented items. For both cities, the first two variables explain about 50 per cent of the variance. The two factors are labelled “politicisation” and “hedonism” and function as dimensions of attitudes towards the May Day venues, which have to be explained.

Overall four linear regressions were calculated to explain the dimensions of the principal component analysis. The descriptive statistics of a range of the independent variables included are shown in *Table 3*. The regression model concerning the hedonistic dimension in Budapest is not explainable due to high levels of autocorrelation as signified by tolerance measures. This might partly be traced back to the bad weather conditions on May Day 2011 in Budapest – and hence, to the relatively small sample of the hedonistic Tabán venue. (As discussed above, the open-air programme of Tabán Fest is always more weather-sensitive compared to the explicitly politicised events of the other Budapest venues, which are more likely to attract their usual audiences even under more severe weather conditions.) Consequently, in the following, the three regressions are discussed.

The three regressions on politicisation and hedonism in Berlin and Budapest are calculated with the same analytical strategy. Each regression is composed of four models to gauge the different impacts of individual variables and context variables on either politicisation or hedonism. The primary func-

tion of the first model (MP1; MH1; MP5) is to control for demographic factors. The second model (MP2; MH2; MP6) additionally includes membership in trade unions and political parties, as well as the belief in the political impact of the visited event. These variables can be subsumed as individual political factors. The third model (MP3; MH3; MP7) adds the personal motives, while the fourth model (MP4; MH4; MP8) also includes all contextual factors like the geographical ones (the venue of the interview), the temporal ones (the time of the interview) and the size of the group.

In the case of the first regression on the factor “politicisation” in Berlin, model one (MP1) explains only a small part of the variability of the degree of politicisation in the sample but age is significant (the older, the more politicised). Model two (MP2) is far more meaningful according to the coefficient of determination. Here, the number of years spent in education becomes significant; the shorter the education was, the more politicised the person is. A possible explanation for this influence is that the majority of trade union members are blue-collar workers and older in the sample because age remains significant. Another indicator for this interpretation is the strong significant influence of the items “believe in the political impact of the event” and “member of a trade union”.

The second model (MP2) makes explicit that older, less educated members of trade unions in Berlin are politicised, which means they believe in the impact of their event. In model three (MP3), the strongest impact comes from “political motive”. “Years in education” and “political impact of the event” remain significant.

The fourth model (MP4) shows that the significant factors are “years in education”, “political impact of event”, “motive: cultural framework” (indicating that the speeches and music are considered important), “political motive”, as well as the context variables of “venue” and “interview in the morning”, which means the interview was held at the DGB demonstration. Thus, the fourth model clearly shows that people visiting the DGB venue are the most politicised in the Berlin

Table 3. Linear regression models on the factors “politicisation” and “hedonism” as dependent variables

Independent variables	Berlin “politicisation”				Berlin “hedonism”				Budapest “politicisation”			
	MP1	MP2	MP3	MP4	MH1	MH2	MH3	MH4	MP5	MP6	MP7	MP8
Years in education	.098	.195**	.192**	.133*	-.051	-.049	-.004	-.021	-.033	.026	.049	-.010
Age	-.245**	-.122*	-.050	-.018	.373**	.319**	.274**	.149*	-.261**	-.252**	-.088	-.025
Gender (1 = male)	-.010	.025	-.004	.034	-.046	-.053	-.047	.009	-.106	-.045	-.004	.016
Member of a trade union (1 = yes)	-	-.254**	-.076	.008	-	.178*	.045	-.103	-	.055	.038	.054
Member of a political party (1 = yes)	-	-.024	.044	.042*	-	.091	.117	.188**	-	-.237**	-.203**	-.170*
Political impact of the event (1 = yes)	-	-.454**	-.378**	-.351**	-	-.172*	-.173*	-.231**	-	-.259**	-.185**	-.158*
Motive: cultural framework programme (1 = yes)	-	-	-.133*	-.234**	-	-	-.179*	-.159*	-	-	.341**	.282**
Motive: meeting friends (1 = yes)	-	-	.002	-.010	-	-	-.054	.050	-	-	.189**	.257**
Motive: fine weather (1 = yes)	-	-	-.082	-.147**	-	-	-.072	-.044	-	-	-.009	-.015
Motive: spontaneous decision (1 = yes)	-	-	-.018	-.002	-	-	.139*	.077	-	-	.190**	.219**
Motive: political motive (1 = yes)	-	-	-.514**	-.311**	-	-	.013	-.094	-	-	-.072	-.031
Motive: unionised (1 = yes)	-	-	-.087	-.069	-	-	.017	-.034	-	-	-.032	-.045
Motive: political engagement (1 = yes)	-	-	.090	.029	-	-	.006	.024	-	-	-.025	.067
Motive: other matters (1 = yes)	-	-	-.095	-.113*	-	-	-.167*	-.167*	-	-	.085	.139
Size of group <sup>1</sup>	-	-	-	-.059	-	-	-	-.034	-	-	-	-.159*
Attendance in minutes	-	-	-	-.104*	-	-	-	-.257**	-	-	-	-.094
Interview in the morning or afternoon (1 = afternoon)	-	-	-	.186**	-	-	-	-.093	-	-	-	.098
Berlin: Venue of interview (1 = MyFest; 2 = DGB)	-	-	-	-.350**	-	-	-	.487**	-	-	-	-
Budapest: Venue of interview (1 = hedonistic)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
R <sup>2</sup> (rectified), %	4.8	37.1	46.2	55.4	12.0	14.4	18.3	37.7	7.0	20.5	34.9	42.3

<sup>1</sup>Without the extreme values 300 and 634; + p < 0.10; \* p < 0.05; \*\* p < 0.01. Source: Own survey.

sample, regardless of whether they are trade union members or not, since “member of a trade union” is not significant in the model.

The second regression analysis on hedonism in Berlin shows only a small impact of demographic factors (MH1) but age is significant (the younger, the more hedonistic). As opposed to (MP2), model two (MH2) is not more meaningful than MH1. Membership in a trade union or political party does not contribute much to the explanation of hedonism. Even in the third model (MH3), age remains the most important factor for hedonism. Visitors plan to go to the venue because of the cultural programme. Additionally, these hedonists do believe in the political impact of the venue. In model four (MH4), it becomes obvious that membership in a political party is a negative predictor for hedonism. However, belief in the political impact of the event strengthens the hedonistic dimension. Age remains important (because younger people are more hedonistic), as does the cultural programme and unspecific “other matters”. According to the regression model, the two strongest predictors of hedonism are the two context variables “venue of interview” (which means that visitors of MyFest are hedonistic), and attendance in minutes. Here, it becomes obvious that hedonists stay longer at the event.

The four models (MP5-MP8) on “politicisation” in the Budapest case show similarities and differences to the Berlin



models (MP1-MP4). The first model (MP5) is only slightly meaningful but age is significant (the older, the more politicised). In the second model (MP6), age remains significant (again; the older, the more politicised). This has been theoretically expected based on the younger generations' general distrust in the political sphere and public affairs in Hungary; according to SZABÓ, A. (2011), in 2000, 55 per cent of Hungarians aged 15–29 were not interested in politics, whereas in 2008, it grew to 60 per cent. An indicator for a high degree of politicisation in Budapest is the strong significant influence of the items “believe in the political impact of the event” and “member of a political party”.

This makes it clear that older members of political parties in Budapest are politicised, which means they believe in the impact of their event. The third model (MP7) makes obvious the strong politicisation of parts of the population due to the fact that hedonistic motives like the cultural fringe events, meeting friends, and a spontaneous decision to go to the venue are strong negative predictors. The individual political factors “membership in a political party” and “believe in the political impact of the event” remain significant, while age does not. The context model four (MP8) displays the influence of the venue; Tabán as a cultural festival is an obstacle to politicisation. Political motives are not significant due to the auto-collinearity of the model, i.e. methodological reasons as indicated by the tolerance value.

### **Conclusions: Fragmentation and depoliticisation of labour protest**

The nature of labour protest is fundamentally changing. Due to the decline of union membership and the flexibilisation of the workforce, an erosion of protest is detectable. While there is much debate in the literature on the reasons for this dramatic downswing, there is little empirical work on the motivations and socio-demographic characteristics of participants in protests today. In this paper we explored the motivations of labour

protesters in Berlin and Budapest. In both cities we compared traditional, union-oriented forms of labour protest as well as new forms of festive, more individualised labour protest. Through our empirical research results based on structured mini-interviews, we advanced three interlinked arguments.

First, a clear fragmentation of labour protests in the forms of venues, audiences and protest motivations is observable. Apparently, the new conditions of labour in times of a flexibilisation of the workforce find resonance in the growing differentiation of protest. Especially younger generations are drawn to new types of festive protest that address lifestyle needs like hedonistic consumption (food, music, cultural entertainment).

Second, newer forms of labour protest have a paradoxical effect: on the one hand, they are able to mobilise a young, educated audience, whereas on the other hand, these festive forms of protest clearly draw a much more depoliticised crowd that attends for reasons of cultural consumption.

Third, we directed attention towards the question of the unemployed and the marginalised. In neither of the observed protest venues – be they old fashioned, unionised labour protest or newly redesigned hedonistic protest – are they present. The urban precariat consists of a growing section of the labour market, yet, it is barely represented in any of the Labour Day celebrations today. Hence, our empirical results sadly confirm existing comparative studies on labour protest and the unemployed in Europe (BAGLIONI, S. *et al.* 2008, 326). The erosion of unionism does not automatically lead to new forms of protest by the unemployed. Rather, atomisation prevails.

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