

LEADERSHIP. DECISION-MAKING. LEGITIMACY. HOW DELIBERATIVE ARE THE LABOR UNIONS IN ROMANIA?

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Abstract: *Deliberative democracy theory highlighted democratic deliberation as a modus operandi for facilitating group decision-making. In 2023, members of Romanian labor unions in several sectors took to the streets in strikes and protests, demanding higher revenues and better work conditions. Nevertheless, misunderstandings and internal ruptures shadowed their noble ends and fueled mistrust amongst unionists. This dynamic reminds rather of interest party politics as it employs vertical power relations, influenced by social and professional background segmentation. One question that reasonably arises in this context is how deliberative the decision-making process is within the unions in Romania. We specifically analyze elements of deliberative organizational leadership and the power relations within labor unions through a qualitative study in the form of interviews.*

Keywords: *Labor Unions, Romania, Deliberation, Representation, Leadership*

Context

Neo-liberalism triggered more dynamism in the labor market and new work relations, forcing unions to reshape and adjust their working procedures repeatedly. Their efficiency in coping with capitalist interests is determined by the strength of their association,¹ which, in turn, depends on

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¹ Erik Olin Wright, "Working-Class Power, Capitalist-Class Interests, and Class Compromise" in *American Journal of Sociology*, 105 (4), 2000, pp. 957-1002.

their capacity to identify, coagulate, and use the available resources.² Literature considered unions' vulnerabilities and ineptitudes and developed a theoretical corpus on their revitalization. For instance, Frege and Kelly (2004) determined six possible union revitalization models: restructuring, organizing, coalition building, social partnership, political action, and international union action.³ The present article adds to these potential actions a new element, which challenges the agents of decision-making at all levels and the method of the deliberative internal decision-making process, aiming to boost their internal democracy and legitimacy. To this end, it aims to determine the desirability of deliberative decision-making operations among a series of interviewed union members.

The idea of an organized labor force goes back to North America. The Fordist labor union model served as a major inspiration for the Western European labor structures. The North American prototype was hierarchical and represented relatively common, bottom-layer workers whose interests were aggregated by a central leadership and bespoken through official channels of social dialogue. It initially dispersed in Western Europe after WWII, pushed by industrialization.⁴ This area provided a relatively stable sociopolitical context, already operating mass production systems with a professional labor force and circulating important amounts of wealth through commercial ties. Here, the workforce could play an essential role in developing a permissive institutional design that accommodated their interests. After the Cold War, the West benefited from an influx of Eastern European qualified workforce combined with neoliberal practices of outsourcing production in these cheap labor countries.⁵

² Adam Mrozowicki, "Trade Union Organising in Eastern Europe: A Viable Pathway to Trade Union Revitalisation (the Case of the Automotive Sector)?" in *Semantic Scholar: Business, Political Science, Sociology*, 2 (1), 2011.

³ Carola Frege and John Kelly (eds.), *Varieties of Unionism: Strategies for Union Revitalization in a Globalizing Economy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

⁴ Magdalena Bernaciak and Marta Kahancová, "Introduction: Innovation against All Odds?", in Magdalena Bernaciak and Marta Kahancová (eds.), *Innovative Union Practices in Central and Eastern Europe*, Brussels: ETUI, 2017, pp. 7–20.

⁵ Dorothee Bohle and Bela Greskovits, "Greskovics Bohle Capitalism without Compromise" in *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 41 (1), 2006, pp. 3–25.

Zooming in on the Central Eastern European countries situation, we note their intricate conditions. Basically, they took over the Fordist style, which later got imprinted with socialist legacies. We find that socialist and Fordist models actually share several standard features: large size, formalized, extensively bureaucratic, and typical to manufacturing industries and the public sector. Yet, the socialist unions stood as mere channels of information transfer between the political parties and the union members, and membership was somewhat compulsory. Bernaciak and Kahancová (2017) refer to the socialist legacy as “routine servicing,” featuring a wide gap between its strata and the lack of genuine communication among and between members.⁶ Looking at their image and functioning is essential, as it affects public opinion and, implicitly, their strength. It seems that the public perception of union membership in Eastern Europe is still closely linked to regimentation, a stigmatic and compelling task, setting subtle psychological barriers related to their activity in the collective mind.⁷ Therefore, one of the primary duties of unions is to improve their public image and gain more internal and external legitimacy.

The East-West division in terms of economy, culture, politics, and general success rate could not yet be reconciled. The West still generates inspiration for the mimetic Eastern hemisphere in many aspects. Similarly, the Northern hemisphere plays a trendsetting role in welfare distribution and employment security. The United States of America, for example, designed trade union *organizing* and recruitment strategies, while the Anglo-American societies combined top-down and bottom-up initiatives focused on “membership acquisition”, conducted through direct personal contacts, calls, and interactive joint activities outside the workplace.⁸ Conversely, the state of the art of the unions in the CEEs remains “hostile”.⁹ States’ institutions tend to control and counteract labor and social movements, keeping them dependent on state funding. The unions are either in contradiction with one another or inactive and still follow communist patterns.¹⁰ Their poor

⁶ Bernaciak and Kahancová, *art. cit.*, in Bernaciak and Marta (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 7–20.

⁷ *Ibidem.*

⁸ Mrozowicki, *art. cit.*

⁹ Martin Upchurch, “Strategic Dilemmas for Trade Unions in Transformation: The Experience of Serbia” in *SEER- South East Europe Review for Labour and Social Affairs*, 9 (4), 2006, pp. 43-64 [<http://www.jstor.org/stable/43293186>].

¹⁰ Mrozowicki, *art. cit.*

representative performance may be due to the lack of real reformation strategies for the transition to a liberal market, the privatization processes, or the framework of foreign business investments.¹¹ Internally, studies reveal flawed preconceptions about the role of the leaders: disbelief in the unions' actual efficacy, role ambiguity, and, lastly, the supplementary workload.¹²

Bringing union leadership among common workers

Considering the dysfunctional union leadership, we have noticed the theoretical shifts from individual leadership to collective leadership, enabling “networks of people” to think and lead for themselves. Rather than promoting an *ideal* type of leader, the new leadership development paradigm¹³ pleads for creating the necessary conditions for collective leadership.¹⁴ Hence, the essential task of this narrative is “how” can leadership be shared by numerous individuals. Literature provides various instruments which create ideal circumstances: “open flow of information”, “flexible hierarchies”, “distributed resources”, “distributed decision-making, and “loosening of centralized controls”.¹⁵ These tools ensure greater organizational competence, coherently linking various stakeholders at different levels of hierarchy, areas, domains, and segments of processes.¹⁶ Besides collective leadership,¹⁷ collaborative leadership is another framework that admits a plurality of actors.¹⁸ However, we suggest an extension of the concept that

¹¹ Aleksandra Sznajder Lee and Vera, Trappmann, “MNCs and Labour Revitalisation in Central and Eastern Europe: Overcoming Post-Communist Weakness Through External Pressures?” in SSRN, 2012 [<http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2220664>].

¹² Christopher Gordon Smith, Tingting Zhang, Lorenzo Frangi, Linda Duxbury, “Would You Like to Become a Union Leader? Analysing Leadership Intentions through a Generational Lens” in *Industrial Relations Journal*, 54 (6), 2023, pp. 425-444.

¹³ Sofia Kjellström, Kristian Stålné and Oskar Törnblom, “Six Ways of Understanding Leadership Development: An Exploration of Increasing Complexity” in *Leadership*, 16 (4), 2020, pp. 434-460 [<https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715020926731>].

¹⁴ Kenneth Leithwood and Blair Mascall, “Collective Leadership Effects on Student Achievement” in *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44 (4), pp. 529-561 [<https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X08321221>].

¹⁵ Nick Petrie, “Future Trends in Leadership Development”, Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), 2011, pp. 1-36.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ Leithwood and Mascall, *art. cit.*

¹⁸ Peter M. DeWitt, *Collaborative Leadership: Six Influences That Matter Most*, London: Corwin, 2016.

can integrate both collective and collaborative leadership under the framework of deliberative leadership.¹⁹ Despite its potential, the deliberative component of leadership has been largely neglected.

Bernaciak and Kahancová (2017)²⁰ consider that “revitalization” needs specific semantic enlargement due to the unions’ new challenges. In their understanding, innovation means a novel “deliberate initiative or set of initiatives launched in response to a specific problem” allowed by new social and working contexts. The Working Lives Research Unit conducted the first research associating innovation with trade union activities. The entity referred to innovation as new forms of engagement or performance of the traditionally operated roles.²¹

Brief history of the labour unions in Romania

Romania has an agrarian, rural history and displays a typical regional lag in modernization.²² The precursors of the labor unions in Romania date back to mid-19th century professional alliances concerned with “issues of democracy at the workplace”. The second part of the 19th century was filled with frequent workers’ protests, and the organizations knew about a period of emancipation regarding their status and structure. They found a common voice and refined their demands by including mental and moral well-being (mutual understanding and support, equality), more pecuniary benefits, and listed their rights, eligibility, and code of practice.²³

The following fundamental moment in consolidating labor unions in Romania was in 1906 when the General Commission of the Labor Unions in Romania was created. The Commission coordinated these movements and established the legal and moral boundaries comprised in the Status of

¹⁹ Ciaran Sugrue and Tone Dyrdal Solbrenke, “Deliberative Leadership: Sustainable Practices for Public Universities?” in *Journal of Praxis in Higher Education*, 6 (1), 2024, pp. 15–42 [<https://doi.org/10.47989/KPDC422>].

²⁰ Bernaciak and Kahancová, *art. cit.*, in Bernaciak and Marta (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 7–20.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² Sergiu Mișcoiu and Ciprian Bogdan, “Introduction: the Never-Ending Story of Romanian Transition”, in Sergiu Mișcoiu (ed.), *Democratic Consolidation and Europeanization in Romania: A One-way Journey or a Return Ticket*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021, p. 6.

²³ Romanian National Archives Inventory, “Sindicatelor profesionale în România” [<http://arhivelenationale.ro/site/download/inventare/Uniunea-Generala-a-Sindicatelor-din-Romania.-1944-1989.-Inv.-3406.pdf>].

the Labor Unions in Romania. By 1909, the Law Against the Labor Union in Romania already prohibited the association of state employees but not for the employees in the private sector.²⁴ Traditionally, unions are the affinities of the social democratic wing. Soon, union representatives teamed up with political actors who were promising solutions to their claims and offered them visibility.²⁵ Therefore, by 1921, the authorities felt the need to separate unions from political interference by the Law of the Labor Unions in Romania, adding, at the same time, more space of maneuver for these structures.²⁶ Nevertheless, this freedom was disrupted during the interwar period by a document signed by King Carol II in 1938, replacing autonomous unions with state-controlled guilds.²⁷ Each guild was constituted by royal decree and was permanently controlled by the Ministry of Labor.²⁸

Under Marshal Antonescu's military rule, public manifestation was restricted, if not forbidden at all.²⁹ The Communist Party made an instrument out of the proletariat's well-being and used it as a perfect alibi for its omnipresence in factory workers' lives. It sought to formalize these associations,³⁰ setting up central institutions such as the Unitary Labor Unions (*Sindicatete Unitare*) and the *Commission for the Organization of Trade Unification* (*Comisia de organizare a Unificării Sindicale*). Each state-led enterprise had now the right to have a union that needed to subsequently affiliate with the Unitary Labor Unions (*Sindicatete Unite*).

This managerial architecture was, in fact, a scheme to keep a hand on the unions. The party used them as spearheads for public action in support of different causes or contestations of competitors, even before ruling the country. Progressively, the Party vacuumed members by infiltrating the

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ Ninucia-Maria Pilat, "Trade Unions and the Amendment of the Labour Code in Romania" in *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 7 (2), 2006, pp. 185–203 [<https://doi.org/10.1080/15705850600840015>].

²⁶ Romanian National Archives Inventory, "Sindicatete profesionale în România" [<http://arhivelenationale.ro/site/download/inventare/Uniunea-General-a-Sindicatelor-din-Romania.-1944-1989.-Inv.-3406.pdf>].

²⁷ Ilarion Tiu, "Monopolul Sindicatelor", *Jurnalul Scînteia*, 2005 [<https://jurnalul.ro/scinteia/istoria-comunismului/monopolul-sindicatelor-32020.html>].

²⁸ Romanian National Archives Inventory, "Sindicatete profesionale în România" [<http://arhivelenationale.ro/site/download/inventare/Uniunea-General-a-Sindicatelor-din-Romania.-1944-1989.-Inv.-3406.pdf>].

²⁹ Tiu, *art. cit.*

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

unions and manipulating, lying, or bribing workers to join the organizations. By the end of 1944, the Unified Labor Unions controlled all professional associations, meaning almost all the blue-collar workers. In the context of the struggles brought by the war, the non-members were being intentionally deprived of financial and material assistance: “Anyone who is not with us is against us!”,³¹ believed the Communist Party. If we speak about numbers, by 1969, virtually 100% of the employees had the quality of a union member.³²

Returning to essential moments in consolidating labor factions in Romania, we must pay attention to the *General Congress of the Unified Labor Unions* in Bucharest in 1945. The event was an excellent occasion for communist figures such as Ana Pauker, Vasile Luca, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, or Petru Groza to gain visibility and to inculcate, through their persuasive discourses, a sense of carefulness and unity within the electorate.³³ The party grew so robust that it became impossible for other actors to compete. Attributions of labor unions in a country with a unique party were channeled towards social situations and cultural and community events. The line of command and execution was always ordered from above, and no dissident activity could be performed.³⁴ A movement of assertiveness worth mentioning happened in 1979, when a group of intellectuals set the Free Trade Union of Romanian Workers. They pleaded for more financial benefits, freedom, equality, and respect for human rights. The attempt was perceived as too daring by ordinary people, who refrained from supporting it because of fearing the Securitate. Indeed, the initiators were severely punished for disturbing the working class’s productivity.³⁵

The regime change created expectations that the unions would finally fulfill their roles. The legal framework became more permissive, ensured space for dialogue, exchange of opinions between the unions and the state, or activities such as collective bargaining (the favorability principle), tripartite

³¹ *Ibidem.*

³² Ștefan Guga and Aurora Trif, “Trade Unions in Romania: Walking the Thin Line between Politics and the Market”, in Jeremy Waddington, Torsten Müller, and Kurt Vandaele (eds.), *Trade Unions in the European Union*, Brussels: Peter Lang Group AG, 2023, pp. 911–944 [<https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.32-4615>].

³³ *Ibidem.*

³⁴ Pilat, *art. cit.*

³⁵ Ashby Crowder, “Romanian Reactions to Independent Unionism, East European Labor and State Socialism” in *The Polish Review*, 52 (3), 2007, pp. 331–355 [<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25779687>].

consultation³⁶ negotiation, distribution of benefits, resources, money, advantages for the members of the unions. Nevertheless, the reality was somewhat ambivalent. While all the freedoms and opportunities were mentioned in the public discourse, exponents of the former authoritarian regime still dominated the scene. The industrial workers perceived themselves as estranged from political life, and their claims often ended in violent, aggressive movements.³⁷

The privatization processes meant a turbulent period for the company-level labor unions. The way they perceived the changes brought by capitalism caused strong resistance and efforts to delay the transition as much as possible. Unlike most Central European countries, Romania did not adopt the “shock therapy” of economic transition but rather preferred a gradual switch.³⁸ Let us look at Sidex Galați, a state-led company that used to generate substantial capital losses and contributed significantly to Romania’s budget deficit. Privatization would affect numerous stakeholders: the management of the company at the time, the State, the unions, the World Bank, the IMF, the EU, and many others. While the international financial institutions were pushing for privatization, the unions and the employees were not so keen on the idea because the State was already securing their wages. In Romania, the public sector is known for using complicated dismissal policies, so a job in the public sector can make one’s entire professional career. Eventually, they gave up their position, accepting the State’s choice to acknowledge LNM Holdings as a foreign investor in the company.³⁹

In 1990, the UGSR (the Unified Labor Unions of Romania) was dissolved and charged for having served the communist party. The same year, CSI Frăția (the Confederation of Independent Labor Unions Frăția) originated as a newly reformed professional association, generating high expectations that Romania would eventually have a veritable, western-inspired democratic representative union.⁴⁰ An avalanche of many other

³⁶ Guga and Trif, *art. cit.*, in Waddington, Müller, and Vandaele (eds.), *op. cit.*

³⁷ Monica Ciobanu, “Reconstructing the Role of the Working Class in Communist and Postcommunist Romania” in *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 22 (3), 2009, pp. 315–335 [<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-009-9064-x>].

³⁸ Mrozowicki, *art. cit.*

³⁹ Sznajder Lee and Trappmann, *art. cit.*

⁴⁰ Umut Korkut, “Entrenched Elitism in Trade Unions in Poland and Romania: An Explanation for the Lack of Union Strength and Success?” in *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 27 (1), 2006, pp. 67–104 [<https://doi.org/10.1177/0143831X06060591>].

smaller or larger entities emerged from scratch or got restructured. Such was the case with, maybe, the most popular faction, CSNLR (Confederation of Free National Labor Unions of Romania), which inherited most of the members of the former UGSR, choosing Mr. Victor Ciorbea, a politically unaffiliated law professional, as president. CNS Cartel Alfa emerged in 1990, and the BNS (The National Labor Unions Block) became the fourth major union confederation in 1991. By 1993, CSNLR and Frăția fused, and Victor Ciorbea served as leader of the new establishment. Miron Mitrea was elected executive Chairman.⁴¹

Since the beginning of the transition period, the leaders of the labor unions have maintained clientelistic relations with the government. Discontentment was silenced with pecuniary privileges. Unions' leaders pursued personal enrichment by engaging in informal, inadequate relations with political figures outside the companies' management. The companies' ownership became increasingly organized and developed means to ensure a professional defense of the management's profit. This forced the growth of union leadership as a counterpart to private management, upgrading their activity and forming sectoral alliances. Yet, clashes between the two occur often. The unionists accuse the organizations of being "uncooperative", while the employers notice the unionists have no representation strategy, which, they claim, make their interaction inconclusive and chaotic.⁴² The mixture of old-style former communist leaders with the new, younger generations of union leaders might cause the poor concertation of unionists' interests. For instance, in the case of steelworkers in Galați, the Solidarity Union of Steelworkers at Arcelor Mittal Galați" (Sindicatul Solidaritatea Siderurgistilor din Arcelor Mittal Galați) was hardly accepted by the company management in the beginning. It was eventually compelled to do so through protests, meetings, and strongly articulated demands for wage increases.⁴³

Since their more dynamic activity, the unions dealt with disputes on political associations and future direction. Ciorbea aligned with the wind of the democratic change and wished to associate with the Democratic Convention. At the same time, Mitrea supported and was supported, in turn, by the PDSR (Romanian Party of Social Democracy). PDSR was the party in power, and it gathered many former influential communists who

⁴¹ *Ibidem.*

⁴² Sznajder Lee and Trappmann, *art. cit.*

⁴³ *Ibidem.*

possessed the information and instruments required to win. In 1994, amid these dissensions, Ciorbea influenced and persuaded approximately a quarter of the establishment to split and created a new confederation, the CSDR (Confederation of Democratic Labor Unions of Romania).

At the end of his mandate, Miron Mitrea decided not to run again. He officially entered politics and became the vice-president of the PDSR, renouncing union affinities. His counterparty, Mr. Ciorbea, also embraced political roles, initially becoming mayor of Bucharest and later prime minister on behalf of the CDR-USD-UDMR coalition.⁴⁴

Overlapping with political parties' agendas or agreements made behind closed doors never fueled public scandals. A case in point is the Union of the Miners in the Jiu Valley, led by Miron Cozma, which was used to suppress students' protests in Bucharest. President Iliescu recognized their contribution to the "public order restoration" operation, admitting the cooperation.⁴⁵ Sometimes, public institutions co-opt representatives of labor unions in an attempt to influence and moderate labor unions' voices, weakening their impact and compromising, at times, the role of the labor union's representative.⁴⁶

The right to association is inscribed in the Romanian Constitution of 1991, with specific forms of public rights claiming, such as strikes, collective bargaining, and collective agreements. The most relevant for us are the Trade Union Act, the Labor Disputes Arbitration Act, and the Collective Agreement Act.⁴⁷

The Trade Union Act provides that a Union can start with 15 members at a minimum. The workers may establish a union in a company or a working sector, provided they belong to a specific profession, at regional or local level. All workers have the right to join unions, and no obligation to join or leave can be imposed upon them as long as they abide by the membership conditions. A company can have multiple unions. If two unions representing the same profession merge, they would form a federation.

⁴⁴ Crowder, *art. cit.*

⁴⁵ Pilat, *art. cit.*

⁴⁶ Sznajder Lee and Trappmann, *art. cit.*

⁴⁷ Al Rainnie, Adrian Smith and Adam Swain, "Employment and Work Restructuring in Transition", in Al Rainnie, Adrian Smith and Adam Swain (eds.), *Work, Employment and Transition - Restructuring Livelihoods in Post-communism*, London: Taylor & Francis, 2002, pp. 7–34.

Similarly, two associated federations would form a confederation if it gathers at least 5% of a total number of employees.⁴⁸

The dynamics of the unions in liberal democratic Romania display a somewhat reactionary and inconsistent attitude. The labor exodus and economic growth encouraged a louder voice of the unions around the 2000s, but a taciturn, absent disposition followed them. The preoccupation with the social security system was raised because of the increased risks of poverty and economic uncertainty brought by capitalism.⁴⁹ To counterbalance the unpredictability posed by capitalist competition, unions demand a more social face in the market economy.⁵⁰ However, the establishment hardly performs tasks such as consultations or discussions with the employees.

The level of unionization in Romania is relatively high. Around 27% of the workforce in Romania is associated with a trade union, amounting to approximately 1.3 million trade unionists. One can interpret the level of unionization in Romania as a laudable participatory attitude or, contrariwise, as an attempt to complement inefficient political representation by the political parties. In any case, affiliation to a union is quite a passive status. There are now five main confederations in Romania, aiming at representing cross-sectoral and cross-industrial interests: CNSLR- Frăția (National Romanian Free Trade Union Confederation–Brotherhood), BNS (The National Trade Union Block), CNS Cartel Alfa (National Trade Union Confederation Cartel Alfa), CSDR (the Romanian Democratic Trade Union Confederation) and CSN Median (The Meridian National Trade Union Confederation).⁵¹ ⁵² All of the entities above represent predominantly employees of the public sector. The largest union federations are in the education sector - FSLI (Federation of the Free Labor Unions in Education), and the health sector - Sanitas. The employees in the public sector outnumber considerably the employees in the private sector. The dynamics at the company/employer level may explain this asymmetry. State employees have more expectations

⁴⁸ worker-participation.eu-Romania.

⁴⁹ Rainnie, Smith and Swain, *art. cit.*, in Rainnie, Smith and Swain (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 7–34.

⁵⁰ Edzard Ockenga, "Trade Unions in Romania" in *Sage Journal*, 3 (2), 1997, pp. 313–328 [<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/102425899700300205>].

⁵¹ The acronyms stand for the Romanian denomination of the unions. The English translation between parentheses was chosen to better understand the name and nature of the union. Hence, the translation will not correspond *ad litteram* to the acronym used. (worker-participation.eu-Romania)

⁵² Guga and Trif, *art. cit.*, in Waddington, Müller, and Vandaele (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 911–944.

from the unions than private employees. Private companies' work relations may rely either on interpersonal interactions⁵³ or a collective bargaining narrative. Any agent can execute collective bargaining, not necessarily a union per se. In addition, the imbalance is maintained by the undeclared working contracts, the massive unofficial employment,⁵⁴ diversification in employment, and privatization.⁵⁵ After the fall of communism, the level of unionization in Romania followed a constant decreasing trend overall. The profile of the union member is a relatively aged person, close to retirement, with a permanent employment contract, and with a relatively long-term interest in keeping the same job.⁵⁶

In many cases, intervention from international bodies called for more attention to be paid to labor unions, putting pressure on the domestic systems to encourage and create favorable conditions for the change to happen.⁵⁷ The European Union insisted on more coordination among the unions, which often have different short-term agendas or long-term visions, leadership styles, and so on. It also highlighted benchmarks and opened its gates for international cooperation opportunities.⁵⁸

Regarding the impact of foreign investments in Romania on labor movements, literature presents both beneficial and weakening effects of the multinational corporations' presence within the country. In some cases, positive changes were accommodated by a healthier, more mature organizational culture of a multinational company. Notable success stories occurred in sectors such as automotive, banking, commerce, and later in IT.⁵⁹ International investments brought about a more relevant dialogue between managers and employees and trained managers for better group management, yet outside the framework of unions.⁶⁰ The presence of foreign companies in Romania depends on offers they get from more convenient countries. This situation generates a state of mutual conditionality. The host state often loses its sovereignty to the global competition for a low-paid labor force. If the

⁵³ Ockenga, *art. cit.*

⁵⁴ Pilat, *art. cit.*

⁵⁵ Guga and Trif, *art. cit.*, in Waddington, Müller, and Vandaele (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 911–944.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁷ John S. Dryzek and Leslie Templeman Holmes, *Post-Communist Democratization: Political Discourses Across Thirteen Countries*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

⁵⁸ Sznajder Lee and Trappmann, *art. cit.*

⁵⁹ Guga and Trif, *art. cit.*, in Waddington, Müller, and Vandaele (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 911–944.

⁶⁰ Mrozowicki, *art. cit.*

multinational decides to relocate, the pressure on the social protection services would considerably affect the host country's economy, which makes the host country maintain or even reconsider the facility package available for foreign investors.⁶¹

In 2011, the right-wing governing party unilaterally adopted a restrictive law of the social dialogue and amended the Labor Code, considerably damaging "collective bargaining" possibilities. It prolonged the trial period of an employee from 30 to 90 days, the fixed period employment contracts, increased the number of unpaid not worked days, and set new provisions that favored the employer. They stayed the same despite the left-wing governance alternating to power since 2012.⁶²

The economic crisis intensified during the pandemic's peak, reversing the balance to the employers' benefit and silencing the unions. However, after years of suppression, tensions resurfaced,⁶³ signaling the unions' diminishing representative capacity.

One can observe certain similarities with the representative function of political parties; the difference lies in their working philosophy. In minimalistic terms, parties are defined by two main features: (i) they seek to exert influence, especially by gaining access to the government (legislation), and (ii) they gather people with various interests and needs. The parties mirror the public interest and look for a top-down approach. The unions are assimilated, instead, to a civil society organization prototype; they stay outside the Government and target a specific political issue. Their course of action is dictated by internal consultation and decision-making.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Milosz Miszczynski, "Global Production in a Romanian Village: Middle-Income Economy, Industrial Dislocation and the Reserve Army of Labor" in *Association for Critical Sociology*, 43 (7–8), pp. 1079–1092 [<https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920515623076>].

⁶² Aurora Trif, "Dialogul social în timpul crizei economice - Supraviețuirea negocierilor colective în sectorul industrial din România", Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2015 [<https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bukarest/12419.pdf>].

⁶³ Guga and Trif, *art. cit.*, in Waddington, Müller, and Vandaele (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 911–944.

⁶⁴ Kevin Deegan-Krause, "Civil Society and Political Parties: Growth and Change in the Organizations Linking People and Power", in Zsuzsa Csergő, Daina S. Eglitis, and Paula M. Pickering (eds.), *Central and East European Politics - Changes and Challenges*, London: Rowman&Littlefield, 2002.

Issues related to internal democracy and the representativeness of the unions' leadership

Scholars describe two primary types of reasoning behind the association in unions. One is driven by a progressive motivation to unite and advocate for their interest, and the other is the need to increase representativeness when discussing with counterparts in employers' associations or authorities. Irrespective of the case, the group must take into account the following principles: "democracy, accountability, power, and legitimacy".⁶⁵ When neglected in practice, unions face high levels of inefficiency. In times of trouble, the finger usually points to the management capacity. However, some scholars have recently suggested changing the way union leaders are chosen, providing alternatives, such as the switch from election to sortition, as a solution to remediate self-governance.⁶⁶

Literature mentions a series of customs that divert leadership from its genuine purpose. For instance, "labor unions are highly politicized".⁶⁷ Unions' leaders come to associate with political parties as it represents an occasion to gain political capital, access to information, networks, and visibility. Unfortunately, in some cases, these incentives are driven by personal political agendas, which are greatly detrimental to unionist preoccupation. In other cases, they can progressively harm the quality of the leadership until perverting union leaders' interests towards aiming for political positions. Alternation to power ensures a secure, profitable position only for the won mandate. Eventually, the bottom-up approach gets flawed, and they end up caught up in "patron-client linkages" that fuel not only organizational interests but also the personal investments of the union leaders.⁶⁸ Often, they become members of a political party to which they seem even more committed. This dissonant double hat is viewed as a conflict of interest, as it allows them to run for incompatible positions. Public opinion expresses anger towards such practices and denounces leaders for failing to fulfill

⁶⁵ Guy Mundlak, *Organizing Matters: Two Logics of Trade Union Representation*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020.

⁶⁶ Simon Pek, "Rekindling Union Democracy Through the Use of Sortition" in *Journal of Business Ethics*, 155 (4), 2019, pp. 1033–1051 [<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-017-3526-2>].

⁶⁷ Pilat, *art. cit.*

⁶⁸ Korkut, *art. cit.*

union roles and duties.⁶⁹ Explicit or hidden associations with politics constrain the elaboration of unions' long-term strategies, as these are pressured to adjust their plans and visions according to the political maneuvers. Labor union representatives can hardly be simultaneously accountable to their political connections and to the union members. We have witnessed situations when union leaders decide to renounce their roles in the union and choose politics instead.⁷⁰

Going further, the interaction between the leaders of the unions themselves follows an effervescent dynamic as well, both hierarchically and horizontally. Though hierarchical structure implies delegation of representativeness to higher fora, fragmentation at lower levels should not necessarily mean structural or organizational weakness. As long as the fractions can collaborate, the number of grassroots organizations gathered under one umbrella is irrelevant.⁷¹ However, mistrust and suspicion are commonly encountered both horizontally and vertically. For instance, leaders of federations often accuse leaders of confederations of having betrayed the lay members of the union.⁷² These episodes alter the level of support and the attitudes of the contributors-members toward unions' management in terms of responsiveness, mobilization, trust, and engagement. Literature on the subject certifies that democratic principles have, unfortunately, not been embedded in the leadership style of labor unions. Essentially, unions suffer from elitism, a custom of non-participation, and uncoordinated activity.⁷³ Members and leaders fall short of connecting, which significantly alters the representative capacity of the elites and fuels a general state of distrust on both sides.⁷⁴

These realities give rise to ample discussion about increasing efforts to democratize labor unions. Baccaro (2002)⁷⁵ does not recommend a corporatist management approach to representative matters because it may not be

⁶⁹ www.bzi.ro, 2023.

⁷⁰ Korkut, *art. cit.*

⁷¹ *Ibidem.*

⁷² Guga and Trif, *art. cit.*, in Waddington, Müller, and Vandaele (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 911–944.

⁷³ Korkut, *art. cit.*

⁷⁴ David M. Ryfe, "Does Deliberative Democracy Work?" in *Annual Review of Political Science*, 8, 2005, pp. 49–71 [<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.8.032904.154633>].

⁷⁵ Lucio Baccaro, "The Construction of <Democratic> Corporatism in Italy" in *Politics and Society*, 30 (2), 2002 [[doi:10.1177/0032329202030002005](https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329202030002005)]

democratic enough, while Schmitter (1979)⁷⁶ disapproves of hierarchical centralized management.⁷⁷ More forms of participation would mean a more complex decision-making process but would ensure shared leadership between members and leaders.⁷⁸ A confirmed way to disrupt passivity in union membership is to assign routine tasks to lay members. Research shows that the common union member is interested and willing to take over responsibilities⁷⁹. Therefore, we assume that more bottom-up engagement and internal deliberation would be a viable problem-solving channel. Democratic deliberation takes the dialogue further and increases the complexity of decision-making process by allowing diverse cognitive contributions, expertise, and experience from various domains in a collaborative framework.⁸⁰ The prerequisites of this effort are good intentions, goodwill, and a problem-solving perspective.⁸¹

The present study does not adopt a normative stance or an all-encompassing diagnosis of the labor unions in Romania. Its relevance relies on the determinant conjunction between the quality of the internal democracy and the “union’s strength”.⁸²

A deliberative leadership for more democracy infusion in the labour unions

Simone Chambers stressed that deliberation is no longer a theory under construction but a “working theory”.⁸³ It is extensively used in political science in normative terms when trying to cover shortages of aggregative democracy:

⁷⁶ Philippe Schmitter, “Still the Century of Corporatism?”, in Philippe C. Schmitter and Gerhard Lehmbruch (eds.), *Trends toward Corporatist Intermediation*, London: Sage, 1979, pp. 7-52.

⁷⁷ Korkut, *art. cit.*

⁷⁸ Lucio Baccaro, “Aggregative” and <Deliberative> Decision-making Procedures: a Comparison of Two Southern Italian Factories” in *Politics & Society* 29 (2), 2001, pp. 243-271.

⁷⁹ Kurt Vandaele, “Newcomers as Potential Drivers of Union Revitalization: Survey Evidence from Belgium” in *Relations Industrielles-industrial Relations*, 75 (2), 2020, pp. 351–375 [<https://doi.org/10.7202/1070352AR>].

⁸⁰ Joseph Raelin, “Dialogue and Deliberation as Expressions of Democratic Leadership in Participatory Organizational Change” in *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 25 (1), 2012, pp. 7–23 [<https://doi.org/10.1108/09534811211199574>].

⁸¹ Korkut, *art. cit.*

⁸² *Ibidem.*

⁸³ Simone Chambers, “Deliberative Democratic Theory” in *Annual Review of Political Science*, 6, 2003, pp. 307–326 [<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.6.121901.085538>].

Theorists of deliberative democracy are interested in such questions as: How does or might deliberation shape preferences, moderate self-interest, empower the marginalized, mediate difference, further integration and solidarity, enhance recognition, produce reasonable opinion and policy, and possibly lead to consensus?⁸⁴

Deliberative democracy is an inspiration for enhancing democratic decision-making processes in the unions and is considered an appropriate way for collective decision-making especially when handling complicated controversies⁸⁵ because it requires a great deal of critical thinking.⁸⁶ Once the problem is acknowledged, any claim must be publicly and rationally justified. Exposing reasons in an open forum increases awareness about how we define and how we relate to the issue.⁸⁷ Moreover, it prevents the pursuit of insidious interests and the abuse of influence and power,⁸⁸ acting as a continuous framework of open dialogue. The looseness of the format allows one to continually return to former decisions for reconsideration.⁸⁹

From a procedural point of view, the participation system can be designed in multiple frameworks, including self-selection or recruitment through randomization.⁹⁰ It decouples the hierarchical decision-making style from the representative power structures and resorts to an inclusive “cognitive diversity,” expected to generate “smarter results.”⁹¹

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁵ Dieter Rucht, “Evaluating Democratic Innovations Curing the Democratic Malaise?”, in Brigitte Geissel and Kenneth Newton (eds.), *Evaluating Democratizing Innovations*, New York: Routledge, 2012.

⁸⁶ Sergiu Gherghina, Monika Mokre, and Sergiu Miscoiu, “Introduction: Democratic Deliberation and Under-Represented Groups” in *Political Studies Review*, 19 (2), 2020, pp. 159-163 [<https://doi.org/10.1177/1478929920950931>]. Also see Sergiu Mișcoiu, Sergiu Gherghina, “Poorly Designed Deliberation: Explaining the Banlieues’ Non-involvement in the Great Debate” in *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, vol. 34, no. 5, 2022, pp. 694-711; Sergiu Gherghina, Sergiu Mișcoiu, “Crowd-Sourced Legislation and Politics: The Legitimacy of Constitutional Deliberation in Romania” in *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 63, no. 1, 2016, pp. 27-36.

⁸⁷ Chambers, *art. cit.*

⁸⁸ Raelin, *art. cit.*

⁸⁹ Chambers, *art. cit.*

⁹⁰ Ryfe, *art. cit.*

⁹¹ Hélène Landemore, “Deliberation, Cognitive Diversity, and Democratic Inclusiveness: An Epistemic Argument for the Random Selection of Representatives” in *Synthese*, 190 (7), pp. 1209-1231 [<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-012-0062-6>].

The quality of the discussion is ensured by the research work the participants will make on the subject before they join the meeting.⁹² Studies on the insertion of democratic deliberation as a decision-making procedure in unions in Italy by Baccaro show that the best “interest mediation” is open, sincere communication rather than complex argumentative lines. In this sense, deliberation is preferred to interest aggregation or ranking procedures for shared group benefits. In addition, it leaves the participants with the perception that the final decisions pertain to them.⁹³ The employees can ideally see their values integrated into their activity, a form of considerable empowerment that follows a genuine employee-centered approach.⁹⁴

Some other studies reveal that deliberation may help set new labor standards and should be taken out in the public sphere, including citizens, journalists, and representatives of all sectors. A rich cognitive contribution would increase their capacity to issue, implement, and monitor labor regulations, counterbalancing the centralized style of leadership.⁹⁵

Deliberation was associated with various concepts, including leadership, resulting in “deliberative leadership”. Although this association of terms confers a virtuous attribute to leadership, the concept is dependent on the leader’s conduct. The leader is expected to initiate change and manage change implementation. These clashing senses have been reconciled in what the authors call a good “symbiosis”, where they actually complete one another,⁹⁶ engaged in a “shared communication” irrespective of their rank. The dialogic dimension of leadership enhances the relational aspects among members as it calls for active listening, entertainment of new ideas and deep reflection. Deliberative organizational leadership is egalitarian and creates a safe space for discussion and competition of perspectives. When implemented, the success rate in democratic organizational rehabilitation and engagement is guaranteed. Repetition of such practices would eventually embed in a seamlessly

⁹² Ami Gutmann and Dennis F. Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004.

⁹³ Baccaro, “‘Aggregative’ and ‘Deliberative’ Decision-making Procedures”.

⁹⁴ Raelin, *art. cit.*

⁹⁵ Archon Fung, “Deliberative Democracy and International Labor Standards” in *Governance*, 16 (1), 2003, pp. 51–71 [<https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0491.t01-1-00204>].

⁹⁶ Dobrinka Chankova and Valentin Vasilev, “Leadership and Deliberative Democracy in the Changing World: Competing or Reconcilable Paradigms?” in *Perspectives of Law and Public Administration*, vol. 9 (2), 2020, pp. 209-219.

deliberative routine, moving the focus from the leader to the problem to be discussed, capitalizing on the patience, discourse competencies, robust construction of arguments, assertiveness, trust in the process, the will to change the status quo, a great sense of responsibility of the participants. We have to mention that the process is not an easy way out of the deadlock, it can be timely and complicated to handle,⁹⁷ but it can boost the energy of absent, inactive members.

In this study, we aimed to check the “desirability” of such a leadership style in the Romanian labor unions by determining members’ attitudes towards this idea. Given the fact that the process forces members to step outside their comfort zone, we consider the possibility of registering a wide range of attitudes. Publicly expressing opinions is not only a privilege but includes the risk of criticism, of prevailing arguments, the risk of getting opinions overridden, of adversity, as well. The uncomfortable situations are to be rationally tackled, converting “the proper decision” into a supreme good for all. Nevertheless, the supreme good retains a feature of “civility”, that is formed by the combination of four key elements: “concurrency, collectiveness, collaboration, and compassion”.⁹⁸ We assume that the success of the association of union decision-making processes with democratic deliberation depends on the overall availability of union members to manage the complexity of the deliberative democratic processes.⁹⁹

Research Design

Our study uses 18 semi-structured interviews with active labor union basic members (with no leadership function at any level), who were selected to increase variation in age and geographical distribution (balance between the counties of the eight Romanian historical regions). The profile of the interviewees is presented in Table 1. For confidentiality and anonymity purposes, the initials of their names are fictional. The interviews were conducted face-to-face (5) and online (13) in May and June 2023. Our interview guide includes questions about the nature and the degree of the involvement of

⁹⁷ Raelin, *art. cit.*

⁹⁸ *Ibidem.*

⁹⁹ Gianluca Schiavo, Adolfo Villafiorita and Massimo Zancanaro, “(Non-)Participation in Deliberation at Work: A Case Study of Online Participative Decision-making” in *New Technology, Work and Employment*, vol. 34 (1), 2019, pp. 37–58 [https://doi.org/10.1111/ntwe.12127].

the respondent in the labor movement, his/her knowledge about the decision-making processes within the union and about deliberation and deliberative democracy in general, his/her assessment of the degree of implementation of deliberative mechanisms in the collective processes of decision-making specific to that union, and about the consequences of the current status of the (lack of) implementation of such mechanisms over the vigor, cohesion and future development of the organization.

Within the qualitative research framework, we use a mix of inductive and deductive thematic analyses to identify the main recurrent arguments presented by the respondents and to cross them to produce a cohesive narrative structured into four points that we will present in the following pages.

Analysis

1. Deliberative democracy – a would-be useful mechanism for the labor unions

The labor union members believe that deliberative democracy is, in principle, a helpful mechanism for consolidating their organizations. According to many respondents, the information about deliberation and deliberative democracy is not very commonly spread, and “it’s a pity, as such things could strengthen us as a union both internally and externally” (*OI*). Why could deliberative democracy and other related practices be helpful for the advancement of labor unions? Our interviewees put forward at least three arguments during our investigation.

First, deliberation is by its essence a “genuinely democratic process” (*NN*), as it includes, as opposed to regular basic debates and other processes of decision-making, a “high preoccupation for inclusiveness and respect of the others” (*VU*). Other respondents highlighted the positive effects of deliberation on the overall legitimacy of “any organization, being political, union-like or non-governmental” (*AP*). One of them stressed the fact that:

“[...] in the Western or the Nordic societies, where I know that deliberation is more extensively practiced, the institutions are more legitimate, and the civil society is also more legitimate” (*OO*).

Then, deliberation could raise the level of cohesion and coherence of labor unions through “well-structured, serious discussions, much-needed in order to produce pertinent public propositions” (*EV*). While deliberating

upon specific issues, “the union members gain in terms of awareness” (AP), “consistency and ability to defend the common interests with more success” (PH). One of the respondents indicated that as far as she was aware, “deliberation could also be considered as a training tool for the union leaders and members” (IZ).

Last but not least, the adoption of deliberation could facilitate a “rapprochement with other more experienced and powerful labor unions of the European countries” (TH). Knowing or guessing that such practices are more present in the Western and Northern European countries, several respondents stated that “our labor unions could be more in line with their foreign counterparts” (KL) if deliberation was implemented in Romania, and “this could enhance our capacity to fight for our rights efficiently” (NN).

2. Deliberation – an undeservedly ignored democratic tool

The union members believe that there is widespread ignorance about the existence and the functioning of deliberative democracy both in broader society and in the labor unions themselves. About half of the interviewees admit the fact that they have themselves a “limited and incomplete” (PG) knowledge about what deliberation means or that they just “heard some positive things about it” (LI). At the same time, they believe that the other members of the unions are “even less knowledgeable, as nobody trained them about it” (VU). Only three of the interview participants think that they have a “pretty good idea about how deliberation is supposed to work” (NN) or about the expected outcomes of a process of deliberation (EV).

Regarding the notoriety of deliberation within wider society, most respondents regret that “it is really an obscure concept; nobody knows about it” (DO). So, there is a higher degree of ignorance about deliberation in the broader public than among the members of the labor unions, and this is because...

“[...] even if we, the union members, are not great intellectuals, we are nevertheless more aware of societal issues than the regular people” (RD).

What are the reasons for this widespread ignorance? First, our respondents pointed out the inconsistency of Romania’s civic and political culture, where “there is no interest to cultivate criticism and to stimulate the individuals in thinking independently” (ER). Then, because deliberative democracy is “maybe too recent, even for the most active actors, such as the NGO or union leaders” (PH), and so there was no time to understand its

principles and “even less time to implement them” (*DO*). Finally, this ignorance is due to the orientation of the “Romanian unions, but also maybe of other unions in this part of Europe” towards the satisfaction of some “basic economic and social demands” (*OI*). A loquacious respondent put it in a nutshell:

“We need to get higher minimal wages from the Government. We ask for decent salaries and they give us peanuts money. So, what are we supposed to deliberate upon? Admit that this is not very sophisticated!” (*KL*).

Thus, even for those who think they are knowledgeable to some extent about deliberation, there is a belief that it rather serves “higher” more complex purposes rather than minimal and simple demands, which explains why there is an inherent reluctance about using it in the working unions’ activities.

3. The centralized leadership – an obstacle against deliberation

If deliberation is paradoxically both needed and ignored, this is also because of the Romanian labor unions’ structure, composition, and practices. Several respondents underlined the “severe concerns” about the degree of “internal democracy of the Romanian labor unions” (*OO*). One of them explained that...

“[...] we have some more or less brilliant leaders, who sometimes succeed to defend some of our interests, but they would not drop power even the Apocalypse was coming” (*TH*).

Other participants in our research pointed out the “pyramidal form organization” of labor unions, which is always based on a “strong and long-lasting leadership” (*PA*). The absence of a limit concerning the number of terms in office that a union leader can have is a preoccupation for another respondent, who rhetorically asks himself:

“What would be the interest of an ‘eternal’ union leader to promote deliberation? Could the result of a proper deliberation be the decision to reappoint him a thousand-plus-one time?”

In other words, deliberative practices are not encouraged in the labor unions as they would lead to a more substantive contestation of the union leaders who are too well-entrenched.

However, there are also some more structural impediments against deliberation in the manner the labor unions are structured, apart from the central role of the organization’s national leadership. Different interviewees

complained about the “lack of transparency of the decision-making processes” (*DO*), the “quasi-formal but content-empty consultations” (*VU*) of the regular members by the unions’ leadership, the “caporalization” (*RD*) of the local committees by the unions’ central ruling groups (*AP*). All in all, our respondents suggest that deliberation is unlikely because it would emerge on an unwelcoming, if not hostile, ground, as the unions’ leading structures would not accept practices that could jeopardize their positions.

4. The lack of deliberative practices – a barrier against the unions’ modernization

Most respondents believe that the lack or very low level of integration of deliberative democracy in the collective decision-making processes prevents the modernization of the Romanian labor unions. There are several ways that this delay or even absence of incorporation of deliberative mechanisms negatively affects the labor unions’ modernization processes.

To begin with, as one of the young interviewees put it, “To be honest, the Romanian labor unions are like elephants, and some deliberations, some debates, some genuine discussions could play the role of a court circuit that could activate and put them in a motion” (*TH*)

Apart from this “awakening” role, an influx of deliberation could “force our union leaders to open the organizations” (*AP*), which are now “so closed, so unfriendly to their members” (*DO*). By introducing a dose of deliberative democracy, “many union members who are asleep could find the motivations to become active” (*LI*), and many workers who are now reluctant to be involved in the unions’ activities would “find the needed impulse to join us” (*ER*).

Moreover, the lack of proper “contradictory debates, discussions, deliberations within the unions” prevents the capacity of the unions to internalize the mechanisms of “wider dialogue and negotiation”, not only with the Government and the business unions, but also with other “relevant social actors” (*VU*). One of the respondents described the situation in a suggestive manner:

“We are like the kids whose only contacts are their respective mothers and fathers; we do not know – and maybe do not feel the need – to talk to other parts of our society” (*OI*).

So, deliberation could unchain the imagination of the members of the labor unions, providing them with ideas and models of practices that could make them “socially valid, more present, more ‘in’” (RD).

Nevertheless, most respondents are pretty pessimistic about the real possibilities of introducing deliberative democracy in labor unions and, in this way, making them more modern. This is precisely because there is a “widely spread lethargy among us, the basic members” and a “self-deceiving satisfaction with the status-quo among them, the unions’ leaders” (AP). The novelty of deliberation, the complexity of its tools, and, above, the incentive to use it as opposed to the less demanding, although less stimulating and effective current activities are among the would-be obstacles against the enhancement of labor unionism via the implementation of deliberative mechanisms.

Conclusion

The findings of our investigation confirm the disconnection between rank-and-file members of the unions and the leading elites. Whether there is discontent or protest, the situation presents *deliberativeness*, basically what Young identifies as a need and space for deliberation. The fact that the union members are appreciative of deliberation shows awareness of the benefits of this mechanism and the potential to respond to a comprehensive series of issues related to legitimacy, the quality of debate, and the emancipation of the unions. Even if some of the respondents showed concerns about the framework of discussion, they believe they are entitled to point out, better than anyone, to the employment issues in Romania. They might feel discouraged from resorting to such tools due to the need for a complex formulation of demands rather than the defense of the bare minimum.

Conversely, there are few incentives for the representative elites to apply this tool. As predictable, the lack of alternation to power contributes to maintaining the status quo. Most leaders try to hold on to power for as long as possible and to ease their work. Deliberation would open a new way to scrutinize management activity, which is less convenient than the current leadership conduct. We note the incongruence of the interests of the members and the unions’ elites. While union members acknowledge that democratic deliberation could enhance internal democracy, they can hardly foresee its implementation as a decision-making process.

The reform tested for labor union revitalization aligns with the “powers” mentioned by Levesque and Murray: “internal solidarity, external solidarity, and strategic and discursive capacity”. These elements further build “deliberative vitality”.¹⁰⁰

This chapter opens avenues for further in-depth research regarding deliberative sectoral and social approaches, inter-union collaborative activity, and congruence between the leaders and the members of a union, federation, or confederation.

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¹⁰⁰ Christian Lévesque, and Gregor Murray, “Understanding Union Power: Resources and Capabilities for Renewing Union Capacity” in *European Review of Labour and Research*, 16 (3), 2010, pp. 333–350 [https://doi.org/10.1177/1024258910373867].

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Table 1: The Profile of Interviewees

No	Initials	County	Age	Branch	Gender
1	VU	CJ	41	Health	F
2	PP	CJ	51	Industry	M
3	OI	IS	28	Education	F
4	TH	AG	62	Administration	F
5	LI	SJ	36	Police	M
6	DO	BC	44	Health	F
7	NN	B	35	NGO	M
8	PP	BV	48	Administration	F
9	ER	CT	58	Education	M
10	PH	MH	41	Police	F
11	KL	HG	60	Industry	M
12	AP	TM	34	Education	F
13	IZ	PH	55	Administration	F
14	PG	VS	58	Industry	M
15	OO	AR	42	NGO	F
16	EV	BH	40	Arts	M
17	PA	B	33	Health	M
18	RD	SB	41	Industry	F