

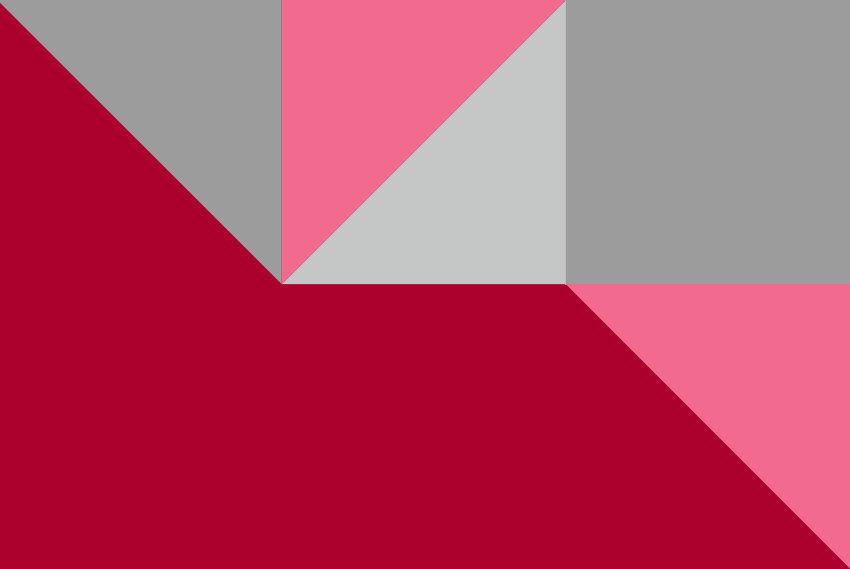


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Improving Collective Bargaining in
European Union. Comparison of
Different Industrial Relations
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Challenges and revitalization hopes for the Greek trade union movement in the post-pandemic era

Christina Korkontzelou
Panteion University



Greek trade unionism in crisis:
Challenges for TUs within the social, economic and
political context from the 1990s to Covid-19

- **The Memoranda and the deregulation of the collective bargaining system** Weakening of cross-sectoral and occupational bargaining (Koukiadaki and Kokkinou 2018)
- **Flexibilization of labour relations in the service economy since the 1990s** – traditionally, Greek trade unions held power in the industrial sector and in public/state-owned enterprises (Bithymitris and Kotsonopoulos 2018)
- **Under-representation of precarious workforce, females, youth and immigrants in the Confederations.** Absence of unionizing campaigns addressed to them. TU density gap in private and public sector that exists until today (Zisimopoulos 2018)
- **Bureaucratization of the official trade union confederations.** The issue of “governmental trade unionism” (Vogiatzoglou 2018)

- **Inability to renew mobilization strategies and repertoire of actions**
Institutional bargaining vs long-lasting industrial actions?
- **GSEE Confederation's political orientation throughout the anti-austerity protest cycle (2011-2015).** The loss of legitimacy (Bithymitris and Kotsonopoulos 2018)
- **Restriction of TU collective action freedom** by New Democracy government bills in 2019, 2020
- **The Covid-19 pandemic effect – job insecurity, increase in unemployment and employers' misconduct** (Kapsalis 2021)
Unlike other European countries, the suspension of employment contracts at the beginning of the lockdown and the protection of working rights during the suspension, were not products of social dialogue negotiations between social partners, but **emergency measures imposed unilaterally by the government, which enterprises had the right to implement if needed, without prior notice to the employees.**



Grassroots responses to TU crisis

- **Emergence of “grassroots” trade unions and workers’ collectives** in telecommunications, telecommunications, catering, private schools, courier companies, and publishing houses since mid-1990s. **Organizing the precarious worker**

Drawing from an anthropological approach, **“Grassroots”** is conceptualized as a wide **range of everyday practices of collective action and resistance, as well as expressions of solidarity on behalf of laborers in response to the new economic conditions.** These practices extend beyond the dominant (legal) discourses of what a trade union should be and do, although they do not entirely negate the existing structures.

- **Alliance building with social movement organizations (SMOs). First Coordination of Primary Trade Unions (2009)** – the **“third pole”** of Greek TU movement beyond the Confederations and TUs affiliated with PAME (Greek Communist Party)

- **Non-trade union grassroots initiatives during the anti-austerity protest cycle** (Workers' Clubs, occupations, solidarity cooperatives) – “the experimental laboratories of the Greek TU movement” (Vogiatzoglou 2015, 2018)

*“The interesting characteristic of the [experimental laboratories] is that, instead of debating whether one or the other trade union activity is more suitable for the emergency situation in which Greek society has found itself, **they seem to renegotiate the content of trade unionism as a whole—questioning self-evident notions such as the workplace and power relations inside it while proposing radical transformations of the workers' organization format and content.**”(2018: 10)*

Challenges posed to grassroots trade unionism

- Minimal institutional affiliation and restricted scope for collective bargaining
- Limited capacity for sectoral nation-wide mobilizations
- Marginalization due to Covid-19



Towards a resurgence of labor struggles and trade union renewal?

The impact of Covid-19 on labour politics

- Globally, the pandemic rendered visible **processes of exploitation and dispossession experienced by the most vulnerable labour groups** (Kasmir 2020)
- The categorizations of “**essential**”/”**non-essential**” workers – how did they inform labourers’ perception and identity?
- Digitalization and **social media networking boost**



The “Support Art Workers” movement



- “Support Art Workers” initiative was launched **in April 2020**
- The sector of arts was brutally hit by the pandemic, since the majority of artists were traditionally working with **seasonal labour contracts**
- **Artists were excluded from the 800-euros state support benefit**, provided to all suspended workers during the first lockdown
- The movement **was initiated by left-wing non-unionized artists as a social media campaign** and tried to address the invisibility of the labour conditions in the cultural sector. **It was later joined by TUs in the sector**, such as Greek Actors’ Union, Unions in Dance and Performance sector and others.
- Organized **symbolic actions**, such as street performances, protests and sit-ins to the Ministry of Culture, musical lives, which received **huge society support**
- **Re-introduced “class” and “worker” as a category of identification and consciousness building** for a **mostly young, heterogeneous, fragmented and precarious workforce, where unionizing processes were scarce** – it managed to **rejuvenate already existing unions and leave a legacy of struggle**

The struggle of E-food platform delivery drivers



- **First strike of workers in the gig/platform economy in Greece**
- Existence of a **grassroots trade union of delivery drivers since 2006 (SVEOD)** with strong international alliances. SVEOD militants had attempted to organize E-food workers
- The **“freelancer” regime** in E-food company
- Organization of the first strike through Viber chats in **September 2021**
- The **“moto-strike”**. Collaboration with Sectoral Trade Union in Tourism and Food Industry and the sectoral Federation
- **Consumers’ boycott of E-food in social media**
- The **creation of the enterprise E-food Trade union and the fight for CBA negotiations**
- The propagation of struggles – **strike of Wolt platform delivery company drivers**

Conclusions

Labor struggles which spring **beyond TU structures**, and subsequently **lead to TU formation or rejuvenation of existent TUs**. **A path to the renewal of trade unionism in Greece?**

Characteristics

- Networking/support/coalition building with **SMOs and grassroots initiatives**
 - Contribution of **digital campaigns**/social media interventions to **forging solidarity ties with society** (e.g. boycott actions)
 - **Novel repertoire of actions** (e.g. moto-strike)
 - Common value set/identity formation for the members - **legitimacy from within**
 - Reintroduction of **class-oriented politics**
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