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YOUTH AND TRADE UNIONS IN CROATIA: AN OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF SOME THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL INSIGHTS

Mladi i sindikati u Hrvatskoj: pregled i analiza nekih teorijskih i empirijskih uvida

ABSTRACT: *Based on the review and analysis of scientific and trade union literature, as well as the comparison of various primary and secondary research data at the level of descriptive statistics, this paper aims at answering some of the questions that arise in relation to the attitudes of young people in Croatia towards trade unions: the various reasons for young people's non-membership or reduced membership in trade unions, the increase in young people's distrust of trade unions, and the question of how familiar young people in Croatia are with collective labour rights and, in general, with the work and activities of trade unions in Croatia. The theoretical and empirical findings, presented and analysed, as well as the conclusions of this paper, could contribute to a better understanding of the attitudes of young people in Croatia towards trade unions, and could have an application value in the design of labour rights education programmes in the framework of civic education, as well as in the implementation of various activities to attract new members among trade unions themselves in the Republic of Croatia.*

KEY WORDS: *trade unions, youth in Croatia, trust, civic competences, collective labour rights.*

APSTRAKT: *Na temelju pregleda i analize znanstvene i sindikalne literature, kao i usporedbom različitih primarnih i sekundarnih istraživačkih podataka na razini deskriptivne statistike, u radu se nastoji odgovoriti na neka od pitanja koja se postavljaju u pogledu odnosa mladih u Hrvatskoj prema sindikatima: o različitim razlozima neučlanjivanja ili manjeg učlanjivanja mladih u sindikate, porastu nepovjerenja mladih u sindikate, te koliko su mladi u Hrvatskoj upoznati s kolektivnim radnim pravima i općenito radom i djelovanjem sindikata u Hrvatskoj. Prikazani i analizirani teorijski i empirijski uvidi, kao i zaključci ovog rada mogu*

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doprinijeti boljem razumijevanju stavova mladih prema sindikatima u Hrvatskoj, te mogu imati aplikativnu vrijednost pri osmišljavanju programa pravne pismenosti u području radničkih prava unutar građanskog odgoja i obrazovanja, kao i pri provedbi različitih aktivnosti privlačenja novih članova među samim sindikatima u RH.

KLJUČNE REČI: *sindikati, mladi u Hrvatskoj, povjerenje, građanske kompetencije, kolektivna radnička prava.*

1. Introduction²

Since the 1980s, worldwide and across Europe “the unionisation rates have declined” (Waddington, 2014; Frangi, Koos and Hadziabdic, 2017; Vandaele, 2018), and there has been a recognised need among trade unions to develop various strategies for their “revival” or “revitalisation” (Pološki Vokić and Obadić, 2012; Pološki Vokić, 2013; Waddington, 2014). One of these strategies refers to various “activities to attract new members” (Pološki Vokić, 2013:4), which is important because membership is a “key resource for trade unions” and “represents a mobilisation potential, is a source of financial power” and means “legitimacy (representativeness)” (Bagić, 2010:136). In this sense, various reasons for the decline in membership are mentioned in the literature, namely at the “level of society” (such as the development of labour legislation in the neoliberal direction, tertiarisation and changes in the employment structure, increasing unemployment, etc.); “at the level of organisations” (“opposition of managers, introduction of new technologies”, etc.); “at the level of individuals” (“individualism, changing concept of career”, etc.); “at the level of trade unions themselves” (“inactivity and fragmentation of trade unions”, trade union leadership, etc.) (Pološki Vokić, 2013:4). Therefore, the decline in trade union membership in Croatia is also not peculiar, but this fact should be placed in the framework of general, global and European trends, as well as in the discussions interpreting and analysing the decline in trade union membership in the scientific and trade union literature. However, with regard to the decline in membership, the introductory theme should first be placed in the context of the changes in Croatian society in the 1990s and then in contemporary Croatian society, which for the purposes of this paper we can define as the period from the new decade onwards. From the period before the 1990s, when the majority of workers were trade union members, until 1994, when about 70% of workers in Croatia were in a trade union, and until e.g. 2000, when this number decreased to about 45% (Jolić, 2002:5), Croatian society went through the process of the first period of transition, which was marked by the War, privatisation, massive decline of enterprises (bankruptcies, closure of enterprises, etc.), the decline in

2 Part of the data on young people’s trust in trade unions in Croatia was presented by the author of the paper at the III. International Scientific Conference “Legal tradition and new legal challenges”, Faculty of Law, University of Novi Sad, 29-30 September 2021, entitled “Trust of the Young People in Croatia in the Trade Unions: Some Empirical Insights”.

GDP, an increase in the “number of unemployed, a decline in average wages, an increase in inflation”, deindustrialisation etc. (Jolić, 2002:5–11; Bagić, 2010:109–113). However, trade union membership in contemporary Croatian society is best described by the data on collective agreement coverage and union density that we provide below.

According to data from 2010, the “coverage rate of workers by collective agreements in Croatia” was roughly estimated at about 61%, which is a high level, comparable to the level in the “15 old EU Member States”, where it is on average about 68% (Bagić, 2010:197). For comparison, this “degree of coverage by collective agreements” was at the level of Germany; “it is significantly above the average of the transition countries”, but it is also significantly “lower than in the Scandinavian countries and in Austria”, where it is around 80% (Bagić, 2010:197). Moreover, in Croatia in 2010, “large differences in union density” were found between the “public and private sectors”: “union density in the private sector was about 17%”, while in the public sector (overall in “state administration, public services and public enterprises”) it was about 68% (Bagić, 2010:140). According to data from 2014, union density in Croatia has decreased over time (from “about 38% in 2000 to about 25% in 2016”), and the coverage of collective agreements has declined (from “about 65% in 2000 to about 53% in 2016”) (Bagić, 2019:96).

According to data collected in the autumn of 2014, “about 570 collective agreements existed” in Croatia (Bagić, 2015:3), and these collective agreements “regulate the rights of a total of about 648,000 dependent employees in the Republic of Croatia, which, out of about 1,231,000 dependent employees, represents a coverage of about 53%” (Bagić, 2015:6; Bagić, 2019:96). Although there are still large differences in “coverage by collective agreements in the public sector” (about 88%), in “public enterprises” (about 75%) and in “private enterprises” (about 36%), this indicative level is still “above the average of other transition countries” (Bagić, 2019:96). For comparison, the “coverage rate through collective agreements” in Germany is “about 56% in 2016”; it is lower than the average coverage rate in “seventeen EU Member States, where it was about 69% in 2015”; and it is significantly lower than in “Denmark, Finland and Sweden, where it was above 80% in 2016” (Waddington, Mueller and Vandaele, 2019:9–10).

At the time of writing, the determination of membership, i.e. representativeness, is ongoing in Croatia, most recently initiated in 2017/2018. There are currently 328 active trade unions in Croatia, most, though not all, of which are grouped in three representative headquarters: “Independent Croatian Trade Unions”, which has around 100,000 members; “Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Croatia”, which also has around 100,000 members, and “Register of Croatian Trade Unions”, which has around 70,000 members (Filipović, 2023). In this sense, the total number of trade union members from this period belonging to one of the trade union headquarters can be estimated at around 300,000, and the number of trade union members is higher if we consider that not all trade unions belong to the trade union headquarters mentioned above. Therefore, attracting new members is one of the “important

strategies for revitalising the union” (Pološki Vokić, 2013:4), and that issue is one of the “key challenges” for the future of the collective bargaining in Croatia (Bagić, 2019:107). In this sense, the need to attract “traditionally non-unionised groups” is acknowledged, namely “women, young people, immigrants, and highly educated workers and workers in the service sector”, as well as “workers with flexible working arrangements” and temporary workers (fixed-term, part-time and the like)” (Pološki Vokić and Obadić, 2012:285; Pološki Vokić, 2013:11; Waddington, 2014:8).

In relation to the title topic of this paper, it is also interesting to highlight some available data on unionisation rates with regard to age in Croatia. According to data from 2009, the union density of young people aged “18–29” was 19.8% (while it was 34.1% for those aged 30–49 and 56.1% for those aged 50–65); the union density of young people “aged 18–29” employed in the private sector was 9.9% (while it was 15.0% for 30–49 year olds and 38.2% for 50–65 year olds), while the unionisation rate of young people “aged 18–29” in the public sector is significantly higher, at 52.2% (while it is 69.3% for 30–49 year olds and 75.0% for 50–65 year olds) (Bagić, 2010:151). In other words, according to the data presented, “only about 1/5 of workers” aged 18–29 were members of a trade union, and this “below-average unionisation rate” of young people indicates a further decline in trade union membership in Croatia (Bagić, 2010:148).

Furthermore, in addition to the above-mentioned reasons for the decline in the number of trade union members at the level of society, the processes of total depopulation, i.e. the total decrease in the number of inhabitants in Croatia³ (with an increase in mortality, a decrease in the birth rate, a high emigration rate, etc.) can be highlighted as fundamental demographic processes since the mid-1990s in Croatia. The analysis of the various demographic trends, especially migration (emigration and immigration), is beyond the scope of this paper, but it should be emphasised that, according to the demographer Šterc (2023), since Croatia’s accession to the EU “about 300,000 employed citizens have left Croatia”, which is information that should also undoubtedly be highlighted as important for analysing the reasons for the decline in union membership at the societal level. In addition, in the period from 2008 to 2018, the “relevant labour contingent of the population”, which refers to the population aged 20 to 64, decreased by “150 thousand (5.6%)”, with the younger segment, which includes the population aged 20 to 34, decreasing the most compared to other age groups, namely by “107 thousand (12.4%)” (Matković, 2020:20). Moreover, according to the projections of the “Europop 2018 Population Model”, a further “decline in the younger” labour force contingent will continue in the period from 2018 to 2030, with a similar dynamic as before, i.e. “from 755 to 638 thousand” (Matković, 2020:20).

3 According to “The Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Croatia 2021”, Croatia has 3,871,833 inhabitants, and compared to the 2011 Census, the number of inhabitants has decreased by 413,056 persons or 9.64% (DZS, 2022), while the long-term ageing process of the population of Croatia continues. Namely, in the 2021 Census, the share of persons aged 65 years and older (22.45%) exceeds the number of young people aged 0-14 years (14.27%) (While people aged 15-24 is 10.27%; 25-34 is 11.40%; 35-49% is 20.23%; 50-64 is 21.38%) (DZS, 2022).

With regard to the data and trends mentioned in the introduction, this paper focuses on the review and analysis of academic and trade union literature, as well as various primary and secondary research data at the level of descriptive statistics, which could answer some of the questions that can be asked regarding the relations between young people in Croatia and trade unions: about the reasons for young people's non-membership or lower membership in trade unions, young people's increasing distrust of trade unions and how familiar young people in Croatia are with collective labour rights and more generally with the work and activities of trade unions in Croatian society. In addition to reviewing and analysing current data on the attitudes of young people in Croatia towards trade unions and their knowledge of collective rights and trade unions, the theoretical and empirical findings, presented and analysed, as well as the conclusions of this paper may be useful in designing a programme of legal education in the field of labour rights as a part of civic education, as well as in implementing various activities to attract new members among trade unions in Croatia.

2. Some reasons why young people do not join trade unions – analysis and literature review

Based on the review and analysis of the scientific and trade union literature, we will select below several possible answers to the question of the reasons for young people's non-membership or weak membership in trade unions. However, young workers are not a homogeneous group, and these answers do not exhaust the above question, but are intended to provide a theoretical and empirical insight into different, partly contradictory but also interrelated, possible answers.

One answer to the question of the reasons for young people's non-membership in trade unions emphasises the process of socialisation, i.e. "the dominant social and political influence on young people's attitudes, beliefs and ideology during their formative years" (Waddington and Kerr, 2002:299). In Britain, Waddington and Kerr (2002:299) speak of the generation of the so-called "Thatcher children", committed to consumerism and individualism and "ideologically opposed to the idea of trade unionism". In Croatian society, such an interpretation could be placed alongside the growing up of young people in the context of the long-standing rule of the "Croatian Democratic Union", a political party with a conservative, Christian Democratic orientation. In this sense, despite the social teaching of the Catholic Church (which since the 1891 encyclical "Rerum novarum" refers to the need for social protection and protection of the dignity of workers), one can speak of non-membership of the younger generations in trade unions for ideological reasons, i.e. because of acceptance of the prevailing neoliberal principles and values. The neoliberal attitudes and values that oppose the trade union movement include the value of individualism and the emphasis on the idea of the free labour market, as well as the attitude that in the transition countries workers' solidarity is seen as a part or idea of the collectivist past, still supported by left-wing citizens, and that if the

worker is “paid enough” for his/her work, there is no need to organise workers in trade unions and that industrial action and strikes are not necessary. This is how trade unionism was interpreted, for example, by F.W. Taylor within the method of scientific management in the early 20th century (Kregar, 2011:10) and by contemporary supporters of neoliberalism today, in the 21st century. In this context, it should not be particularly emphasised that the macro-political neoliberal environment is “not favourable” for trade unions, nor is the “micro-environment” created by managers and private entrepreneurs, who are also not favourable to trade unions because they fight against “flexibility in managing people and their salaries” (Pološki Vokić and Obadić, 2012:279).

Due to the influence of socialisation agents (parents, family, media etc.) on the attitudes and beliefs of young people, it is not unimportant to emphasise that various studies on institutional trust in Croatia, conducted in recent decades on representative samples of the general population in Croatia, undoubtedly point to low trust of Croatian citizens in various institutions, including trade unions, i.e. to a continuous decline in the level of trust in trade unions and an increase in distrust towards them (Sekulić and Šporer, 2010; Trzun, 2012; Baloban Črpić and Ježovita, 2019; Ježovita, 2019; Bovan and Baketa, 2022). This is in line with the theories of the “crisis of confidence in institutions” and therefore in the trade unions as well, but in contrast to the approaches and research findings that question the “crises of confidence” in trade unions (Frangi, Koos and Hadziabdic, 2017:846). Namely, based on the statistical processing of data from the European Values Study (EVS) from 14 European countries between 1981 and 2009, Frangi, Koos and Hadziabdic (2017:840) conclude that while trust in institutions “has been declining since the 1970s”, there is an interesting divergence between “variations in trust in trade unions and union density”. According to their regression analysis, “union density decreases almost linearly, while the percentage of people who declare to have confidence in unions remains relatively stable” between 1981 and 1999 and then “increases significantly between 1999 and 2008” (Frangi, Koos and Hadziabdic, 2017:840). Therefore, Frangi, Koos and Hadziabdic (2017:846) conclude that “while union density has declined, trust in trade unions has increased overall in Western countries” during this analyzed period. However, when comparing the data from the EVS for Croatia, for the period from 1999 to 2017, a “noticeable decline in trust in all institutions”, can be observed (with the exception of the army and, to a lesser extent, the police) (Baloban Črpić and Ježovita, 2019:37). At the same time, it should be emphasised that a decline in trust was also recorded in the institutions that citizens trust the most in all three EVS surveys, as well as in the institutions that citizens trusted less or little in previous surveys (Baloban Črpić and Ježovita, 2019). In terms of trust in trade unions, there was also a decline in “very high” and “high” trust: 1999 (27%); 2008 (17%); 2017 (15.1%), and an increase in distrust (“no trust”): 1999 (14.0%); 2008 (23.1%); 2017 (33.2%) (Ježovita, 2019:263). Therefore, the data on young people’s (dis)trust in trade unions will be presented in a separate chapter of this paper as another possible answer to the question of why young people do not join trade unions.

The third answer to the question of why young people do not join trade unions also emphasises the socialisation of young people and their adoption of values that prevail in societies, but it is an answer that contrasts with the first one presented. Namely, the third response emphasises that the values of young people in post-industrial societies are “less materialistic” than the values of previous generations and that young people express so-called “post-materialist values” more frequently or more often (Waddington and Kerr, 2002:299–300). Such an interpretation is based on the assumption that the richer post-industrial societies of the 1980s and 1990s experienced a “socio-economic development” that changed people’s values and beliefs in the direction of spreading “expressive values” (Inglehart and Welzel, 2007). As people become more materially and existentially secure, “expressive values” are spreading in place of “survival values”, emphasising individualism (with a more humanistic rather than egocentric orientation, as associated with neoliberal social Darwinism), quality of life, autonomy, freedom of choice, self-realisation, protection and preservation of the environment, etc. (Inglehart and Welzel, 2007). At the same time, young people’s activist commitment to protecting some of these rights, such as “environmental or animal rights”, is “replacing” the earlier commitment to upholding labour rights and the idea of trade unionism (Waddington and Kerr, 2002: 300). However, the above thesis is questionable, firstly because of the assumption that “socio-economic development” has been achieved, since we can speak of the spread of “social and economic inequalities during the 1980s” (Waddington and Kerr, 2002:300), and secondly because of the assumption that young people attach greater importance to expressive values than older people, since this does not apply to those societies “that have had little or no socio-economic development” (Inglehart and Welzel, 2007:105). Nevertheless, with regard to the values of young people in Croatia, Ilišin (2011:116–117) concludes that the value system of young people in Croatia “is a mixture of materialistic and post-materialistic values” and that “support for some post-materialistic values decreases in the process of leaving school, while at the same time materialistic and traditional values are strengthened” as young people become more integrated into society. Such a conclusion is in line with the results of other empirical studies on values at the level of the general population, according to which the values of “traditionalism and (post)modernism” are simultaneously present in Croatia, i.e. that a “complex combination of re-traditionalisation and modernisation” exists at the same time (Sekulić, 2020:243).

The fourth response links young people’s lower participation in trade unions to their increasing “political apathy”, which is expressed in young people’s lower participation in political activities, non-participation in elections, parties, etc. (Waddington and Kerr, 2002:300). Still, although these conventional forms of youth participation in democratic processes are declining, young people are simultaneously participating in local civic activities and accepting and developing some other forms of participation, such as participation via the internet, etc. This is in line with interpretations that young people are not “apolitical” but “sceptical” and very critical of today’s political processes and parties. In this sense, it is interesting to point to some research data on young people’s willingness to

engage in civil activities related to trade unions, which was measured in the 2017 Youth Survey as willingness to personally participate in organising a strike (Ilišin, 2017). According to Ilišin (2017:212), 20.7% of young people were willing to organise a strike in 2004, and 29.4% of young people were willing in 2013. According to Ilišin (2017:212), such an “increase in the willingness to organise a strike” should be “interpreted in the context of other findings, according to which in the period from 2004 to 2013 the willingness to participate in elections and sign petitions decreased”, but young people’s willingness to engage in “civic activism” increased.

The fifth answer is in line with the previous one, and places young people’s reluctance or lower participation in trade unions in a broader theoretical framework, namely in connection with the so-called “concept of silent citizenship”, which can be observed in developed Western democracies but is even more pronounced in transition countries (Ravlić, 2017). Namely, this concept refers to the “declining participation of citizens in democratic processes and politics”, such as declining voter turnout, declining membership in political parties, membership and participation in protective interest groups, especially trade unions, but also decreasing participation in protest activities (strikes, demonstrations, etc.), alienation and distrust of citizens towards political democratic institutions and processes, etc. (Ravlić, 2017:109). According to Ravlić (2017:116), the decline in union density is similar to the decline in party membership, i.e. such a decline is “particularly large in Portugal and Austria, as well as in the Netherlands, Ireland, the UK, France and Germany”, while there are also exceptions among some European countries (Ravlić, 2017:116). According to Ravlić (2017:116), “union density has declined especially in transition countries”, which the author interprets partly as a consequence of the “abolition of compulsory membership and the introduction of voluntary membership”, but of course political, structural and other factors presented in the introduction cannot be ignored.

The sixth answer highlights the structure of youth employment, i.e. its greater concentration in the private service sector, where “union density is low compared to manufacturing and the public sector” (Waddington and Kerr, 2002:300). In this regard, union “revitalisation” literature “places the activities of workplace representatives at the centre of union practices”, highlighting the need to “develop workplace representation in order to ensure” membership (Waddington, 2014:10). Therefore, one of the reasons for “the low levels of membership among young people” could be the non-availability or low-availability of trade unions in private sector “where young people are employed” (Hodder and Kretsos, 2015:4). Moreover, young people in transition and post-transition societies, including in Croatia, are particularly exposed to various phenomena of flexibilisation, casual and temporary work, precarisation of work and insecure employment (i.e. more frequent employment in short-term and low-paid jobs). This has been clearly demonstrated by various academic studies and analyses of the “position of young people in the labour market in Croatia” (Ilišin and Radin, 2002; Ilišin, Mendeš and Potočnik, 2003; Ilišin, 2006, 2007; Ilišin and Radin, 2007; Ilišin, et. al., 2013; Ilišin and Spajić Vrkaš, 2017; Gvozdanić et. al., 2019; Matković, 2020). Young people exposed to

such working conditions rarely even have the opportunity to join a trade union (Hodder and Kretsos, 2015), and unions “should establish a presence at workplaces where young workers in precarious jobs are employed” in order to be their support, and help them “to reduce job insecurity and their vulnerability to exploitation and intimidation” (Waddington, 2014:28–29). Apart from jobs associated with “shorter employment contracts and unstable employment relationships”, young people in Croatia were mainly employed in seasonal jobs in the period from 2008 to 2013, with a focus on the summer months and jobs related to tourism, catering and other service activities (Matković, 2020:14). This is also an indicator for trade unions in Croatia in which direction they should increase their visibility, presence and activity.

The seventh answer to the question about the reasons for young people not joining trade unions emphasises insufficient or very limited “knowledge about trade unions” and about “what unions do” among young people, which can be an important reason for their non-membership (Waddington and Kerr, 2002:311; Hodder and Kretsos, 2015:7; Vandaele, 2018:669). Based on the presentation and analysis of the primary data on the knowledge about collective rights among vocational secondary school graduates in Croatia, as well as comparison with other, secondary research data on the knowledge about trade unions among young people in Croatia, a separate chapter of this paper is devoted to this topic.

The eighth answer or interpretation of young people’s reluctance or lower membership in trade unions highlights the fact that “in Croatia, the collective agreement applies to all workers employed by the employer for whom” the agreement is binding (Barjašić Špiler and Šepak-Robić, 2016:178). Therefore, all workers to whom this collective agreement applies, “regardless of whether they are members of a trade union”, equally “enjoy the rights under the collective agreement, and only workers who are members of the trade union that has concluded a collective agreement with the employer contribute to the conclusion of the collective agreement through the trade union membership fee” (Barjašić Špiler and Šepak-Robić, 2016:178). This puts union members “at a disadvantage position compared to workers who do not contribute in any way to the costs of collective bargaining” and has long been the subject of legal and public debate (Barjašić Špiler and Šepak-Robić, 2016:178). Therefore, it can be stated that young workers in Croatia who are employed by an employer covered by a collective agreement do not even need to join a trade union in order to enjoy some rights under the collective agreement, which may influence the motivation for at least some of these young workers to join union.

3. The (dis)trust of young people in Croatia in trade unions

The low level of young people’s trust in various institutions in Croatia, and then the continuous decline of already low trust, i.e. the continuous increase in young people’s distrust of these institutions in Croatia in recent decades, is evident from the results of various studies conducted so far on young people

in Croatia (Ilišin, et al., 2013; Ilišin, Gvozdanović and Potočnik, 2015; Franc and Međugorac, 2015; Ilišin and Spajić Vrkaš, 2017; Gvozdanović et al., 2019). By reviewing and analysing the above research conducted on a representative sample of young people (population aged 15–29), below we will highlight some of this research data on young people's trust in trade unions in Croatia and their interpretations.

According to 2012 survey data, “none of the 13 institutions studied enjoys the majority of trust among young people” (Ilišin et al., 2013:117–118). Compared to the lowest ranked institutions (“political parties, government, parliament and organs of political authority”), it can be observed that the civil sector (“associations, media, religious leaders, trade unions”) enjoys greater trust, even though this “is not high and is mostly about one third (or less) of trust” (Ilišin et al., 2013:118). In this sense, 29.2% of respondents trust trade unions (Ilišin et al., 2013:117). According to Ilišin (2013:119), the expressed “(dis) trust of young people in the institutions governing Croatian society is probably related to the perception of their (lack of) success in solving social problems”. Therefore, it is interesting to emphasise that the majority of respondents identified unemployment (79.4%), the increase in poverty (68.4%) and job insecurity (63.5%) as extremely worrying problems (Ilišin et al., 2013:119). A comparison of data from 2004 and 2013 also suggests that young people's trust in trade unions is decreasing (in 2004, 27.6% of young people trusted trade unions completely or mostly, while in 2013 this percentage decreased to 14.2%) and distrust of trade unions is increasing (in 2004, 28.3% of young people did not trust trade unions completely or mostly, while in 2013 this percentage increased to 48.5%) (Ilišin, 2017:201). In this sense, Ilišin (2017:202) concludes that the observed decline in trust in all observed institutions indicates “that young people do not trust political, media, trade union and religious organisations”, i.e. that all these institutions “have not responded to the challenges posed to them by the perennial economic and social crisis”.

Furthermore, Franc and Međugorac (2015), while analysing and comparing data from the international MYPLACE research project (which, among other things, collected data on young people's trust levels in “13 institutions in 14 countries at the end of 2012 and beginning of 2013”), conclude that “young people in Croatia differ from young people in other countries in their low trust in institutions” (Franc and Međugorac, 2015: 59). Nevertheless, regardless of the differences in the level of trust, according to the researchers, “the pattern of trust they express is characteristic of most countries” (Franc and Međugorac, 2015:59). In other words, “while they show relatively the most trust in the army and the police and the least in parties and politicians”, they are by no means special (Franc and Međugorac, 2015:60). Moreover, the authors note that according to the “theories of political trust”, which emphasise the “importance of the functioning of the institutions themselves”, the low trust of young people in institutions in Croatia “should be interpreted primarily as an indicator of the unsatisfactory functioning of the institutions themselves and not as an automatic indicator of the undemocratic character of youth” (Franc and Međugorac, 2015:60).

According to the results of the “Youth Survey in Croatia 2018/2019”, with regard to young people’s trust in institutions, it can be stated that “young people in Croatia express more institutional distrust than trust” (Gvozdanović et al., 2019:48). Namely, “none of the observed institutions” (and a total of 20 of them were included in the questionnaire) “enjoys the majority of young people’s trust, and young people express the most trust in repressive institutions”: the military (48%) and the police (41%) (Gvozdanović et al., 2019:49). Regarding trust in trade unions, 16% trust them, 37% are undecided, 37% do not trust them, and 10% do not know (Gvozdanović et al., 2019:49). Given the high percentage of 37% undecided, as well as 10% of young people who do not know how to estimate their trust, the above data should be interesting for trade unions themselves, especially because of the recruitment of new members among the young people.

The last research we will highlight in this part of the article is the latest, third study on pupils “political literacy”, conducted in the school year 2020/2021 on a “representative sample of 1,122 pupils in the final years of 59 secondary schools” in Croatia (Baketa, Bovan and Matić Bojić, 2021). The political literacy of high school graduates was studied in 2009/2010 and 2014/2015, but in the last wave of research in 2020/2021, trust in institutions was also studied. In summary, high school graduates in Croatia have a rather low level of trust in various institutions. They place the least trust in the “judiciary (16.4%) and political institutions” (Government of the Republic of Croatia – 16.8%; Croatian Parliament – 14.7%; political parties – 7.2%), as well as “various sources of information (television, print media, internet portals and social networks)” (Baketa et al., 2021:48). At the same time, the majority of students trust only “the army – 66.7% and scientists – 63.5%” (Baketa et al., 2021:48). Between the institutions that students trust the most and the least is “a heterogeneous group of institutions” including trade unions – 13.3% and civil society organisations – 25.4% (Baketa et al., 2021:48). In terms of trust in trade unions, the largest percentage of participants in this research are undecided (47.5% of high school graduates), while 19.6% do not trust trade unions at all, 19.7% mostly do not trust them, 12.3% mostly trust them and only 1.0% fully trust trade unions (Baketa et al., 2021:49). Regarding differences in mean scores by gender, the authors conclude that there is no difference in terms of trust in trade unions. In terms of regions, “students from Zagreb, Istra, Primorje and Gorski kotar” show a higher level of trust in trade unions (and the least “students from Central Croatia and Dalmatia”), while in terms of type of secondary school programme, the following average scores are observed: pupils from the high school programme have a higher level of trust in trade unions (2.77), followed by four-year vocational programmes (2.52), and pupils from the three-year vocational programme show the lowest level of trust in trade unions (2.35) (Baketa et al., 2021:50). In short, the researchers conclude that “the overall political knowledge of the entire sample is relatively low” and that “the study participants show rather low levels of political participation” and “low levels of trust in various institutions and sources of information” (Baketa et al., 2021:59).

4. Knowledge about collective labour rights and trade unionism among young people in Croatia

This part of the paper presents and analyses the data on knowledge about collective rights collected by the survey during 2019 within the EU project “With Knowledge to Law”⁴, on a convenient sample of 1102 pupils from the graduating classes of 54 vocational secondary schools in Croatia. Knowledge about collective rights was tested by the following questions in the questionnaire: Who can form a trade union in Croatia, rights under collective agreements, the purpose of a strike as a collective work stoppage by workers, and who can organise and initiate a strike⁵.

Regarding the question “Who can form a trade union in the Republic of Croatia?”, the highest percentage of the high school graduates surveyed were unsure, i.e. 47.5% of them did not know how to answer this question. The remaining answers are distributed as follows: 26.7% of the surveyed high school graduates correctly answered the question that a trade union can be established by “10 persons of full legal age”, 15.5% of them believes that a company can establish a trade union in Croatia, while 9.7% of them believe that anyone can establish a trade union in Croatia⁶.

The next question is: “What rights of workers can usually be negotiated through a collective labour agreement as an agreement between the trade union and the employer in relation to the labour contract?” (Jeknić and Čop, 2021:62). The highest percentage of the pupils surveyed, 52% of them, stated that they did not know the correct answer to this question. The remaining answers are distributed as follows: 36.7% of the graduates answered the question correctly, that “a collective agreement as an agreement between a trade union and an employer can usually establish more rights than in an employment contract” (Jeknić and Čop, 2021:62). Furthermore, 10.4% of the surveyed graduates believe that fewer rights can be agreed in a collective agreement than in an employment contract.

The third question referred to the purpose of holding the strike as a “collective stoppage of work by workers”: 71.7% of the graduates answered this question correctly, that strike is carried out with the aim of “promoting the economic and social interests of workers, due to the non-payment of wages” (Jeknić and Čop, 2021:62). In addition, 10.1% of the surveyed graduates believe that the strike is carried out with the aim of bringing about political changes, and 2.5% with the aim of causing social unrest. In addition, 14.5% of the respondents do not know how to answer this question.

4 The project holder of this project (code number UP.04.2.1.03.0013) was the trade union of employees in the Croatian school system “Preporod” together with partner institutions, and the project was implemented from 2018 to 2020.

5 The basis for determining the correctness of answers to questions on collective rights are: Article 171, paragraph 1; Article 193; Article 205, paragraph 1 and Article 205, paragraph 2 of the Croatian Labour Law (NN 93/14, 127/17, 98/19).

6 The remaining part up to 100% refers to respondents who did not answer the question, and the same reference applies to the results of all questions presented in this part of the paper.

The fourth question is: "Who can organise and start a strike"? The largest percentage of respondents, 59.2%, believe that a strike can be organised and initiated by a group of dissatisfied workers, and 18.8% believe that a strike can be organised and initiated by a works council. In addition, 12.8% of the pupils surveyed do not know how to answer this question, and only 6.7% of them answered correctly that the strike can be initiated and organised by the trade union.

In addition, the survey collected data on the degree of the trust that graduates have in trade unions, as well as their willingness to join a trade union after taking up employment. According to the survey conducted, the highest percentage of graduates surveyed expressed little or no trust in trade unions, namely 62.9% of them, which is in line with the previously presented data about the low level of trust of young people in Croatia in the trade unions. The distribution of responses is as follows: 37.5% express little trust in trade unions; 25.4% do not trust trade unions at all; 8.5% of graduates surveyed express a lot of trust in trade unions, while 2.3% have a very high level of trust in trade unions, and 25.6% do not know how to answer this question. Regarding the question whether they will "join a trade union after entering into an employment relationship", the highest percentage, 43.6% of the graduates is undecided, which is information and data that should be particularly interesting to the trade unions, while 38.1% pupils think that they will not join a union after taking up employment, and 17.1% think they will join a union after taking up employment.

The previously mentioned questions in the questionnaire included knowledge about "collective labour rights", and to these questions the surveyed graduates knew on average "one of the four questions correctly (mean/arithmetical mean = 1.44; median = 1)", which points to the conclusion that they do not know enough about the selected collective "labour rights covered by the questions in the questionnaire" (Jeknić and Čop, 2021:62). In relation to the overall index of knowledge about labour rights measured by the conducted survey, the presence of statistically significant differences between respondents was found in relation to the expressed level of "legal knowledge about legal regulations from labour law" and "this in relation to the variables of gender, place of residence and school achievement" (Jeknić and Čop, 2021:64). In terms of demonstrated knowledge of the collective labour rights dimension, female pupils achieved "a higher average of correct answers than male"; according to the place of residence where respondents live, "respondents living in smaller settlements (up to 10,000 inhabitants) and cities with up to 100,000 inhabitants achieved a higher average of correct answers" than high school graduates "living in cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants and in the city of Zagreb"; with regard to the school success of the graduates studied, pupils "who achieved very good school success showed a higher level of knowledge" on the dimension of knowledge of collective rights, while the lowest level of knowledge was shown by "pupils who achieved sufficient school success" (Jeknić and Čop, 2021:65–71).

Summarising the above data, the research findings indicate relatively weak knowledge of selected collective labour rights among the studied graduates, and

“the relationship between the socio-demographic and educational characteristics of the respondents with the index of overall knowledge of the selected labour rights” (Jeknić and Čop, 2021:72). In this sense, the results of this research, although conducted on convenient sample of pupils, which makes it impossible to generalize the results, point to the need to educate and inform young people, i.e. pupils, about the work, role and benefits of trade unions, as well as about “collective labour rights, the content of collective agreements, the benefits of collective bargaining for workers, etc.” (Jeknić and Čop, 2021:73). The research on “perceptions of the student population in Croatia regarding the role and benefits of trade unions”, conducted in 2012 on a convenient sample of “620 final year students” from “13 different faculties at the University of Zagreb”, came to the same conclusion (Vidović and Rimac, 2013:81).

That questionnaire collected data on the respondent students’ inclination to join a trade union, on the young people’s “level of knowledge about trade unions” and on their perceptions and attitudes “towards the role and benefits of trade unions” (Vidović and Rimac, 2013:82). Regarding their intention to join a trade union when they get a job, the surveyed students show great indecision. Thus, an equal number of students expressed the intention to join a union (42.14%), as well as indecision (42.14%), which is in line with the previously presented data, while a smaller number of students (15.72%) answered that they had no intention to “join a union if it exists in the organisation where they will be employed” (Vidović and Rimac, 2013:82). In terms of “active participation” in the work of the union, if they join a union, the surveyed students show a high level of willingness to be active, as 57.5% of them believe that they are likely to be active, 8.19% believe that they will certainly be active, while 34.31% believe that they are unlikely to be active (Vidović and Rimac, 2013:83).

The level of knowledge of the surveyed “students about trade unions in Croatia and trade unions in general” was assessed through questions about trade unions in Croatian society (“questions about the number of trade union headquarters, the number of registered trade unions in Croatia and the amount of trade union dues”); questions about knowledge of trade union regulations (e.g. whether “a person can be a member of several different trade unions”, whether “conditions from the collective agreement also apply to persons who are not members”, and whether the employer establishes a trade union in the company), and basic tasks and duties of the trade union (various information about the tasks of the trade union) (Vidović and Rimac, 2013:83–85). Overall, the data collected show that the majority of students surveyed have “no basic information about Croatian trade unions” and that the majority of students surveyed have a “very low level of knowledge” about trade union regulations and their “tasks and duties” (Vidović and Rimac, 2013:86).

The third group of data collected refers to “young people’s perceptions of the role and benefits of trade unions”, which were measured in the questionnaire through 25 statements on positive and negative “features of the role of trade unions”, and on positive and negative “features of usefulness of them for its members” (Vidović and Rimac, 2013:86). Overall, the data collected regarding

the assessment of the role and influence of “trade unions on society as a whole” shows young people’s uncertainty or that they do not have a clear opinion on what role “trade unions have or should have in society” (Vidović and Rimac, 2013:87). Therefore, Vidović and Rimac (2013:90) conclude that the data collected clearly show that the students surveyed “are not sufficiently familiar with trade unions as civil society organisations”, as well as “with the way they are organised and what their purpose is”.

In short, the results of both conducted studies that were presented, point to the need to educate and inform young people, i.e. pupils and students, about the work, role and benefits of trade unions, as well as about collective labour rights. The same conclusions about the need to inform young people about the work, role and activities of trade unions in Croatia are also reached when reading the data collected in the framework of three surveys on “political literacy of young people in Croatia”, the results of which were published in 2011, 2015 and 2021 (Bagić, 2011; Bagić and Gvozdanović, 2015; Baketa, Bovan and Matić Bojić, 2021).

Within the framework of these studies, some “political attitudes” were also determined, among which we emphasize below the attitude of young people towards trade unions (Bagić, 2011:47). It was measured by the level of agreement with the following statement about the strike: “When they call for a general strike, trade unions threaten the security of all of us and our country” (Bagić, 2011:65; Bagić and Gvozdanović, 2015:28; Baketa, Bovan and Matić Bojić, 2021:42). The aforementioned statement is an integral part of the “scale of activist cynicism”, which measures the degree of scepticism of high school graduates towards the “motives of non-governmental organisations and their members” as well as “all those who engage in some form of public engagement” (Bagić, 2011:54). According to Bagić (2011:54), the surveyed pupils were “divided in their attitudes towards non-governmental organisations”, and with regard to trade unions, “about 42% of high school graduates disagree with the statement that trade unions threaten the security of citizens and the state when they call for a general strike”, while “about 1/5 of the surveyed” high school graduates agree with this statement. Results are repeated in the research from 2011, because 19.2% of high school graduates agree with this statement (41.9% of them disagree, while 36.0% of them are undecided) (Bagić, 2011:55), and in the research from 2015, because 18.4% of high school graduates agree with this statement (41.3% of them disagree, while 40.4% of them are undecided) (Bagić and Gvozdanović, 2015:28). Moreover, similar data emerged in the political literacy survey from 2021, where 18.3% of high school graduates agree with the same statement about trade unions and the call for a “general strike” as a “threat to the security of citizens and the state”; 45.3% of them disagree, while 36.4% of them are undecided (Baketa et. al., 2021:42). Or, in short, according to the aforementioned “political literacy” survey, “slightly less than one-fifth” of the high school graduates surveyed “consider trade union strikes risky for the security of the state and citizens” (Bagić and Gvozdanović, 2015:28). In this sense, the data collected on the “division of high school graduates” regarding the work and activities of non-governmental organisations, including trade unions

as organisations whose main task is to represent and protect workers, as well as the high percentage of undecided high school graduates, point to the need to educate young people about non-governmental organisations and the activity and role of trade unions in society (Bagić, 2011; Bagić and Gvozdanović, 2015; Baketa et al., 2021).

5. Conclusion

The research findings on weak knowledge of collective labour rights and low level of knowledge of the work and activities of the trade unions among young people in Croatia should be placed in the context of young people's political and legal education as an integral part of their civic competences. With regard to the development of civic competences of young people in Croatia within the education system, it should be emphasised that the issue of the need for civic education in the public education system in Croatia has been open since the mid-1990s of the 20th century and has since undergone various changes, from the proposal to introduce it as a separate subject to the implementation of civic education as one of the cross-curricular topic, which has been in force since 2014. It is therefore important to emphasise that what matters is not so much whether civic education is implemented as a separate subject or cross-curricular topic, but rather that it is implemented systematically and consistently, and that changes in educational policy do not call into question its implementation or make it dependent on the enthusiasm or training of individual teachers. In this sense, the city of Rijeka can be cited as an example of good practise, which "since the 2016/2017 school year" has been offering pupils in grades 5 to 8 of primary school to attend civic education as a separate subject, i.e. as an extracurricular activity, and this "Rijeka model" has also been adopted by some other cities and districts in Croatia (Jeknić and Čop, 2021). Two manuals have been produced for this purpose (the first for Year 5 and 6 and the second for Year 7 and 8), and in the second manual, Chapter 13 is devoted to the teaching of the topic entitled "The right to work". This chapter deals with the concepts of "the right to work, labour rights, trade unions and trade union organisation" and introduces pupils to the existence and functioning of trade unions, with the fact that "in order to protect their economic and social interests, all workers have the right to form trade unions"; that "the trade union is a voluntary, solidarity-based organisation of workers that advocates and fights for the social and material rights of workers"; "how to become a member of a trade union", etc. (Golub and Pašić, 2018:32–33). In addition, also as an example of good practise, we can highlight the teaching unit on "What are workers' rights and how to achieve them?" in the framework of the civic education, produced as part of the EU project "Together we are stronger" and implemented by the "Croatian Confederation of Independent Trade Unions" (CMS, GOOD, 2019), as well as the brochure for vocational students "With Knowledge to Law", produced within the EU project of the same name and implemented by the Syndicate "Preporod"⁷.

7 URL: <https://sindikato-preporod.hr/znanjem-do-prava-brosura>, Accessed 5 June 2021.

Moreover, this issue must be placed in the context of current European debates about the need to promote “social interaction between trade unions and young people” through education from primary and secondary school onwards (Hodder and Vandaele, 2019:5). In this sense, formal education at all levels, as well as informal education is important for the development of civic competences. Academics analysing the work of trade unions, as well as trade unions themselves, have recognised the need to educate young people about the work and activities of trade unions. In this regard, we can emphasize the “production and donation of books”, brochures, teaching materials, “awarding scholarships to students”; “organising professional internships in trade unions” or participation in trade union work as an extracurricular activity that strengthens civic skills, etc. (Pološki Vokić and Obadić, 2012:285). In addition, the need for clearer oral and written, internal and public information about what trade unions actually do and generally more transparent communication by trade unions with members and non-members has been recognised (Jolić, 2002; Jolić, 2003). In this sense, trade unions should also develop media strategies and avoid appearing in the media only in crisis situations and only with conflictual issues (reports on strikes, protests, conflicts with employers, authorities, etc.), but continuously inform the public, including young people, through the media about their daily work, representation of workers’ interests, achievements in protecting workers and workers’ rights, etc. (Jolić, 2003).

In this regard, the development of civic competences can be influenced, as well as the improvement of social interaction between trade unions and young people, which should also have an impact on their perception of trade union work and their trust in trade unions. However, this is only part of the answers to the question of why young people are less likely to join a union, which this paper aimed to at least partially answer. In this sense, this paper focuses on data pointing to an increase in young people’s mistrust of trade unions and insufficient knowledge of young people about collective labour rights and the work and activities of trade unions as two possible answers to the previously opened question. For further answers, it is necessary to continuously conduct further quantitative and qualitative research and collect data. Finally, it is up to the trade unions themselves to face the challenges and strive to make their activities more visible, present and active, which can have an impact on the growing trust in their work, as well as to develop and implement different strategies for their “revitalisation”, which should involve young workers, who are particularly exposed to various phenomena of flexibilisation and precarisation, as well as casual, temporary, insecure and seasonal employment.

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