

Individualism and the second modernity revisited

- Changing wage earner values and attitudes and new prospects for trade unions.

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“It is necessary to direct one’s attention violently towards the present as it is, if one wishes to transform it. Pessimism of the intelligence, optimism of the will” (Antonio Gramsci)

Introduction

No future. Is this the prospect for collective actions and trade unions? According to dominant sociological theories of individualization it looks like this is the case. There is no longer room for or will to solidarity. This proposition may find some empirical support in the economic, political and cultural developments in Europe during recent years. However, there is a lot more to say about social and political framing and individual choices and identities in the “second modernity”.

The economic crisis since 2008 has strengthened neo-liberal policy concepts and policies aiming at improving the competitiveness of firms and industries, reducing social costs and undermining trade union rights (Krings 2009, Heynes and Lewis 2014). Austerity-policies in the EU area have made their contribution to a changed social hegemony and a further financialization of society (Harvey 2005, Wallerstein 2005, Sassen 2006, Lindberg & Neergaard 2013). Repercussions in national employer structures, organizations and actions are to be seen (Crouch and Traxler 1995, Traxler 2003, Chung and Thewissen 2011, Lehndorff 2015). Jobless growth and higher unemployment

levels are producing worries in most places (Spector 2002, Held and McGrew 2000) and this is also the case with the weakening of national political democracy in connection with the changed organization of capitalist production. The new accumulation and regulatory regime weakens the position of wage earners and their trade unions in national arenas (Taylor et al. 2011). No doubt.

Alongside the changes at the macro level new moral and political claims at the micro level are to be recorded. In most industrial societies a common understanding has developed that in case you are not working you are not as worthy as those who contribute to the production of wealth in society. It has become a social duty to take up paid work and you cannot refuse a job offered – no matter under what conditions the job is to be carried out (Dean 1999, 2007). Formerly, some groups did not have to work: children, elderly people, sick and handicapped people and women on material leave. Now all individuals between 16 and 65 of age must activate themselves or be “activated” by public authorities. The will to take up paid work has again become a responsibility of the new reforming state. “Work first” policies with individual action plans and threats of sanctions in case you do not behave according to the claims of the street-level bureaucrats within the jobcentres or labour exchange authorities are heavily used (Bunt et al. 2008). The welfare state has changed its policies and arrangements in relation to paid work (Brodkin and Marston 2013). Now it is – in German - both “Fordern und Fördern”, claims and emancipating promises.

These policy efforts are followed and supported by norms and demands for everyone to “write one’s own biography”. Creative freedoms, free choice of work, identity and life style are offered on a rhetorical level. Individualization creates an aura of associated involvement to form your own identity and life course – in working life, in politics and spare time. However, *individualization* is not only political slogans and recipes for personal success; it has also become *scientific explanations* for social, economic and labour market developments. *Anthony Giddens* (1991, 1994, 2000), *Ulrich Beck* (1983, 1986, 2000, Beck et al. 1994, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, Beck and

Levy 2012) and Zygmunt Bauman (2000, 2001) are amongst the most used theory builders. Their analysis and concepts are having a golden age at the moment, all connected to the idea of a new modernity with flexible and reflexive people. The old days of mass society and mass organization are over, we are told. There is no longer room for collective entities like trade unions and other organizations build on some kind of solidarity. Reflexive modernization equals individualization. Individuals have been set free: “*We are not what we are, but what we make of ourselves*” (Giddens 1991, p. 75). Class society is simply abandoned (Pakulski & Waters 1996, Atkinson 2007). People will have to cope with more and more competitive conditions without any kind of collective support. Individualization is both a behavioral concept and a social organization of society unprecedentedly unknown.

“*The individual is becoming the basic unit of social reproduction for the first time in history*” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, p. xxii). This dramatic formulation of one of the founding fathers of the individualization thesis is also a research programme for a subject oriented sociology which do not want to stick to “zombie” categories like class, social positions, and social group. Labour market research should, correspondingly, focus on individual identities (Giddens) and biographies (Beck) only. The processes and results of individualization are held to be universal according to Giddens, Beck and Baumann.

When individualization is presented as an alternative to “zombie” concepts, the traditional sociology and the whole field of industrial relations research seem to be irrelevant. If the theories are rights, we can stop exploring collectivism and solidarity and their organizational expressions. The present problems of trade unions might find an easy and final explanation here (Bieler et al. 2008, Phelan 2009).

But it is too early to make such conclusions. The theories of individualization are wrong in central aspects as to the degree and reasons for “individualization”, we think - and we will argue against central propositions in the theories, also with empirical support from analyses of wage earner experiences, assessments, and attitudes. The frame of reference is Northern European labour markets and welfare arrangements with Danish wage earners as direct objects for the empirical investigations.

Individualization as process and result of modernization

Both elements of individualization and the embedding economic, political and cultural surroundings are part of the theoretical propositions of Giddens, Beck and Bauman. According to them the individual in post modernism has been made free and is using his or her freedom to make own choices in life. Reflexive modernization is a new way of thinking and acting in new production and cultural systems. Nothing is linear or closed any longer; the individual is the new center for social relations. Ulrich Beck has made some of the most advanced argumentations in which labour market developments and inequality are included. We use his contribution the most.

To Ulrich Beck individualization is neither a fully atomizing process nor pure autonomy but basally a request from the side of the institutions of society. Self-reflection and choices are forming new connections between social frames and subjective ways of organizing you own life. Emancipation and new modernity constitute two sides of the diagnosis of the new age, the risk society (Beck 1986, 2000, Beck and Levy 2012). Our activities are framed by a generalized climate of risk, and finding “the right thing to do” becomes a normal daily and troublesome exercise for everyone. Class society does not exist any longer. New social inequalities and differences will dominate. We will have world risk regimes (Beck and Levy 2012) and as risks are difficult to foreseen you have to be reflexive and instrumental as an individual. The connection is to a high degree created by way of labour market participation:

“Central institutions of modern society – basic civil, political and social rights .. are geared to the individual and not to the group. Insofar as basic rights are internalised and everyone wants to or must be economically active to earn their livelihood, the spiral of individualization destroys the given foundations of social coexistence” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, pp. xxi-xxii).

The second modernity has removed people from collective entities and categories. Beck is firmly convinced that discontinuity is the most important trait in development of new individual efforts of creating own life. Everything has become in flux: work, working time, family, life style. New mind-sets are being formed. Identity is no longer a fixed part of each member of society. Individual biographies must be written. Opportunity structures are not equally distributed implying that the single individual writing her or his own biography is not having a totally free choice.

The labour market produces new risks and new possibilities at the same time. It is the strongest producer of individualization (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *ibid*). Especially three institutions are of importance: 1) *Education*, requesting long periods of development of skills for self-reflection. Repeated exams and tests are giving discipline and the will to be a winner in competitions. 2) *Mobility* has become a duty for wage earners. You have to adapt and accept new demands all the time and to be on the move – professionally, geographically, and mentally. 3) *Competition* is a strong parameter accumulating individualism. You have to be attractive and ready for using all kinds of resources in the processes. Competitiveness is the ultimate test of individuals.

These three dimensions interact and reinforce each other. Behavioral claims are to be flexible, mobile and competitive. This is also to state that wage earners no longer have a collective element in the formation of subjective assessments and attitudes and that collective resistance against the political, professional and cultural developments is not to be found. Discontinuity in labour market participation is a fact, and the labour market is producing risks for everyone.

We will shortly comment on these propositions and then put them to an empirical test.

Analytical arguments against the individualization thesis

Quite a number of scholars have taken part in discussion of the Beck thesis of individualization over the years. When looking at what has been said from the broad set of critics and followers (Kron 2010, Berger & Hitzler 2010) it seems clear that there is a strong line of division between these two camps. We will try to formulate our own points of view, mostly in line with critics – but now without some reservations.

Firstly, Beck has been accused of mistaking middle-class values for working class values. As an academic Beck is living a sequestered life from the ones of ordinary people and his free competitive academic experiences and free choices cannot be generalized to everyone. Individualism and rationalism is a well-known phenomenon in academic circles. This emancipated way of thinking and acting reflects middle-class situations only (Becker & Hadjar 2010). – This seems to be a serious objection. But the proof of the pudding is in the eating. So the final test must be empirical, and we will return to this shortly. Without doubt you can say that Beck (and Giddens) ignores more aspects of class, gender, race and age as central to aspects of “reflexive modernization”. Maybe the theories of Beck and Giddens are only “projects for intellectual grandisement”? (Skeggs 2004, p. 57).

You can say that wage earners always have had to “create” their own lives and own identities. This is nothing new. Modernization theories have a long history and individualization was already a topic of traditional social science. Karl Marx was among the first to place individuals in formative class relations and a theory of capitalist development. After him other sociologists were intensely occupied with theorizing individualism (Rosa & Kottmann 2007). Emile Durkheim saw *differentiation* of society with stronger division of work and functional requirements as to groups

and persons as the most important explanation of structural individualization. Egoism and anomie can be a threat to the community. The “gefährliches”, the potential dangerous in society, is also discussed later by Bourdieu and Foucault. Max Weber took *rationalization* as a starting point and stressed the cultural aspects which make calculations and effectiveness central to modern life. However, the system world is also threatening cultural aspects and the freedom to act of individuals. Jürgen Habermas is working in the same tradition today. Finally, George Simmel concentrated this theory on the way society marks and influences *personality*. The demands of forming will and consciousness will change as society develops into modernity. Differentiation, more individual autonomy and increased isolation is his conceptualization of the new ways of living. Tensions will increase as to coping with autonomy and the problem of creating authenticity. Today Axel Honneth (1994, 2004) is working in the same spirit of giving control and pathological diagnoses a theoretical basis.

Ulrich Beck is clearly writing in the tradition of Simmel, giving individualization a modern twist of free choices but also stressing the need to take own responsibilities seriously. You must write your own history – even though risks and tensions are to be accepted as common conditions. Anthony Giddens has developed an optimistic version of the Max Weber tradition, stressing reflexivity and individual choices, while Zygmunt Bauman has subscribed to the Durkheim tradition supplemented by critical concepts dealing with fluid modernity - without analyzing capitalist production and employment relationships. Bauman has delivered a critique of consumerism only. But people do a lot more than consume. Beck is also stressing the individualizing tendencies without direct investigation of the social relations in production (as did Marx) but includes mechanisms for producing individualization. He concentrates on the possibilities and pitfalls of individualization in general; and as he is far more complex and interesting than Bauman and Giddens, it is reasonable to concentrate on his analysis.

We find it difficult to see how you can make such a clear distinction between social conditions and identity formation “then” and “now”. There have always been changes, but continuities exist – also within the domain of the labour market. Social relationships stratify, segment and exclude socially both in a first and a second modernity. Beck is operating with one big break only – a radical one. *Changes and continuities are to be analyzed and assessed together.* We are still dealing with developments within the frames of capitalist society; we do not have a post-capitalist society. Methodologically, it is also difficult to separate description, causes and effects from each other in the concepts of Beck.

Secondly, identity and reflexivity is clearly placed *in* the individuals by Beck – not in the social relationships. Seen from a sociological point of view it is a problem to isolate the individualization exercises to the person her- or himself. Actually, it is “lonesome” individuals – numbers of “Ich” - who are calculating, choosing and acting in the world of Beck. People enter different roles and relationships and it the social organizations which make it possible for people to live together in a reasonable way. The social has disappeared to a high degree in the writings of Ulrich Beck, we think. Individualization is stratified as is careers, consumption and political behavior. But *you cannot mix conditions, forms, determinants, mechanisms, actors and results or consequences in one single concept of “individualization”.* This is done by Beck. You have to approach peoples own consciousness and behavior – their “Eigensinn” – in a much more open and empirical way.

Thirdly, social changes come as a result of discourses, framings, and semantic strategies before institutionalizations occur. Both cognitive and normative elements are also at stake (Campbell 2002) and they must be included in the analysis. At the moment neo-liberal discourses and policies are dominant. Privatization of responsibilities is a fact. Individualization is a central axiom for the neo-liberal discourses and fundamentally viewed as a positive aspect. But things can change – also political hegemony. You have to develop concepts and operational elements to find and measure

individualism and collectivism at the same time. That is what we are going to do now. But only after a final remark as to the way Ulrich Beck has tackled the problem of combining micro motives with macro dynamics.

Macro dynamics and (dis)connections to micro motives

In a strange way, the new individualization theories have conceptualizations close to neo-classical thoughts as to individual decisions and their relationships to a wider social context. Beck presupposes that individuals will make rational choices by calculating risks and gains, costs and benefits. High cognitive competences are required as in neo-classical economic choice theory. This is a rationalistic misconception because this is not the way ordinary people live their lives and make their choices (Burkart 1993). People are supposed not to be influenced by norms, pressures, social customs etcetera – which they are in reality (Bhaskar 1997). To “construct” your own life is more a kind of metaphor than a modern way of thinking and acting. Social forces are embedding you in society and this makes thinking and behavior contingent.

It is neo-liberal economist thinking that still establishes a direct connection between the micro motives of people and the behavior of firms to a balanced macro distribution of economic variables. That is to say: Neo-liberal economist want economic incentives to be effective in order to realize the promised macro equilibrium in the economy (Borjas 2003). Subsidiary, sticks have to be used in order to have all people behaving in correspondence with the theoretical assumptions behind the models (Pascual and Magnusson 2007, Weishaupt 2011, Gilbert and Besharov 2011). The strong political success of the political recommendations has been visible almost everywhere during recent decades – and especially during the last five years of the crisis. Austerity policies in connection with welfare reforms - cutbacks and recalibrations - and activation measures have made “politics for markets” a fact of the day. It is no longer “politics against markets” (Esping-Andersen 1985).

In industrial relations, a profound shift of power balance has taken place too. Employers have been on the offensive and with the coming of the economic crisis and mass unemployment since 2008, a move away from collective bargaining and compromises between capital and labour towards market based regulations and individual contracts has taken place and unionization has been made difficult (Kelly and Frege 2004, Clasen and Viebrock 2008, Scheuer 2011). In academic circles a corresponding shift from industrial relations to employment relationships was seen already a couple of years ago (Kaufmann 1998).

Consequences for trade unions and their members at the macro level are not difficult to see and assess. However, the knowledge of the consequences for individual wage earners and how they respond to new experiences and prospects are not very clear; actually we know more about the positions and opinions of central actors than we do as to “ordinary people”. That is why the theories of individualization still need empirical foundation. They must be taken seriously. One of the weaknesses of the individualization thesis lies in the disconnection of macro developments with the micro foundation. This is parallel to the neo-liberalist economic theorists who also aggregate from micro motives to macro dynamics.

In the theories of Ulrich Beck one will never find an adequate definition and specification of the relationships between the self-referential and reflexive considerations by the individuals at the micro level and the macro-institutional dynamism in the second modernity. Risk, reflexivity and reflection have splits that do not combine to a coherent and fruitful conceptualization (Elliott 2002). Writing one’s own biography might – as Bourdieu has named it – be a biographical illusion of constructing “life history” (Bourdieu 1987).

Empirical arguments against the individualization thesis: Changing Danish wage earner values and interests

More and new empirical information as to the content of work, relationships and processes as well as to the results of the way work and welfare is organized is needed. A unique possibility has been created by Danish investigations of wage earner values and attitudes in 1992, 2002 and 2014 with identical questions in surveys and interviews. The analyses have been conducted by the CARMA research group at Aalborg University to which we all belong (Bild et al. 1993, 1998, 2007, Madsen 1998, Caraker et al. 2014). Based on surveys and interviews it is possible to follow developments during more decades as to experiences, assessments and attitudes of wage earners. The set of points to be highlighted will be questions of individualistic values and interest configurations or collective values and interests. Are individualistic values and positions internalized and totally dominant? Do people accept the neo-liberal flexibilization and modernization requests? Is the “corrosion of character” (Sennett 1998) a fact? And do we find no support for collective regulations within the labour market and for a collectively organized welfare system?

A number of answers to a comprehensive questionnaire filled out in spring 2014 (with almost 3000 respondents) will form the prime basis of our empirical tests of the individualist theses. The data files and findings are documenting changes along an axis of individualism and collectivism and another axis of material and post-material values. In this paper the first axis is the most important. We will analyze answers to questions relating to four arenas: the working place, the trade union arena, the collective regulation arena, and the welfare state arrangements.

As to experiences in *the working place* we have found that most wage earners in Denmark see the working place as a most important arena not only for having a salary earned but in fulfilling social and psychological needs. It is the professional aspects of doing something meaningful and the social life at the workplace which gives meaning to the individual and the activities are also seen as important in a wider context.

Most wage earners do not want to compete with each other here. The contrary is the fact. The working place is no sport arena. People are ready to work together with other people despite their union affiliation (“red” or “yellow”), age or gender. However, it is different experiences people have with management policies and actions. A number of questions in regard to this have the following distribution:

Tabel 1: Management policies, % of “to a high degree”

Question: *How is your experience as to the management at your workplace?*

Safeguard the right to hire and fire	58 %
Secure that each individual has fine chances of development	37 %
Uses the skills and abilities of the employees	50 %
Puts efficiency above all other considerations	35 %

Clearly, different experiences are being made. Further analyses show that management policies of a different kind – development oriented and efficiency oriented - can co-exist and that not everyone has the newest neo-liberal management concept as the basis for daily practice. In the public sector, however, New Public Management arrangements give a lot of negative experiences especially to semi-professionals (see also Nordegraaf and Steijn 2013). Control systems and institutionalized distrust have been recorded. But again we see that only a minority of wage earners find that people are elbowing one’s way forward (24 %).

Years of crisis have had repercussions as to the feeling of security. 36 % of all wage earners is afraid of being dismissed, and 30 % are afraid of not having the qualifications needed in the future. Security is a most relevant factor and element of demand when it comes to trade union action and state responsibilities. Collective answers to private problems are preferred.

The trade union arena is central to our investigation. According to Ulrich Beck collective organizations would have no role to place in the second modernity. Therefore it should be impossible to find broad acceptance by the individualized wage earners of trade unions as necessary

institutions to secure interests. We can easily falsify his theory in this respect. Asked this way, we find a distribution of Danish answers like this:

Table 2: The necessity of trade unions

Question: *Are trade unions necessary for securing wage earner interests today?*

Agree to a high degree	47 %
Agree	31 %
Neither agree nor disagree	14 %
Disagree	5 %
Disagree to a high degree	3 %

8 out of 10 Danish wage earners still find trade unions indispensable! For trade unionist in the biggest head organization, LO, the figure is 88 % and in FTF, the second biggest central organization for white-collar workers/semi-professionals, it is even higher, 89 %. This contradicts the individualization thesis. The collective interest perspective is highly visible in all parts of the Danish landscape and the support for trade unions as institutions has risen with 10 per cent points since 2002 when the last CARMA investigation was carried out.

Next: The most important reason for joining a trade union combines collective and individual elements. Most people state that they think you *ought* to be a member (78 %). Self-seeking motives without a collective perspective is only to be seen in a small minority. Collective and solidaristic reasons for joining a trade union have also increased since 2002. This is also a most important finding, stressing the collectivist elements in unionization.

As to the tasks trade unions are supposed to give highest priority to, it is not personal service – as in an individualized version – but these:

Table 3: Most important trade union tasks

- Improving occupational health and safety (84 %)
- More apprentices and trainee places (81 %)

- Improvement of further training and education (81%)
- Highest possible wages (77 %)
- Equal pay between men and women (75 %)
- Working against social dumping (78 %)
- Better job security (77 %)
- Fighting unemployment (76 %)
- Improving pensions (77 %).

The priority given to these trade union activities are mostly in line with the organizations own list of tasks today. However, the wage earners are not fully satisfied with the way the organizations at the moment do their job. Critics are many. This can be seen from the next table.

Table 4: The influence of trade unions in society (% of “agree” and “agree to a high degree”)

Do trade unions have too little influence on the development of society	41 %
Trade unions have too little to say vis-à-vis the employers	43 %
The trade union movement would be stronger in case central organizations would cooperate more	53 %

The results indicate reservations as to the results made by the different trade unions. Among members of the LO 53 % has answered yes to both questions. Figures for members of the FTF are 46 and 52 %. Hope for a more powerful trade union strategy and influence is expressed this way.

The trade unions are invited to use their organizational and institutional power resources better. The organizational resources have been weakened since the beginning of the 21st century and this is also the case with the political representation of wage earner interest. A change is wanted.

The collective regulation arena was supposed to disappear according to the Ulrich Beck thesis. But this is not the case. The undisputed most preferred way of regulating wage and working conditions according to the Danish wage earners is collective agreements. The precise figures are like this:

Table 5: Regulation by way of collective agreements

Agree to a high degree	46 %
Agree	26 %
Neither agree nor disagree	16 %
Disagree	6 %

Disagree to a high degree 7 %

The collective negotiation and agreement system is by far the most preferred. 86 % of all people on collective agreements want this system to be operative – not individual contract, not political interventions, and definitely not EU regulations. The strongest support is to be found amongst public employees. But it is even more surprising that also wage earners not members of trade unions have a clear positive balance of opinion.

Wage is still to be a collective product – not a result of individual wage bargaining. It should not be transformed into a local instrument of management, we are told. Again we see a refusal of “individualization” by the big majority.

Going to the welfare state arrangements collectivist values and opinions dominate too. *The welfare state functions* are forming part of every citizen’s daily life and they are also part of the political battle for restructuring or preserving the welfare state. A universal welfare state frame of reference is what Danish wage earners have in common. And there has been broad support for the welfare state arrangements – also when it comes to the will to pay taxes for it. But the discourses of financial crisis and the need for austerity and fiscal consolidation (Kristensen 2015) might have had an impact on people’s consciousness and will to accept cutbacks and welfare state retrenchment? Our analysis shows that this is not the case. Danish wage earners support the universal welfare state very strongly as before and they even want improvements as to central welfare state functions. The following empirical results document this.

Table 6: Universal welfare functions (% of “agree” and “agree to a high degree”)

The public health system should be expanded	87 %
The health system should be driven by the public sector	71 %
Payment in case of consulting a doctor should be introduced	26 %
Old age pension (“folkepension”) should be improved	71 %

A strong support for the universal welfare state functions is to be recorded. Changes in a more neo-liberal direction are clearly dismissed. Only a small minority support claims for a more personalized welfare state and private payment for using public services (a liberal instrument). Mediation between individual and community should have collective frames. The public sector is supposed to give security to everyone and the support for intensified competition and market based mechanism has been shrinking since 2002.

Furthermore, a majority want *solidarity* to be mushrooming also by the way of having wage earners standing closer together. *Social justice* should be implemented more strongly as differences between rich and poor should be shortened. And *democracy* is also to be spread to more areas of society according to the majority of Danish wage earners. Contrary to these results, *no major support is to be found as to the use of market mechanisms within the public sector*. Neo-liberal approaches do not have a strong hold in people. Again: collectivist points of view dominate over self-seeking orientations.

These results clearly are at odds with the statements in the individualization theories. We can go further in supporting our refusal of these. In order to analyze and test the “individualization” hypothesis on a common denominator, we have constructed *an index* that seeks to capture ‘collectivistic’ vs ‘individualistic’ orientation (hereafter c-i orientation) among Danish wage earners. The index is constructed on the basis of the variables listed in Table 7 chosen with the help of a factor analysis of a large battery of variables relevant to the c-i orientation scale (see Bild et al. 1993). We have asked the exacted same questions in 2002 and again 2014 using the exacted same reply values enabling us to compare the data from the two questionnaires. See table 7 for specifications.

Table 7: Operationalization of c-i orientations among members of the LO affiliated unions

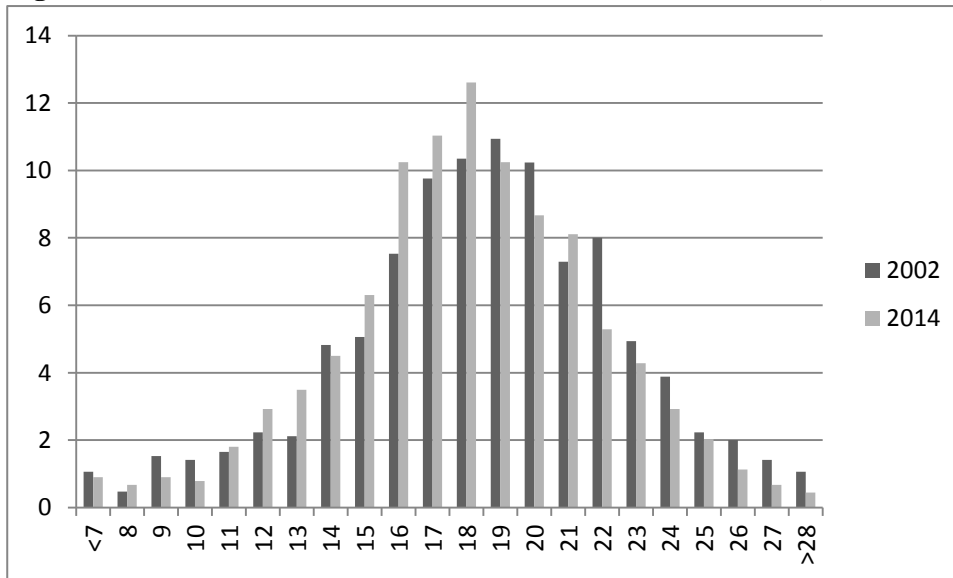
Variable	Reply
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	values
<i>What do you think ought to be unions most important tasks: Equalize salary differences between the high paid and the low paid</i>	1-5
<i>How do you think society ought to develop in the years to come: The wage ought to be adjusted to the individual wage-earner's efforts</i>	5-1
<i>How do you think society ought to develop in the years to come: Solidarity should be extended: wage-earners should stick together</i>	1-5
<i>How do you think society ought to develop in the years to come: Social justice should increase; the differences between rich and poor must be reduced</i>	1-5
<i>How do you think society ought to develop in the years to come: It should to a greater extent be rewarded to put extra effort into one's job</i>	5-1
<i>How do you think society ought to develop in the years to come: The capable must receive greater recognition</i>	5-1

Note: The reply values are the same for all variables/questions: 1=Total agree, 2=Partial agree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Partial disagree and 5=Total disagree

On the basis of the above index, the members of the LO affiliated unions are distributed on a scale with a variance of between 6 and 30 'points' with '6' indicating the most 'collectivistic' end and '30' the most 'individualistic' end.

Figure 1 - Members of the LO affiliated unions score on c-i index, 2002 – 2014 (in %)



Source: APL-surveys (2002, 2014). N (2002) = 850, N (2014) = 888. Median (2002)=19,00 , median (2014)=18,00.

Figure 1 shows the LO members distribution on the the c-i orientation scale in 2002 and in 2014. If wage earners are becoming more individualistic orientated we might expect the distribution to lean more to the right from 2002 to 2014 as a result of more wage earners indicating individualistic related answers. However, this is not the case. In fact the distribution is leaning more to the left with a mean of 18,00 in 2014 in relation to a mean in 2002 of 19,00. Once again: The result is contradictory to the individualization thesis.

Our survey and longitudinal analyses documents value developments and new constellations of interests, giving more kinds of wage earner profiles. However, the analyses also highlights a new and dominant collective feeling and longing for more solidaristic policies both from the side of trade unions and from the welfare state. It is a kind of protest against increasing competition, de-collectivisation and increasing individualization in society which have been discovered. It is employers, politicians, traditional economists and opinion-forming people – including academics - who have tried to individualize employment relationships and politics. But Danish wage earners react to this. Individualism is shrinking; collectivism is growing. The findings strongly contradict the Beck (and Giddens) theses. Actually, our empirical results signal a shift of orientation and value judgments away from individualist positions towards more collective values and elements of solidary. A bigger value shift in society seems to be started, bringing collectivity and solidary back in.

Concluding remarks

The popular thesis of individualization - made famous by authors as Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman and Ulrich Beck - are empirically not supported - almost falsified - by our empirical findings in a number of aspects. In others they need strong qualification. This is not least the case with the ones of Ulrich Beck.

A growing collectivist mind-set and request for common efforts in order to reduce insecurities and improve gratification, working conditions, ways of paying respects to people, acknowledgement, codetermination, and justice is to be witnessed. The working place is of utmost importance to wage earners and it is soon to become a professional and political arena (Jørgensen 2014). Strong support as to the trade union as an institution and to the welfare state is also to be seen. Criticism of trade unions as organizations is, however, also to be addressed. Members expect more from their trade unions. An unexpected trade union revival and a political comeback to the trade union movement might also be in the pipeline. This could be more than the optimism of will.

Collectivist ways of organization security and representing interests are clearly in demand by Danish wage earners. Individualist ways of regulating the labour market and steering the public sector is not given broad support at all. The universal welfare state is to be defended, galvanized and even expanded as to wage earners. Neo-liberalist solutions to economic, social and political problems are refused.

Together the discussions and empirical facts signal a goodbye to old understandings and individualist strategies and a new hello to collectivist approaches within the labour market. Employment relationships need a backward mapping transformation into industrial relations once again. Collective rights and duties, collective organisations, collective memories count once again in a Northern European context. We will have to say goodbye to individualization – and to individualization theories.

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