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Democratic welfare nationalism and competitive community: changing ideals of social harmony in the regulation of capitalism

Pauli Kettunen

At a time of increased asymmetries between labour and capital in globalized capitalism, the warm symmetrical expressions ‘social partners’ and ‘social dialogue’ were widely adopted, especially in the language of the European Union. Moreover, during a period when the spatial ties of capital loosened, humble community-oriented concepts such as ‘corporate citizenship’ became popular in the rhetoric of ‘corporate social responsibility’. This chapter discusses these paradoxes from a historical perspective. Social practices cannot simply be reduced to language and concepts; however, it is important to recognize the power of conceptualizations in defining the political agenda and agency.

By examining the meanings and contexts of ‘social partners’ and ‘corporate citizens’, the chapter highlights the changing relationships between the public and the private, and the mandatory and the voluntary, in the social regulation of capitalism. These developments are associated with the changing roles of territorial entities, including nation states and the European Union, in a world of increased cross-border mobility for money, information, jobs and people. I will argue that harmony- and-symmetry-laden concepts reflect new emphases on a competitive community in the framework of globalized capitalism.

In order to provide a historical interpretation of ‘social partners’ and ‘corporate citizens’, I examine the terms in relation to the particular pattern of social reform that was – with national variations – shared by the Nordic countries, that is, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. I draw attention to two aspects of what can be characterized as the democratic nationalism of the Nordic model of welfare: the ideal of parity between workers and employers and confidence in virtuous circles between different interests and objectives within national society. After a brief account of the emergence of these modes of thought and action, I focus on the Swedish Social Democratic economist and social scientist Gunnar Myrdal, reading his theoretical endeavours as self-critical reflections on the formation of the Nordic model. In the late 1950s, in his notion of a ‘created

harmony', Myrdal generalized from Swedish experiences and future expectations while also criticizing the nationalism of the welfare state, instead envisioning a 'Welfare World'. I then move on to the present visions of harmony and symmetry appearing in the usages of 'social partners' and 'corporate citizens'. Comparing these visions with the older Nordic ones, I discuss the changes in the Nordic model as a particular case of those transnational transformations in which 'social partners' and 'corporate citizens' serve as conceptual tools.

When examining 'social partners', the focus is the European Union, and the data mainly consist of documents resulting from and dealing with the European 'social dialogue'. In turn, the analysis of 'corporate citizenship' focuses on international arenas advocating this idea, including the World Economic Forum, the United Nations and the International Labour Organization, utilizing the documents they have produced.

IDEOLOGY OF PARITY AND VIRTUOUS CIRCLES

A point of departure for European labour law in the 19th and 20th centuries was the recognition that the symmetry between the parties of an employment relationship, worker and employer, was merely formal. The worker was the weaker party to the contract and was, consequently, in need of protection. This could be provided by legislation or collective agreements between workers' associations and employers. Such agreements were advocated, in particular, by the social liberals of the late 19th century as the main solution to the so-called labour question. They argued that at the collective level, a more than formal kind of symmetry could be established. 'The ideology of parity' (Bruun 1979, pp. 157–61) was strengthened in Western European countries during the post-Second World War decades until the 1970s, and the practices of collective negotiations and agreements expanded.

In the Marxian tradition of critical theory, the symmetrical appearance of labour market relationships is seen as an ideological disguise hiding the basic asymmetry between capital and labour. At the individual level, the relationship between worker and capitalist appears as a free market relationship, yet it is essentially – as Karl Marx concluded – a relationship of subordination and exploitation. This basic asymmetry is not removed by collective associations and agreements, as important as they may be for protecting workers and increasing their class consciousness. Parity at a collective level is still a mere formal appearance that conceals the fundamentally different

compositions of the two labour market parties. One of the most significant contributions in this critique of ideology is the analysis of the ‘two logics of collective action’

presented by Claus Offe and Helmut Wiesenthal (1980), who focus on the essential differences beyond the symmetrical outlook of trade unions and employer organizations concerning the actors they represent as well as their modes of creating and articulating collective interests.

However, in the Nordic traditions of industrial relations, the symmetry between labour market parties seems to have meant something more than simply a juridical form of regulating labour market conflicts or an ideological disguise of the basic asymmetry of capital and labour. Arguably, the symmetry of collective labour market agreements became a criterion for an immanent critique of society, that is, the mode of critique in which society is criticized by means of its own apparent normative standards.¹

In the Nordic countries, the ideology of parity was modified by influential trade unions associated with reformist socialist movements. As early as the 1930s, Denmark, Sweden and Norway, in this order, were among the most highly unionized societies in the world, and ‘labour market parties’ was adopted as an expression that reflected and reinforced the idea of a symmetric collective-level relationship between workers and employers. Labour market parties reciprocally recognized the particular and legitimate nature of their interests and committed themselves to taking into account the general interest through their mutual compromises. This mode of thought was manifested in a reinforced system of collective agreements in Denmark, Sweden and Norway in the 1930s, based not only on earlier traditions of collective organization and agreement but also on experiences of large-scale industrial conflicts.

Any simple distinction between conflict and cooperation would be inadequate for describing this change. The increased power of trade unions was based on their conflict potential, and they became oriented to using it for extending the field of symmetric relations between ‘labour market parties’. This did not only mean that trade unions achieved a legitimate role in industrial relations. An equally fundamental change was that capitalists and somewhat later even the state and municipalities in their role as employers were defined and organized as a ‘party’ with (no more than) particular interests. Thus, the horizon was opened to a continuous widening of the agenda, in which employers would be obliged to admit the particularism of their interests, that is, the widening

¹ On immanent critique in Marx’s critique of political economy, see Lohmann (1986).

of symmetrical party relations. In the Nordics, in Sweden the most successfully and in Finland the least successfully, the Social Democratic movement was able to establish the parity of labour market parties as a normative standard of ‘society’ itself, which could then be turned against the prevailing asymmetries.

Trade unions were seen as agents of democracy in two senses, both as a part of the Nordic tradition of voluntary associations and as a labour market party. These two aspects were interlinked by the idea of collective action as a means of levelling asymmetrical social relations (Kettunen 2012). The notion of democracy associated with the parity of labour market parties was extended in two directions. On the one hand, in the Nordic countries, the notion of industrial democracy was associated with the local and workplace-level practices of the system of collective agreements, including shop stewards, rather than with separate institutions of employee participation (Fleming 1990; Knudsen 1995). In debates on working-life reform, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, one can recognize a politically effective utopian idea according to which the collective-level parity between the labour market parties must be extended and woven into individual employment relationships, a vision of a kind of social citizenship within wage-work relationships (see Winner 1995, pp. 78–82). On the other hand, Social Democratic trade union leaders, in particular, conceived the representation of organized interests in economic and social policies as an essential part of their visions of economic democracy (Kärriylä 2019).

However, in addition to widening democracy and preventing destructive conflicts, compromises between divergent particular interests were also seen to serve the universal interest in other ways. In the lessons drawn from the Great Depression of the 1930s, new ideas of cumulative economic success reshaped the notion of national economy. A virtuous circle would connect the interests of worker-consumers and farmer-producers as well as those of workers and employers, yet it entailed, in political discourse, something more than merely organized economic interests promoting each other. It was also a virtuous circle between equality, efficiency and solidarity, which, in a sense, can be seen as being based on three different ideological strains of Nordic modernization processes: the idealized heritage of the free peasant, the spirit of capitalism and the utopia of socialism. The correct definition of political objectives and the means of combining and achieving them remained contested issues. However, confidence in the possibility of virtuous circles provided a widely shared framework for political conflicts and compromises in a process that, retrospectively, can be seen as the making of the welfare state.

This was not a uniquely Nordic mode of thought and action. During the Second World War, interlinkages between social equality, economic growth and democracy had become a more or less

explicit part of the so-called post-war planning in Western countries. At the international level, it was manifested in the Declaration of Philadelphia of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1944, which came to form part of the organization's constitution. Among the main principles of the Declaration were collective bargaining and the participation of workers' and employers' representatives in social and economic policies, conceived as a part of democracy. Full employment was a primary objective that would direct national and international measures in social and economic policies, which were to be controlled and coordinated by the ILO.²

Commentators within and outside the Nordic region nevertheless often perceived the post-war development in Scandinavia, especially in Sweden, as exceptional in the sense that it was seen to represent uniquely consistent steps along this universally applicable road to progress. To be sure, in the Cold War world, more than one candidate for a universally applicable road emerged.

Nonetheless, the notion of 'the middle way', as associated with Sweden and sometimes with the whole *Norden*, implied a particular claim of universality. It was expressed, for example, by maintaining that 'freedom and welfare' were principles of the established cooperation in social policy between the Nordic countries (Nelson 1953; Salvesen 1956). The vision of a created harmony, developed by Gunnar Myrdal, reflected this kind of Nordic self-understanding and a critical elaboration of Nordic, notably Swedish, experiences and expectations.

CREATED HARMONY

In 1960, based on his lectures at Yale, Gunnar Myrdal published the book *Beyond the Welfare State: Economic Planning and Its International Implications*. He identified two problems of the welfare state: detailed bureaucratic control and nationalism. In his proposed solutions, key expressions included 'created harmony' and 'a more enlightened citizenry'.

Myrdal distinguished between three phases in the planning of the welfare state. Prehistory consisted of uncoordinated public interventions to attempt to solve the problems caused by 'the quasi-liberal state of mass-poverty, much social rigidity, and gross inequality of opportunity'. Then, attempts at the coordination of these interventions were initiated and expanded. This meant increasing direct

² Declaration concerning the aims and purposes of the International Labour Organization (Declaration of Philadelphia), https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:62:0::NO:62:P62_LIST_ENTRIE_ID:2453907:NO#declaration (accessed May 1, 2022/2019).

state intervention. However, this was solely a transitional period which would result in the third phase of planning:

In this transitional phase of the development towards the more perfect democratic Welfare State, while coordination and planning are becoming gradually more thorough, under the pressure of the continually growing volume of intervention, both by the state and by collective authorities and power groups beneath the state level, it often happens that people confuse planning with direct and detailed state regulations. The opposite, however, is true; there is still such a large volume of intervention because the measures are not ideally coordinated and planned.

Thus, the perfection of planning in its third phase would mean an actual decrease in state intervention:

The assumption is a continued strengthening of provincial and municipal self-government, and a balanced growth of the infra-structure of effective interest organizations. This would, in its turn, presume an intensified citizens' participation and control, exerted in both these fields. (Myrdal 1960, pp. 67–8)

That there was no natural harmony or equilibrium of private interests was clear to Myrdal. Moreover, it was neither through collective compromises per se that the common good was to be achieved, nor was the 'created harmony' an outcome of a Great Plan. The inseparable connection of planning and education was essential for Myrdal. This was the process of enlightenment. Planning as practicing the knowledge and values of the common good presumed that all relevant interests were institutionally articulated *and* nobody, especially not the economically powerful, had any right to claim universality for their particular interests.

Furthermore, 'created harmony' would not only be realized within a national framework but also on a global scale. Myrdal was critically aware that '*the democratic Welfare State in the rich countries of the Western world is protectionist and nationalistic*' (p. 162, italics original). He argued that 'economic balance in the world, and at the same time national stability and progress in all countries, should be secured by inter-governmental planning and concerted action, directed towards a coordination of national policies in the common interest' (pp. 213).

Beyond the Welfare State was overtly linked with Cold War confrontations and conflicts related to decolonization. Myrdal aimed to assure his American audience that the welfare state and economic planning, correctly conceived, would not lead to a Soviet-type system. His vision of a 'Welfare World', in turn, was associated with contemporary expectations regarding the growing significance

of Third World voices. Thus, he recognized different roles for nationalism in different parts of the world. While nationalism had become an obstacle to progress in the Western welfare states, it could play a progressive role in the development of ‘underdeveloped countries’ and in their integration into the world economy.

‘Created harmony’ referred to the dynamics of reform rather than a future state of affairs. It implied two basic assumptions in Myrdal’s theoretical thought. The first was the idea that social reality consists of self-reinforcing processes, or, in Myrdal’s terms, ‘circular cumulative causation’ between economic, social, political and cultural factors (Myrdal 1957; Berger 2008). According to Myrdal, these self-reinforcing processes tended to be vicious circles, and the task of politics was to turn them into virtuous ones. The creation of harmony was thus a process of positive ‘circular cumulative causation’ in which planning had become an integral part of the virtuous circle based on the recognition of divergent interests. The second basic assumption of Myrdal’s theoretical thought was the idea of the immanent critique of society. Any social scientific study should begin from an empirical identification of existing valuations in the society under scrutiny and a choice of some of them as value premises for reform-oriented critical research. In a rational choice of value premises, those valuations existing in a society should be chosen that correspond to the progress of enlightenment (Kettunen 1997; Strang 2007).

Myrdal’s critique of the state-centredness and nationalism of Western welfare states also encompassed the Scandinavian countries. However, he seems to have thought that the characteristics of a created harmony had already achieved, especially in Sweden, the status of society’s own normative standards, and thus they provided the criteria for its self-criticism. He mentioned the ‘people’s home’ as an ideal that had been formulated in Sweden but indicated the future forms of popular self-government in all Western welfare states (Myrdal 1960, p. 177).

Myrdal arguably universalized something that had been, in Nordic debates, idealized as the unique features of ‘Nordic democracy’. This concept had gained popularity in political conclusions drawn from the Great Depression and the threat of fascism in the 1930s (Kurunmäki & Strang 2010). While contrasting parliamentary democracy to dictatorships, it also referred to practices beneath the state-level. The sub-state ingredients of Nordic democracy included local self-government, popular movements with a strong ethos of education, and collective agreements between organized labour market interests. In his vision of planning through the self-regulation of enlightened citizenry, Myrdal obviously elaborated on these experiences. In expanding ‘the Welfare State’ into ‘a Welfare World’, he put his confidence in ‘the international idealism of all people’, which he was convinced was ‘a reality’ (Myrdal 1960, p. 214). Here, too, he seems to have universalized such aspects of the

Swedish and Nordic self-understanding that he could see as normative standards of society itself, including small-state moral superiority.

The sub-state ingredients of Nordic democracy contributed to what can be characterized as the societalization of the state (Kettunen 2011, pp. 24–5). Interest organizations came to play a strong role in political processes, and municipalities developed into the main providers of public services. However, while the legitimacy of the state was reinforced and high taxes were approved as a form of social solidarity, the societalization of the state never resulted in the decrease in direct state interventions that Myrdal had envisioned.³

Nonetheless, decreasing direct state interventions and removing protectionist borders did emerge as influential ideas in discussions on globalization and transnational integration after the 1970s. However, applying the phrases of the two 1974 Nobel Prize winners in economics, Friedrich Hayek and Gunnar Myrdal, we can say that these ideas were connected with a confidence in Hayek's 'spontaneous order' rather than Myrdal's 'created harmony'. Visions of harmony thus appeared in the form of neoliberalist assumptions on the self-regulating market. However, as part of globalization rhetoric, images of harmony are also constructed by arguments pointing to community. Territorial 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1983) – local, regional, European, yet still, in particular, national – are reproduced in efforts to provide competitive operational environments for globally mobile economic actors. In the making of a competitive 'us', institutional and discursive changes have thus emerged, including those indicated by the new usages of 'social partners'.

SOCIAL PARTNERS AND LABOUR MARKET PARTIES

In the mid-1980s, 'social dialogue' between 'social partners', that is, trade unions and employer organizations, was introduced in the procedures of European integration (Barbier 2013, p. 50). Its status was confirmed in the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties of the European Union as well as in the constitutional Lisbon Treaty. However, the translations of the Lisbon Treaty into Danish, Finnish and Swedish, the languages of the three Nordic EU members, make reference to 'labour market parties' rather than 'social partners'.⁴ The vocabulary implies that a particular Nordic

³ In his critical historical, partly autobiographical, account of Swedish social democratic politics in 1982, the main message of the old Gunnar Myrdal was a critique of what he considered 'large-scale' bureaucratic solutions (*storskalighet*) in different policy areas in recent decades (Myrdal 1982, pp. 23–36).

⁴ Danish: *arbejdmarkedsparter*; Swedish: *arbetsmarknadsparterna*; Finnish: *työmarkkinaosapuolet*.

feature in the regulation of labour has been the stress on the labour market and divergent interests rather than communitarian ideas.

The Nordic pattern of the welfare state and industrial relations did not rest on a denial of the fact that labour is a commodity. Arguably, it was not even oriented to abolishing this state of affairs. The policies Gøsta Esping-Andersen (1985; 1990) influentially termed ‘decommodification’ were rather aimed at empowering the sellers of labour power so as to level the asymmetries that stemmed from the ‘fictitious’ character of labour as a commodity (Polanyi 2001 [1944]), that is, from its being inseparably connected with its seller’s life. Social policies liberated people’s life courses from the necessity of selling labour power under any conditions and thus aimed to make labour more like a *real* commodity (Kettunen 2012).

Social security, public social services and industrial relations were shaped by reforms that significantly promoted the functioning of the labour market. The Nordic model of social reform implied the making of modern society, in which waged and salaried work is the overwhelming social form of work and institutions are based on the normalcy of this form of employment, including the work of women outside the home. The notion of social citizenship not only concerned the relationship between the state and the individual but it also meant that the individual was empowered as a party in social relationships.

‘Social partners’ has a different origin. The term *Sozialpartnerschaft* seems to have emerged in Austria after the Second World War and referred to common efforts to facilitate national economic and political recovery and overcome previous cleavages. Its major features can be found in Social Catholicism, which took shape in the late 19th century (Hyman 2001, pp. 38–65). In the post-Second World War decades, especially in Austria and West Germany, the notion of ‘social partnership’ had the potential to combine the traditions of Social Catholicism and Social Democracy. The Social Democratic ‘dualism of labour and capital’ (Brüggemann 1994, p. 254) could be interpreted within the framework of the Catholic organicist idea of a community in which every member fulfils his or her own function for the common good. This idea implies a norm which reduces societal relationships to a personal relationship – a crucial aspect of the Catholic understanding of the principle of subsidiarity in the ‘social dimension’ of the EU (van Kersbergen 1995, pp. 187–97; van Kersbergen & Verbeek 2004, pp. 142–62).

Adopting ‘social partners’ within the EU vocabulary detached the concept from its particular historical contexts and generalized its ideological content. Social dialogue is a mode of action all

EU member states are supposed to share.⁵ In connection with this usage, another concept frequently appears that is also detached from its original post-Second World War context, namely ‘social market economy’. Stemming from so-called ordoliberalism, the concept was adopted by the German Christian Democrats at the end of 1940s and, later, by other European conservative parties as a tool for opposing any kind of socialism, including the Social Democratic combinations of economic planning and social policies (Ptak 2004, pp. 201ff.; Slobodian 2018, pp. 74, 190, 266). As part of the EU vocabulary, ‘social market economy’ was turned into an all-encompassing concept for the European mode of relating the economic and the social, a crucial part of which is ‘social dialogue’.⁶ In the EU reports on industrial relations, ‘social partners’ is routinely used as the concept for any trade unions and employer organization. At the turn of millennium, the ILO also adopted ‘social dialogue’ as part of its vocabulary as a friendly and flexible companion to its old key concept of ‘tripartism’ (Baccaro & Mele 2012).⁷

The discursive power of ‘social partners’ and ‘social dialogue’ stems not only from the anchorage of these concepts in one of the long traditions of European social thought, but also from their resonance with recent and current tendencies in social political agenda setting. They are concepts in a discourse in which collective labour market negotiations and agreements are discussed from the perspective of their compatibility with European or national competitiveness. The concepts are means to defend collective regulation by attempting to prove its benefits to competitiveness and modify it to further promote this end.

For those from the Nordic countries, it has been easy to support EU competitiveness strategies that recognize the need for social protection and the role of workers’ and employers’ organizations. It has been less easy for them to notice the changes in agenda setting caused by the new meanings of competitiveness. Similarly, it has been difficult to notice that the notion of symmetry in ‘social partners’ and ‘social dialogue’ differs from the ideal of symmetry that had been influential in the development of Nordic industrial relations. In the Nordic vernacular vocabularies, ‘social partners’

⁵ See, especially, Commission of the European Communities. The European social dialogue, a force for innovation and change. Proposal for a Council Decision establishing a Tripartite Social Summit for Growth and Employment. COM (2002) 341 final, Brussels 26.6.2002.

⁶ See, especially, European Commission. A new start for Social Dialogue. 05/03/2015. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=521&eventsId=1028&furtherEvents=yes> (accessed May 2019).

⁷ As part of the Governance and Tripartism Department of the ILO, the Social Dialogue and Tripartism Unit was founded in the early 2010s.

has not substituted for ‘labour market parties’, yet the equivalence between the terms seems to be taken for granted.

SOCIAL PARTNERS IN SOFT GOVERNANCE

In the 1990s, several opinions and declarations were issued as a result of EU-level social dialogue, with a common stance being the easiest to achieve on, inter alia, training and education. However, anyone expecting that the European single labour market would be regulated by an EU-level system of collective agreements proper was soon to be disappointed. In only a small number of cases did social dialogue result in an agreement implemented in the binding form of a Council Directive (the first one in 1996, on parental leave). The most obvious institutional limits to social dialogue derived from the fact that in social policies EU-level arrangements play a merely complementary role in relation to national practices. For the coordination of national social policies, the particular EU ‘social dimension’ is less important than the institutional preconditions stemming from single market norms.

However, new modes of including social policies in the EU-level political agenda were introduced in connection with the Lisbon Strategy in 2000 that was aimed to make the EU, by 2010, ‘the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion’.⁸ A procedure called the Open Method of Coordination was to provide non-binding frameworks for national policies in areas within member-state competence (Zeitlin et al. 2005). In the process of establishing those general frameworks, a consultative role was assigned to the social partners. Moreover, a principle of non-binding framework agreements was adopted. In such agreements (the first one in 2002, on telework), the EU-level social partners committed themselves to urging their national member organizations to implement the agreements in nationally appropriate ways (Larsen & Andersen 2006).

The Lisbon Strategy period ended with the financial crisis. The failure to achieve the objectives of competitiveness and a European-level social model was recognized in the next ten-year strategy, launched in 2010, *Europe 2020: A European Strategy for Smart, Sustainable, and Inclusive Growth*. Now ‘social model’ appeared in the plural form. Moreover, ‘structural reforms’ were

⁸ Lisbon European Council 23-24.03.2000: Conclusions of the Presidency, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1_en.htm (accessed October 2019).

‘essential for a strong and sustainable recovery and for preserving the sustainability of our social models’.⁹ In addition, a new tool of macroeconomic coordination, the so-called European Semester, was launched.¹⁰ It was arguably designed to orient the EU to defining the imperatives of globalized financial markets and turning them into guidelines for national policies. The autonomy of social-policy coordination was reduced, as it was more tightly integrated with economic policies. Divergent claims have been made as to whether this meant the socialization of economic policies or the economization of social policies (Dawson 2018; Zeitlin & Vanhercke 2018). However, this dualism already appeared in the phrase ‘social protection as a productive factor’, introduced in the late 1990s – with support from the Nordic defenders of the welfare state – and adopted in the Lisbon Strategy. While it was an argument for the economic importance of social policy, it also implied a demand to reform social policy to allow it to serve as a productive factor and as ‘social investments’ (Beck et al. 2001; Magnusson et al. 2008; Kettunen 2012, p. 36).

The prospects of EU-level social dialogue became weaker during the Lisbon Strategy period. In 2015, the Commission arranged a high-level conference on ‘A new start for Social Dialogue’. The message was a reminder that ‘social dialogue at all levels is a prerequisite for the functioning of Europe’s social market economy and crucial to promote both competitiveness and fairness’.¹¹

Reading EU documents on social dialogue,¹² one can make three observations. Firstly, while ‘social partners’ originally explicitly referred to a particular communitarian attitude to the relationships between workers and employers,¹³ in the EU vocabulary they appear as a natural element of any (at least any European) society. Secondly, little mention is usually made of the diverging compositions of various social partners. Instead, the increased global asymmetries between capital and labour disappear behind the symmetrical figures of social partners and social dialogue. Thirdly, as far as hints about conflicting interests appear, conflicts are presented as disturbances rather than structural aspects of social relationships. The common good is described as the improvement of economic and social ‘quality’ rather than as a result of compromises between divergent interests. Social dialogue

⁹ Europe 2020: A European Strategy for Smart, Sustainable, and Inclusive Growth, <http://www.efesme.org/europe-2020-a-strategy-for-smart-sustainable-and-inclusive-growth> (accessed October 2019).

¹⁰ European Council/The Council of European Union. European Semester. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/european-semester/> (accessed October 2019).

¹¹ European Commission. A new start for Social Dialogue, 05/03/2015, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=521&eventsId=1028&furtherEvents=yes> (accessed June 2019).

¹² Especially, *Industrial Relations in Europe* reports that the European Commission has published every second year since 2000.

¹³ In critical social research, one may still find this usage of *Sozialpartnerschaft*. See e.g. Seelinger (2012).

is ‘a force for innovation and change’, ‘a key to better governance’, and ‘a force for economic and social modernization’.¹⁴

Not only is the EU-level social policy a field of ‘soft governance’ in relation to national social policies; the EU conceptualization of the social also contributes to confidence in voluntary agency and soft governance in the social regulation of capitalism. ‘Social partners’ and ‘social dialogue’ indicate such confidence. Social partners are characterized as actors of civil society, and social dialogue is presented as a way of creating a European civil society (Kettunen 2018, pp. 358–60).¹⁵ Since ‘civil society’ in this usage denotes the sphere of citizens’ voluntary association, business enterprises, associated in employer organizations, thus qualify as citizens, notably in the sense of being members of civil society. However, more explicit ways of applying the concept of citizen to firms also appear, notably the concept of ‘corporate citizenship’.

CORPORATE CITIZENSHIP AND VOLUNTARISM

Personified collective actors are far from recent novelties. In *Leviathan* (1651), Thomas Hobbes described the state, the ‘commonwealth’, as ‘an artificial man’. In later sociology, a living (human) organism came to be an influential metaphor for society. Moreover, in a more direct way, the 19th-century conceptual innovation of the ‘juridical person’ provided the preconditions for the ‘corporate citizen’. The political philosophy of natural law, dealing with societies of human beings – even if an artificial person might unite them – failed to provide the means for conceptualizing the phenomena of the new commercial society. As the Swedish labour-law researcher Håkan Hydén notes, ‘legal positivism, by breaking with natural law thinking, opened up for legal constructions’. A juridical person, which referred to an association of several natural persons, especially a company, was one such revolutionary construction, making ‘the expansion of large-scale industrial society possible’ (Hydén 2002, pp. 161–4).

¹⁴ Quotations from Communication from the Commission. The European social dialogue, a force for innovation and change /* COM/2002/0341 final */, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52002DC0341> (accessed June 2019).

¹⁵ The idea of employer organizations as a part of civil society is also included in the Lisbon Treaty. According to article I-32, ‘The Economic and Social Committee shall consist of representatives of organizations of employers, of the employed, and of other parties representative of civil society, notably in socioeconomic, civic, professional and cultural areas.’ In the ILO, employers’ and workers’ organizations have defended tripartism against ideas of involving ‘other civil society organizations’ in the ILO structure (Baccaro & Mele 2012, p. 208).

In the late 19th-century United States, ‘corporate citizenship’ was even introduced as a legal construction, utilized, for example, for defining whether a railway company had its corporate domicile in Alabama or Tennessee (McCinney 1892). The concept nevertheless provoked opposition. It was, as a critic of monopolies wrote, ‘a legal fiction’ that intolerably increased the power of trusts and monopolies (Benjamin 1907, pp. 263–6).

In management discourse, ‘corporate citizenship’ gained popularity in the late 1990s. In their value manifestos, large businesses promised to be ‘good corporate citizens’. Moreover, corporate citizenship was rapidly adopted even in academic contexts. For instance, *The Journal of Corporate Citizenship* was first published in 2001, and research institutes, government units, consultancies and think tanks were founded during the first years of the 21st century in, for example, the United States, Britain and Australia (Matten & Crane 2003; Pies & Koslowski 2011). As the manifesto of an established field of research, the *Handbook of Research on Global Corporate Citizenship* was published in 2008. At the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the time of the global economic crisis, ‘corporate citizenship’ seems to have lost some of its popularity in global business language, yet it certainly did not disappear.

The introduction of ‘corporate citizenship’ was a response to the critique of neoliberalist globalization.¹⁶ A major impulse for the wider adoption of this concept was the foundation of the United Nations Global Compact in 2000. General Secretary Kofi Annan initiated this programme at the World Economic Forum in Davos 1999. He urged business leaders to respond to the increased criticism of the globalized market economy by joining ‘a global compact of shared values and principles, which will give a human face to the global market’. According to Annan, the failure to do this would result in the global economy remaining ‘vulnerable to backlash from all the “isms” of our post-Cold War world: protectionism; populism; nationalism; ethnic chauvinism; fanaticism; and terrorism’.¹⁷ ‘Corporate citizenship’ was adopted as a key concept of the UN Global Compact, ‘the world’s largest corporate citizenship initiative’, although ‘corporate sustainability’ later emerged as an alternative. In 2019, about 10 000 companies located in more than 160 countries had committed themselves to ten principles that ‘enjoy universal consensus’ in the areas of human rights, core

¹⁶ For example, on the role of NGOs in the emergence of the schemes of corporate social responsibility in Germany, see Berthoin Antal et al. (2007); Rieth (2009, pp. 111–13).

¹⁷ ‘Secretary-General proposes global compact on human rights, labour, environment, in address to World Economic Forum in Davos’, *Press release SG/SM 6881, 1.2.1999*, <https://www.un.org/press/en/1999/19990201.sgsm6881.html> (accessed May 2019).

labour standards, environmental norms and anti-corruption. The primary proof of commitment is an annual report that each member company should submit.¹⁸

The World Economic Forum has been a leading arena for advocating corporate citizenship. A landmark in the triumph of this concept was the joint statement on ‘Global Corporate Citizenship – The Leadership Challenge for CEOs and Boards’ by the CEOs of 34 large multinational corporations at the World Economic Forum 2002 in New York.¹⁹ Intergovernmental organizations have played a vigilant role in adopting and diffusing such novel concepts as ‘corporate citizenship’. For instance, the ILO has been a major actor in the UN Global Compact. In the first years of the Global Compact, the ILO implemented ‘The Management Promotion and Corporate Citizenship Programme’, which, mostly by means of research and knowledge production, helped ‘build the supportive systems and the managerial competencies that enable enterprises to be productive, competitive and viable and at the same time meet the increasing social expectations on business’.²⁰ Corporate citizenship belongs to the field of issues in which intergovernmental organizations such as the ILO and OECD primarily produce comparative knowledge and, thus, promote ‘bench-marking’ and the diffusion of ‘best practices’ instead of aiming at legally binding conventions.

Voluntarism does not, however, imply hostility towards the official norms set by legislation or collective agreements. ‘Human and labour rights’ were mentioned in several parts of the declaration of CEOs at the World Economic Forum 2002. Moreover, the ten principles of the UN Global Compact on human rights, core labour standards, environmental norms and anti-corruption are all based on international conventions. Furthermore, the programme emphasizes that its members are committed to ‘voluntarism as a complement of regulation’.²¹ The ILO has, for example, developed ideas for involving the encouragement of corporate social responsibility (CSR) – and, thus, a social dimension – in international trade and investment agreements, in which the World Trade Organization (WTO) opposes the inclusion of binding social norms (Peels et al. 2016). Varying forms of trade union participation have also been associated with the CSR schemes. For example,

¹⁸ United Nations Global Compact, [https:// www .unglobalcompact .org/](https://www.unglobalcompact.org/) (accessed October 2019).

¹⁹ World Economic Forum 2002. Global Corporate Citizenship – The Leadership Challenge for CEOs and Boards, [http:// www .weforum .org/ pdf/ GCCI/ GCC_ CEOstatement .pdf](http://www.weforum.org/pdf/GCCI/GCC_CEOstatement.pdf) (accessed May 2019).

²⁰ International Labour Organization. The Management Promotion and Corporate Citizenship Programme, [http:// www .ilo .org/ dyn/ empent/](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/empent/) (accessed March 2005); Kari Tapiola, ‘UN Global Compact and other ILO instruments’, OECD Roundtable on Global Instruments for Corporate Responsibility, OECD Headquarters, Paris, 19 June 2001, [http:// www .oecd .org/ industry/ inv/ mne/ 2348714 .pdf](http://www.oecd.org/industry/inv/mne/2348714.pdf) (accessed May 2019).

²¹ The Importance of Voluntarism, [https:// www .unglobalcompact .org/ docs/ about_ the_ gc/ Voluntarism_ Importance .pdf](https://www.unglobalcompact.org/docs/about_the_gc/Voluntarism_Importance.pdf) (accessed May 2019).

transnational companies have made international framework agreements with international trade union federations. These agreements may express general principles in their CSR programmes, including the right of unionization and sometimes even a role for national and local trade unions in implementing and monitoring the programmes (Croucher & Cotton 2009, pp. 57–68).

Manifestos on corporate social responsibility and corporate citizenship encompass both the internal social relationships of firms and their relationships with the host communities. In this sense they are reminiscent of the welfare capitalism or company paternalism that, particularly in the early 20th century, was characteristic of many large industrial enterprises. However, the role of spatial ties has profoundly changed. Today, territorial communities, most notably national ones, are being reproduced and reshaped as part of the globalized economic competition between different business environments (Rosamond 2002; Sassen 2006; Kettunen 2011), and the onus is on making community membership more preferable to companies than exit or remaining unengaged.

CORPORATE CITIZENSHIP AND THE EXIT OPTION

Albert O. Hirschman (1970) distinguished three ways actors can respond to changes in the milieu of their activities. *Exit* means leaving an unsatisfactory milieu, while *voice* refers to attempts to exert influence on the operational environment and *loyalty* to commitment to its modes of functioning. Applying this distinction in a world of increased cross-border mobility of capital, it is apparent that, for transnational companies and investors, the exit option has become a powerful silent means of exerting an influential voice and defining the preconditions of loyalty.

A market relationship has developed between business companies and the suppliers of business environments. One aspect of this change is a reversal of the positions of public and private. National and local public authorities are behaving as market actors as they attempt to produce and market attractive business environments to companies and investors, emphasizing, for example, their high levels of ‘human capital’ and ‘social capital’. Private companies, in turn, are active in creating self-regulating norms and sanctions, for instance in the form of various certificates in social and environmental issues as an alternative to legal constraints. ‘Corporate citizenship’ is an expression for this reversal. At the same time it indicates that not only the providers of business environments but also businesses themselves must take into account the requirements for the popular legitimacy of their policies. For companies this means, most obviously, a sensitivity to consumer attitudes, and a good branding tool is an award in a Best Corporate Citizen Competition, which, for example, the

U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation and the Chinese Committee of Corporate Citizenship arrange annually.²²

The exit option is one side of the Janus face, while the other side is ‘corporate citizenship’. Correspondingly, we can distinguish between two sides in the conventional politics dealing with globalization as a *national* challenge and reshaping the nation state as a ‘competition state’ (Cerny 1990; Streeck 1998; Palan et al. 1999). On the one hand, politics is shaped as the reactive fulfilling of economic necessities, which are associated with the exit option of companies and investors. On the other hand, politics is aimed at the active creation of an innovative context for competitive companies. Thus, varying national forms of ‘Public Private Partnership’ have emerged in projects for creating and exploiting competitive business environments that engage with national and local public authorities, universities and other institutes of research, education and training, large and small enterprises, and various kinds of voluntary organizations.

At the same time as voluntarism connects ‘corporate citizenship’ with the notion of a civil society distinct from the state, the concept also implies the idea of membership in a community in which many different actors – called ‘stakeholders’ – must be taken into account and where the private and the public are inseparably intertwined. According to the declaration on Global Corporate Citizenship at the 2002 World Economic Forum, the first category of stakeholders comprises ‘investors, customers and employees’, while the second is a mixed collection of ‘other stakeholders’, such as ‘business partners, industry associations, local communities, trade unions, non-governmental organizations, research and academic institutions, the media and government bodies – from local municipalities to regional, state and national governments and international bodies such as those in the United Nations system’. The wide range of stakeholders in the rhetoric of corporate citizenship bears some resemblance to Myrdal’s emphasis on the recognition of all relevant interests. However, it also indicates that business interests have gained the new power of being recognized as general rather than particular interests.

In the making of the Nordic model, an important principle was that the interests of businesses as employers were no more than a category of particular interests. This was to be ensured through collective and public regulation of labour relations, bolstering the ability of the weaker party (workers) to articulate their interests and constraining the stronger party (employers) from presenting their interests as universal.

²² The Citizens Awards. U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/citizens-awards-1> (accessed June 2019); Chinese Association of Social Workers, Committee of Corporate Citizenship, <http://www.chinacccc.org/en/> (accessed June 2019); Darigan & Post (2009).

In the 1980s, the direction changed in a way that can be characterized by means of a distinction between ‘industrial relations’ and ‘human resource management’. Until the 1970s, the agenda of working-life reform was dominated by the struggle over the extent to which management questions should be drawn into the sphere of collective interest representation and conflict regulation, that is, into industrial relations. Then, the terms of the debate changed, and the perspective of human resource management became the dominant position in defining the agenda of working-life problems (Dulebohn et al. 1995, pp. 29–38; Looise & van Riemsdijk 2001). From a defensive position, trade unions developed arguments for proving that the institutions of industrial relations usefully contributed to social stability, economic predictability, more committed employees, more innovative management, and knowledge-based competitiveness.

By contrast, the transnational rhetoric of national business interest organizations sends the message that they represent the *universal* interest of the ‘economy’ in relation to the *particular* and biased interests of trade unions and public authorities. In many European countries, for example in all Nordic countries, separate employer organizations have been abolished. Instead, the representation of enterprises as employers has become just one function of the business interest organizations that represent the interest of the ‘economy’ in relation to many different ‘stakeholders’, competitiveness appearing as the core of this universalized interest.

On the other hand, for ‘global corporate citizens’, national business interest organizations are but one category of ‘stakeholders’. Thus, what kinds of motives can tie a transnational company to a national business or employer interest organization? This is as fundamental a question as the problems of trade union membership. One plausible motive is the logic of buying interest representation services. We may assume that the need for and availability and quality of such services are among the variables considered by transnational corporations when assessing potential business environments. Effective national business interest organizations adopt an influential dual role in which they both translate the imperatives of global competition into national challenges and are active in the shaping of national responses.

In the competition to sell business environments for competitive economic performance, nation states, in turn, may highlight their effective systems of collective conflict regulation, risk sharing and consensus making as competitive advantages in their ‘country brands’.²³ In the Nordic countries, this appears to be an important aspect of how encounters between transnational economic

²³ In Finland, a commission for developing the country brand of Finland was appointed in 2008 by Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb and published in a report in 2010. It was chaired by Jorma Ollila, the president of the boards of Shell and Nokia, who has on several

actors and national institutions are moulding the nation state as a competition state and national society as a competitive community.

CONCLUSION: COMPETITIVE COMMUNITY

The need to cope with transnational economic, political and cultural interdependencies was a major impetus in the development of national welfare states and industrial relations systems. The Nordic experiences provided a background for the ‘created harmony’ Gunnar Myrdal envisioned in the late 1950s. According to his critical account, national responses to transnational interdependencies should be complemented and coordinated with international policies. In a world of increased cross-border mobility of capital, information, jobs and people, the problematic implications of the nationalism of Western welfare states are more evident than they were at the time of Myrdal’s observations. Nevertheless, the national welfare state is hardly expanding into a Myrdalian welfare world. By contrast, it is being modified to serve the competition-state and security-state functions of nation states that aim to provide attractive operational environments for globally mobile economic actors and respond to global inequalities by preventing the entry of unwanted people.

Since the 1980s, the premises of the Nordic vision of symmetry between labour market parties have been weakened by a variety of developments: the increasingly multinational and transnational character of companies in the global economy; the restructuring of corporate practices and production chains by networking, subcontracting and outsourcing; transformations in the public sector in the spirit of New Public Management, including the blurring of boundaries between public and private, obligatory and voluntary, and official and unofficial; the increase in so-called ‘atypical’ employment relationships; and the growing fluidity of the boundary between wage work and entrepreneurship. It thus became more difficult to identify, organize, unite and centralize the different labour market parties within national society. Moreover, through the ethos of entrepreneurship, the idea of the worker as the weaker party of the employment relationship tended to be marginalized while, on the other hand, the asymmetry between capital and labour increased due to the dramatic growth in the mobility of financial capital.

However, in the Nordic traditions, some favourable preconditions existed for a re-orientation. For instance, competitiveness was an integral part of the post-Second World War ideology of virtuous

occasions – also when active as the CEO of Nokia in 1992–2006– expressed his views on the economic benefits of the ‘Nordic model’. For a scholarly example of this kind of argumentation, see Andersen et al. (2007).

circles. Thus, it was easy for trade unions to accept, at least in their programmes, a value-added competition strategy based on innovation, training and participation as an alternative to the cost-based strategies of social dumping and low-wage competition. Much of the ideological power of knowledge, education and innovation in the Nordic countries stemmed from the promise that competitiveness and its preconditions in the global economy can – or even must – be seen from a wider perspective than that of neoliberalist deregulation. Consequently, the concepts of ‘social capital’ and ‘social investment’ gained popularity in the 1990s, while they also opened up new possibilities to revitalize ideas of a virtuous circle between social cohesion and economic success. Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden have stubbornly held their top positions in international statistics of unionization. Thus, change has occurred within a period of remarkable institutional continuity, through ‘institutional conversion’ (Mahoney & Thelen 2010, pp. 1–37), in which the old welfare state institutions have been modified to serve the new functions of the competition-state.

Concerning the guidelines of the political process, this change can be described by means of the distinction between compromise and consensus suggested by the Dutch historian Frank Ankersmit (2002, pp. 193–213). Compromise is based on mutual recognition of the particular instead of the universal nature of the interests in question, and the political process does not aim to remove this state of affairs. Consensus, in turn, presupposes a commitment to a predefined common interest, and in the political process only those aspects of the particular interests of the participants are recognized which contain elements of that common interest. Conflicts may emerge over the content of the common interest or the correct ways of representing it, and such conflicts, based on the consensus ideal, may be hard to regulate, as they easily involve accusations of betrayal.

In nation state societies, consensus and compromise often co-exist, yet the relationship between these principles varies and changes. The Nordic pattern of social regulation institutionalized compromises between different particular interests, and they were legitimized by a confidence in virtuous circles. The recognition of and compromises between divergent interests were also at the core of Myrdal’s ‘created harmony’. However, creating competitive communities in a system of globalized capitalism reinforces consensus and weakens compromise.

‘Social partners’ and ‘corporate citizens’ indicate this change. The institutionalized status of ‘social partners’ and ‘social dialogue’ in the EU – and, later, also in the ILO – reflects attempts to engage businesses in a strategy aimed at promoting competitiveness based on knowledge, innovation, relatively high social norms, and trade union participation. ‘Corporate citizenship’, in turn, emerged as a management concept for responding to the critique of neoliberalist globalization. It thus enjoys

a weaker institutional status, and, moreover, may be a double-edged sword, as the concept of citizenship still tends to be associated with rights and duties and equality and inclusion among human beings. Consequently, critics of corporate policies might turn ‘corporate citizenship’ against the very idea of the self-regulated responsibility of non-human persons that it was introduced to support (Rowe 2005, pp. 130–31).²⁴

Nonetheless, ‘social partners’ and ‘corporate citizens’ are both conceptual tools for connecting the state, capitalism and civil society, most notably in the context of how nation states or the European Union are shaped as competitive territorial communities.²⁵ Here, the newly emerged notion of civil society as the sphere of voluntary associations and social movements meets the Hegelian *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, which refers to the sphere of (economic) needs and necessities. This Janus-faced notion of civil society appears to be furnished, in the rhetoric of ‘social partners’ and ‘corporate citizens’, with a strong emphasis on the common good, that is, on the orientation of action Hegel associated with the state. One may find here a competition-state variety of the ‘integral state’, which, as Antonio Gramsci (1971) argued, includes the complex of state machinery and the modes of organizing economic interests in ‘civil society’ – the complex within and through which hegemony is established.

The Gramscian concept of hegemony applies to a specific type of power that is evident in the discussion on corporate citizens, social partners and social dialogue. It is the power of defining the questions that are viewed as relevant, legitimate and also taken for granted. Struggles between rival answers tend to conceal the power of formulating the question. Thus, controversies over the answers to ‘how to make Europe (or a country) competitive in the globalized economy’ seem to reinforce the self-evident role of competitiveness in political agenda setting.

The changes are nevertheless paradoxical and controversial. They are paradoxical because the competition state, while fulfilling the imperatives of ‘our’ competitiveness, seems to point to the notion of a warm *community*, based on personified ties, rather than to the notion of a cool *society* that consists of structures and interests and has been characteristic of Nordic-type welfare states.

²⁴ A few researchers advocating ‘corporate citizenship’ have elaborated this concept in a way that includes human beings in their roles associated with the political agency of a company, as employees and customers (Crane et al. 2008). In this direction, new perspectives may be found on the old but recently marginalized discussion on ‘corporate democracy’ or ‘industrial democracy’. However, there are good grounds for agreeing with Colin Crouch (2009, p. 55), who finds ‘corporate citizenship’ a ‘deeply problematic’ idea.

²⁵ Of course, there are many other topical issues concerning the relationships between the state, capitalism and civil society. See Adloff et al. (2016).

The changes are, however, also inherently controversial. While the emphasis on ‘us’ in the making of competitive territorial (most notably national) communities is an integral part of globalized economic competition, the very same transformations may also either erode solidarity based on common spatial ties, evoke xenophobic reactions and practices of bordering, or help to create new cross-national and cross-territorial perspectives for defining ‘us’.

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