

# Research Plan

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## 1 Introduction and research setting

Labour unions in Europe have been in a difficult situation in the final two decades of the 20th century. External factors such as globalization, unemployment and an antagonistic political climate have put labour unions on the defence (Hyman 1999, 2001; Behrens et al. 2003; Baccaro et al. 2003). These factors, among others, may have caused a downward trend for labour unions in terms of their membership base, frequently depicted as the union density measure (e.g. Ebbinghaus and Visser, 1998). Regardless of this trend, labour unions still seem valid actors in the system of industrial relations. Membership decline therefore does not seem to have significantly affected the organizational and strategic capabilities of labour unions (yet).

As is pointed out in my literature review of 2007, two main strands of labour union research exist. The first is mostly preoccupied with union density and how changes in union density can be explained. This approach is quantitative in nature and broadly speaking the factors influencing union density are exogenous, meaning that the labour union cannot influence these, such as the level of employment or inflation rates (e.g. Checchi and Visser, 2005 or Lesch, 2004). The other approach is concerned with labour union revitalization strategies. This strand of literature is based on the notion that the demographic of the working population and the socio-economic circumstances are changing, and the labour union as an organization must adapt to reflect these changes. The union revitalization literature discusses issues of gender and ethnic equality, as well as using labour union services, such as schooling, to attract under-represented members and maintain a valid role in society. Examples include Kirton (1999), Frege and Kelly (2003) and Wrench (2004).

Since the labour union operates as an actor in a wider economic and political environment, and also functions as an organization which is dependent on its members, both strands of literature by themselves are inadequate to explain the changes in the position of the labour union in society. Jokingly, one could say that according to the union density literature labour unions should not have the position they occupy at all, while the revitalization literature would wish the labour union all the members in any given sector, if it just would become more representative and provide a lot of services. In reality, both theoretical viewpoints have their pros and cons. It is the explicit aim of this dissertation to provide a bridge between these strands of literature, in order to be able to better explain changes in the strategic and organizational capabilities of the labour union. The concept chosen for this purpose is representativeness, as this reflects the main function of the labour union: to represent its members.

The empirical part of this study will analyse the paper-industry labour unions in the Netherlands, Finland and France. The paper-industry has been a global industry since a long time, meaning that issues such as relocation of plants or overseas investment decisions are well-known to the labour unions covering this industry. Furthermore, the paper-industry unions, especially in Finland, have their own interesting history: they are at the same time a representative of

traditional 'blue-collar' workers, but these workers are extremely highly skilled since the industry is high-tech. Lastly, the three countries selected are good examples of their respective classification: Finland is an (extreme) example of the Scandinavian model of industrial relations, with high levels of union centralization, a strong collective bargaining tradition and with high union density; the Netherlands is an example of a moderate corporatist country with strongly institutionalized collective bargaining structures but low-to-medium union density, as well as competition between unions thanks to the remnants of the 'pillarized' society; France is an example of a country with very low union density, few institutionalized co-operation structures and a highly militant, left-wing, splintered union movement.

The period covered in this study is the time between 1980 and 2005. The period between 1980 and 1990 is significant for this research since it was a period of austerity for unions worldwide thanks to the 'Reagan-Thatcher' politics of anti-unionism (Pike et al. 2002). The period between 1990 and present is very interesting since it has seen changes such as the collapse of the Soviet Union, Finland joining the EU and increased global competition in the paper industry (Kujala, 2006, p. 633).

The remaining sections of this document deal with the key research question, data selection, methodology and theoretical framework. Also a timetable is included.

## 2 Research question

In the light of the research setting presented in the previous section, the central research question is:

How does labour union representativeness explain the changes in organizational and strategical capacity of the labour unions of the paper-industry in France, Finland and the Netherlands between 1980 and 2005, and how does it explain the differences between the unions in these countries?

This question can be subdivided into the following questions:

1. What is labour union representativeness?
2. What is the organizational and strategical capacity of labour unions?
3. How has this capacity changed in the labour unions of the paper-industry in France, Finland and the Netherlands between 1980 and 2005?
4. How does representativeness explain the changes in the organizational and strategical capacities of labour unions?
5. How does representativeness explain the differences in capacity between the labour unions in France, Finland and the Netherlands?

From these five main research questions the structure of the study becomes apparent. Questions 1 and 2 form the theoretical backbone; in this part, the introduction, the concept of representativeness will be examined in relation to e.g.

Walter Korpi's power-resources theory and other theories of organisational power. A preliminary operationalisation will be included in the section on the theoretical framework in this document. Question 3 results in the empirical part of the study, which will be the subject of in total five articles, while questions 4 and 5 deal with analysis, in the comparative chapter of the dissertation.

The form of the dissertation is an article-dissertation; the structure of the dissertation will be such that four core articles constitute the analysis of the Finnish case, while one article explores the European-level dimension and one article focuses on a French case study. The Dutch case will be discussed in the introduction and in the comparative chapter.

## 3 Theoretical Framework

### 3.1 The four dimensions of representativeness<sup>1</sup>

Following Hyman (1997), the constituencies of a labour union consist of an elite, core, periphery and excluded group. The elite can be understood as the highly educated members of the workforce, while the core is the workforce the labour union focuses on. The periphery are those workers that are in a poor and insecure position while the excluded category are the unemployed and those unable to work. Hyman describes the core as 'a section of the labour force with scarce skills, relatively high pay, and often [...] considerable job security.' (Hyman, 1997, p. 517). He states that the core as a basis of unionisation has declined in influence but labour unions have not adapted to this change yet, which also Cockburn (1997) and Kirton (1999) acknowledge. In other words, the periphery and excluded categories should become more prominent in the labour union. Statistical analysis should point out the socio-economic changes that have occurred. One could pose that what has been periphery should become part of the core; Hyman's division of constituencies points to the fact that the membership and potential membership is dependent on the union's policies as well.

On the other hand, the union density literature has analysed in depth the institutional factors influencing labour union membership, and thus the factors that enable or hinder labour unions being a representative of their members vis-à-vis the employers representation (Vernon, 2006). Combining both dimensions, we can say labour unions have internal and external representativeness. Added to these are legal representativeness, which contain the ground rules of labour union operation within the rule of law, and reputation representativeness.<sup>2</sup> The latter derives from interaction with other actors, such as employers, grass-roots movements and other labour unions. These four dimensions of representation make labour union representativeness a dynamic rather than a static concept. Essentially, all dimensions are subject to change, which enables us to analyse labour union function at different points in time, incorporating changes in the environment of the

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1 This section is expanded in a draft theoretical chapter, which was presented in the jatko-tutkimus-seminar of the department of sociology.

2 Legal representativeness also includes for example the mechanism by which a collective agreement is extended beyond the members of the labour union and employers' organization, or the way in which collective agreements can be used to enforce EU law, or what denotes a single labour union as being representative in the collective bargaining process. See <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/areas/industrialrelations/dictionary/> and the crosslinks found there to related issues.

labour union. This concept of representativeness also might help to explain the relative strength of labour unions that do not have a large membership density and it might help to explain behaviour of supposedly 'strong' labour unions, regardless of their large membership base.

### 3.2 Factors influencing representativeness

Having thus defined representativeness as a dynamic concept, we now turn to factors that influence representativeness. Concerning external representativeness, the literature on union density learns that factors like workplace access for unions, union-managed unemployment funds and union centralization have a strong effect on membership density, which makes sense also outside the context of statistical analysis, since these factors influence the 'weight' of labour unions in the negotiations with the employer (Vernon, 2006).<sup>3</sup> An aspect which some authors try to capture under the heading 'level of corporatism' is the extent to which labour unions participate in more or less formal bodies of deliberation, such as the Dutch Stichting van de Arbeid (Labour Foundation).<sup>4</sup> Also participation of labour unions in various transnational and European platforms should be seen as a factor influencing external participation.

Factors influencing internal representativeness include the demographic structure of the membership, organizational structure of the labour union, labour union policy-making and democracy, education for members and membership services (e.g. Wrench, 2004; Greene and Kirton, 2002; Yuki and Yamada, 2004; Björkman, 2006). The legal representativeness of a labour union is obviously influenced by the union's country's legal system, and because of this, legal representativeness may vary widely from country to country, even though European law provides a common legal basis for labour unions, as does to some extent the ILO.<sup>5</sup> Although the legal representativeness is the most stable dimension of representativeness, in the analysis of representativeness legal changes and the legal value of collective agreements in particular should not be underestimated. Finally, reputation representativeness is perhaps the most dynamic of the four dimensions. Factors influencing this dimension include: ethical conduct, fraud in labour unions, industrial action, co-operation with social movements, media coverage and ideological colour (e.g. Frege and Kelly, 2003).<sup>6</sup>

These aspects might be difficult to 'manage' by the labour union, but they fulfill a role in creating a new collective

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3 The literature on union density points out that various labour market variables are highly significant, but these are not institutional factors like those mentioned; therefore these are left out of the analysis at this point. See e.g. Checchi and Lucifora (2002) or Checchi and Visser (2005).

4 e.g. Ebbinghaus and Visser (1998)

5 e.g. the International Labour Standard on Tripartite Consultation, Convention 144 of 1976.

6 Ideological colour seems to be of consequence in countries like the Netherlands, where labour unions are still organized along 'pillarized' lines, or in France and Italy where the labour unions occupy a wide spectrum of left-wing ideologies. See for example <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/2006/11/articles/nl0611039i.html> for the Netherlands or <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/2006/11/articles/it0611029i.html> for Italy, illustrating conflicts between labour unions which harm reputation representativeness.

identity, which should make labour unions more up-to-date and representative (Hyman, 1997; Greene and Kirton, 2002; Greene, Kirton and Wrench, 2005).

The theoretical framework presented here solves several problems of the existing literature on labour union 'power'. It focuses on institutional aspects as well as internal aspects of the labour unions, combining these with two other aspects which determine the immediate environment in which the labour union operates. It enables us to critically assess the labour union's policy in all of its functions, which is not possible in for example the labour union density literature. The framework enables us to assess the developments of the diverse dimensions of representativeness, which returns the focus of labour union research back to its core function: representing its members in the co-operation with the state and the employers' representation. This theoretical framework will be elaborated and compared to e.g. Korpi's power resources theory in the chapter on the theoretical framework

### 3.3 Organizational and strategical capability of labour unions

In this study, the concepts of organizational and strategical capability are derived from Hyman (1997) and Frege and Kelly (2003). These authors provide the clearest vision of these concepts, in the sense that they can be easily operationalised. According to Hyman (1997), the key elements of organizational capability are: intelligence, strategy and e-fficacy. Intelligence is defined as 'the degree to which, at all levels within union movements, knowledge is seen as an essential component of union power.' E-fficacy is defined as 'the attainability of union policies within the objective context [and] the overall coherence of aims [...]' (Hyman, 1997, p. 519). Strategic capability contains according to Frege and Kelly (2003, p. 9): organizing skills, organizational restructuring, partnership with employers, political action and international links [with other unions].

These eight dimensions of organizational and strategical capability of labour unions can be used to map changes. In particular, the dimensions of partnership with employers, political action and international links can be quantified by the use of indicators such as strike incidence and working hours lost, number of connections with other labour unions and social movements and their co-operation in e.g. joint publications. The dimension of organizing skills is mainly concerned with the membership trends of the union, and related to this, campaigns to boost membership figures. Organizational restructuring can be measured in terms of inter-union mergers (or the opposite: splinter groups), internal reorganization and (if feasible) changes in budgetary policy (Frege and Kelly, 2003, p. 9). The dimensions listed above will be further operationalised and where possible, quantitative or qualitative indicators will be developed.

## 4 Data selection

The countries chosen for this research represent three different institutional settings of labour unions. Finland is an extremely institutionalized country, the Netherlands is not as institutionalized but it features a corporatist set-up, through which labour unions have opportunities for deliberation. In France, lastly, labour unions are fairly marginal institutionally, but they are frequently militant and left-wing, which makes them an 'institution'. As the research deals with both external and internal aspects of the labour union, data should come from many sources. Regarding the external aspects, labour statistics are necessary to analyse the employment

trends in the three countries and to analyse union density developments for the paper-industry sector. Foreign direct investment statistics will help to analyse the pressure of globalization on the paper-industry and its possible effects on labour unions. In a less quantitative format, data regarding the legal perimeters of labour unions is necessary (such as the possibility collective agreement extension and strike legislation), as well as regulations determining union workplace access (i.e. is it allowed for unions to organize workers and to what extent). The data for internal aspects include union demography data, policy documents, data on union education and union services as well as informal agreements with grass-roots movements.

Related to the strike legislation, it is useful to find data on the number of conflicts about the legality of a strike. For this, I am involved in an international book project on strikes, together with historian Tapio Bergholm. We have access to the archives of SAK and the National Conciliator for data on strikes and industrial conflict. Also, I am involved in a project on 'New Ways in Strike Research' led by the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

## 5 Methodology

The diversity of the data demands a mixed methods approach, although emphasis is on qualitative sources. Where feasible however, a quantitative approach will be taken. The union density literature provides a model which statistical methods to use, although these methods can similarly be criticized. I employed this methodology in Jonker (2009) - see publication list for full details. The analysis of qualitative data will be mostly content analysis and analysis of secondary sources.

## 6 Courses

In 2007 I participated in several of Leena Koivusilta's courses on Multi-Level Statistical Analysis and Longitudinal data analysis.

During 2008, I have attended a course on postcolonial feminist theories and analytical approaches in Roskilde, Denmark, to extend my knowledge on gender issues in society, and more specifically in the labour market. Also during 2008, I participated in the Oslo Summer School on Comparative Social Sciences, a course named Markets as Social Formations, for which I wrote an essay. In Spring 2009 I will do the book-exam in the way required by the department of Sociology.

## 7 Timetable

Since my employment contract ends in December 2009 - although other sources of funding will be sought - it is important to have a good and realistic time schedule.

Spring 2009	Fieldwork Netherlands and France; Book exam; Article EU-level	Rewriting/Publication of article on shop stewards for Industrielle Beziehungen (in review at present) and Outsourcing-article.
Summer 2009	Analysis; Article France;	NordWel International Conference on Labour Markets and the Nordic Welfare State (? - abstract submitted)
Autumn 2009	Analysis; Finishing draft introduction	Conference IIRA in Australia (September)
Winter 2009	Finishing comparative chapter and preparing manuscript for	Työ sosiologian kurssi (Jonker, Naumanen, Lähteenmäki)

Presently, I have two international referee publications, and one in review for the journal Industrielle Beziehungen (see list of publications). Before Christmas, I will send out the fourth article for review, and in January I will send a revised

version of my 'Labour unions and the EU-level' -article to a refereed journal.

## References

This list of references is complete for this document. However, my full literature review gives a much more complete picture of the literature, and the theoretical chapter presented in the seminar of the department of Sociology also critically interprets the literature.

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