

DFG - Research Project

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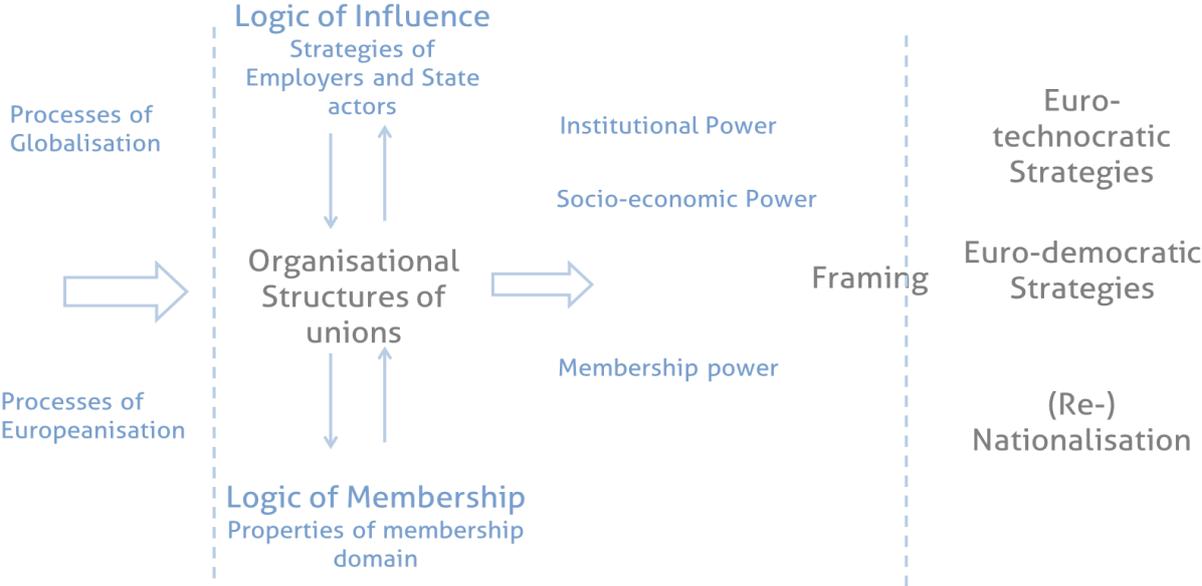
Industrial Relations in Europe – How Trade Unions Might Contribute to Horizontal Europeanisation

The project focuses on trade union strategies and action in the organisational field of industrial relations in Europe. It examines how trade unions contribute to the democratisation of the 'European Project'. By carrying out a number of case studies in two sectors, manufacturing and IT services, the project aims to uncover the factors that facilitate or inhibit processes of horizontal Europeanisation in the field of work and industrial relations.

European integration, and the Single Market and Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) in particular, pose considerable challenges to trade unions. While their main power resources are still provided within national systems of industrial relations, such as membership and institutional support (e.g. free collective bargaining and mechanisms for the extension of collective agreements), employers display a high level of transnational mobility and hence, capacity for regime shopping. Some authors have therefore argued that the process of Europeanisation inevitably strengthens the position of employers *vis-à-vis* trade unions (e.g. Streeck 1998; Scharpf 2010).

However, trade unions in some sectors and occupations (such as the metal sector) have responded to economic and political processes of Europeanisation with transnational coordination of collective bargaining and strike action. In this regard, EMU was undisputably a driver for transnational collective action and hence, for *horizontal Europeanisation*. Against this background, the project addresses the following research question: *1) How do national trade unions strategically respond to processes of vertical and market-driven Europeanization?* Contingent upon existing power resources of trade unions at national and EU level we distinguish between three strategic options: a) (Re-)Nationalisation; b) Euro-democratic strategies; c) Euro-technocratic strategies. In this regard, the project aims to explore patterns and processes of *horizontal Europeanisation* in the field of industrial relations as well as strategies of (re)nationalization.

Figure 1. Trade Unions’ strategic options in the field of European Industrial Relations



In theoretical terms, we draw on organisational neo-institutionalism (Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1983; DiMaggio 1988; Scott 2008; Fligstein 2011) and industrial relations theory (Frege and Kelly 2003; Hyman 2007; Rehder 2008; Erne 2009, Traxler and Brandl 2009, Glassner and Pochet 2011). Based on this literature we regard power as to constitute trade unions’ positions within organisational fields of industrial relations at national and European level. Within these fields trade unions are perceived as collective actors possessing strategic capacity to change both their position as well as institutional logics that govern the behaviour of organisations participating in the field.

The research project draws on a qualitative, most-different systems design (Przeworski and Teune 1970) which allows to test and to generate further conceptual assumptions and hypotheses about trade union behaviour in a comparatively new strategic field of action (Fligstein and McAdam 2011). We selected three countrys (United Kingdom, Germany and Poland) and two sectors (automotive/metal sector and information technology services) in which we will conduct six case studies. Countries have been selected according to the degree of institutional embeddedness of trade unions and dominant levels of collective bargaining. The two sectors represent industrial manufacturing (automobile) as well as services (software) and have been selected according to theoretically relevant dimensions (see table 1).

Table 1. Selection of countries and sectors

Countries	Germany	United Kingdom	Poland
Industrial Relations	Social Partnership	Liberal Pluralism	Transformation
Collective Bargaining	Sector	Enterprise	State/Enterprise
Sectors	Automotive (Metal-sector)	Software development	
Degree of market opening	High	High	
Labour Mobility	Low	High	
Degree of atypical mobility	Low	High	
Membership density	High	Low	
Transnational coordination	+	-	

The research team consists of Susanne Pernicka (project director), Vera Glassner, Torben Krings and Stefan Wagner, who are all located at the Institute of Sociology, University of Linz. External partners are Roland Erne (University College Dublin) and Guglielmo Meardi (Warwick Business School).

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