Studying TU cooperation and networking in Europe with a comparative approach – potentials and problems

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Why comparative research on transnational TU cooperation and networking in Europe?

A) It is an important question for the strength of TUs

B) It is an important research area, since there is not much systematically comparative research on transnational TU networking and cooperation – even though there is much research on:

- The Social Dialogues, and the EWCs, and their problems and outcomes – which of course connects to the issue of transnational TU cooperation and networking.

- Industrial relations (national and sectoral “regimes”) and changes in IR – though is not that often related to transnational TU cooperation from below.

- There are studies on trade union cooperation and networking from below, though not that much with a systematic and comparative character -- many case studies, and singular sector/regional studies.
Approaching TU cooperation from a network perspective:

A) Conceptualizing TU cooperation as existing of at least three layers:

1. Contacts and exchange of information in bilateral or multilateral communication networks, increasing the body of knowledge on which individual unions base their strategies and activities – i.e. networks of bilateral contacts

2. Identification of common interests and establishment of relatively loose coordination networks, which allow unions to synchronize their actions – i.e. organized networks of multilateral contacts.

3. Joint transnational decision-making and negotiating bodies in the form of meta-organizations with the mandate to act on behalf of the individual unions (either on a case-to-case basis, or through a joint management).

• It is of course also possible to study the latter as consisting of networks of organizations and individuals – internal ones and external ones.
Some important methodological issues:

• Studying networks of individuals or organisations?
• Networks internal or external to TU movement: e.g. with social movements, EP-members/groups and EU institutions etc.
• Only manifest networks, or also latent and potential: The latter have to do with ”underlying” similarities in ideas, strategies, and with which organization TU’s are willing to cooperate more.
• Quantitative or qualitative network approaches?
• How to explain differences in overall network structures (e.g. density) and variations in clustering between different sectors – national/sectoral IR regimes?
• How to explain the within-sector structure, its clusters and differences between positions: resources, issues/attitudes, IR-regime differences, other cultural aspects?
3-year research project on transnational trade union cooperation and networking at industry/sector level in Europe

Main questions:

1. How can TUs’ relations and networks within different industries/sectors be characterized, and what are the consequences of these for the possibilities of their cooperation?

2. To what extent may TUs’ organizational characteristics, priorities, and relationships explain differences in network position and forms of cooperation?

3. To what extent can similarities and differences in positions and relations be explained with reference to the circumstances in various industries/sectors and various countries/”industrial relations regimes” respectively?

• Sectors: (1) mining; (2) metal industry; (3) construction; (4) transport; (5) banks/financial services; (6) health care.

• Countries: selected on the basis of member-TUs in the relevant sectors in (1+2) industriALL-Europe, (3) EFBWW, (4) ETF, (5) UNI-Europa, (6) EPSU
A) Types of networks to be studied – and methods:

- **Manifestly existing NW**: with which TUs they have strong cooperation on a set of issues (… presented in next slide)
- **Potential networks**: with whom they would like to cooperate more in the future.
- **Latent networks**: with which other TUs in the sector they share interests in certain issues (e.g. wage setting, working time, posting of workers).
  - Interviews
  - Questionnaire/survey
  - Documents/observation
Aspects of cooperation focused in the study:

*Manifest networks:*

1. exchange of information on collective agreements, coordination of collective bargaining and exchange of observers in collective bargaining;
2. recruitment and mobilization of members;
3. collaboration on training programs for trade union representatives;
4. joint trade union actions such as demonstrations, boycotts, overtime blockades and strikes;
5. common organization of ‘lobbying’ towards EU institutions;
6. writing of common positions to be used in sectoral dialogue with employers

*Latent:* questions regarding their view on a set of specific issues.
Thank You!