

Nordic trade unions: Torn between Europeanisation and protection of national systems

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Nordic project 2000-2003:

Globalisation and regionalisation – national change and international strategies of Nordic trade unions

Fafo (N), FAOS (Dk), Arbetslivsinstitutet (Sw), Labour Institute (FI)

7 reports – comparative analyses of:

- changes in national collective bargaining and wage setting
 - implementation of European directives (parental leave, temporary work)
 - sectors – metal industry, telecommunication, road transport
 - survey on the international policies of all Nordic trade unions (>1000 members)
 - the European approaches of Nordic confederations (various articles, anthology)
- (+ a doctoral dissertation on transformation of the Swedish model)

Published by Saltsa: www.arbetslivsinstitutet/saltsa/pub

Background conditions: "Nation-building and union-building hand in hand"

1. Small, open Nordic economies with high export/import shares have shaped the evolution of national IR-systems – pattern bargaining with exposed industries in the lead + local CB/rep
2. Scandinavian unions have from early on engaged in extensive cooperation and exchange of views, ideas and experiences -> common traits, notions of strategy, community and identities
3. Differences in industrialisation, union-building and democratisation -> distinct national traditions as regards union structure, legal regulation & state intervention, influencing the actors' current approaches to EU labour policies.
4. Situated in nation-states with historically contested mutual & external relations of dependence and strife for sovereignty, many Nordic unions have been sceptical of EU supranationalism
5. With EFTA background, their relationship to 'Europe' has – except for Finnish unions – traditionally been coined in economic notions of 'market access' and trade interests (bacon prices)
6. Combined with their national strength -> stout national identities and sense of representing a unique stream in European unionism -> External challenges prompted 'protective responses'
7. Transnational trade union cooperation - often perceived as charitable acts of solidarity or a way to raise the standards of competitors in order to prevent social dumping.



1985-2005: Protracted Europeanisation...

Main theses:

- (1) Nordic unions have – through stepwise incorporation into the single market and EU institutions – undergone significant (but delimited) processes of Europeanization. These processes have
- (2) Strengthened their position and influence at the top European level ('Nordic block')
- (3) Revitalised Nordic cooperation and bolstered their regional identity, - continues to invest most resources where it pays off most in the short-term i.e. nationally
- (4) More varied relationships to EU, Euro, EEA/EFTA - convergence AND divergence
- (5) Ambivalence, unclear visions, cautiousness and lack of dynamism in their European policy-making:
 - support more Social Europe - but resist supranational means to achieve this
 - Strong divisions among core constituencies constrain strategic leadership -> 'two-level games'
 - How to play the multilevel-game..?
- (6) Nordic unions fail to fulfil the (key) role in European unionism their weight, domestic strength and potential bridge-building position between East and West might otherwise suggest.

Question for the future:

Will the confluence of crisis and search for new ideas and directions in the EU, the labour market challenges of enlargement, and the perceived threats to core institutions of Nordic IR posed by the Commission's and the ECJ's handling of the 'Laval/Vaxholm case' create a new turning point?

– > **Encapsulation or more determined, offensive European strategies?**

External pressures have triggered domestic renewal and consolidation

- Crises in the 80s-early 90s – recovery and race to the top of rankings since
- Monetary policy shift -> low inflation, independent Central Banks discipline wage setters
- Adjustment of collective bargaining – reinforced coordination + decentralisation
- Union reorganisation/alignments – high and pretty stable density and coverage
- Implementation of European directives and agreements by law -> erga omnes DK...
 - To many's surprise ...improved and extended certain rights and standards

Some European convergence AND Nordic divergence of industrial relations – increasing resemblance with the traditional German model

Thesis: The position of Nordic trade unions is stronger today than in 1990, globalisation and europeanisation regardless.....

Company level – transnationalisation but the single channel to headquarters at home retains primacy

- Only partial internationalisation:
 - Less than 1/3 of unions tend to experience cross-border acquisitions, mergers etc, less than 1/3 'have' EWCs, 50-60% in private services, 60-70% in manufacturing, normally only a few EWCs
 - 12 unions (18% of group) often in contact with sister unions, 37 (54%) now and then cc restructuring
- Only a couple of unions (25) with more than 10 EWCs in their domain - providing advice, information, support and some training activities

The trade unions' experiences with EWCs? Conditionally positive	
Very positive	6 %
Depends on attitudes of managers and key union activists	49%
Large variation among companies	17%
Gives little influence/ rights are too weak	15%
Mostly become a tool for management	0%
N=69	

>The EWC functionality depends on links to board reps and anchoring – home base unions critical
 >EWCs have often proven instrumental in strike and conflict situations, can smoothen restructuring
 >Vertical union structures doesn't match horisontal group organisations -> some tension/rivalry

Union headquarters are concerned about EWCs and company union bodies becoming too selfreliant initiating transborder company bargaining, undermining national agreements and coordination

Transnationalisation at industry level – overview of varied terrain

- 9 of 10 unions are member of European Industry Federations or alike
- Around 50% engage in bilateral exchange, ex wage info – mostly in Nordic context - private sector more often also European exchange
- Some participation in sympathy actions; mostly letters, demos, 10% in boycott/blockade
- 2/3 have some activity aimed at influencing EU policies; 1/3 claim high activity on one or more EU-issue – 58% among Sw-TU, lowest (36%) among N-TU
- 3 of 4 tell EU-issues demand more time and resources, strong increase among 1/3
- Only 16% pursue their own lobbying in Brussels

>**Nordic cooperation seen as most useful**; 58%
vs 46% for European, 37% for Global TU coop

>**European Ind Fed has become more important**
acc to 73% vs Nordic 53% and Global 42%

➤**Reinforced interplay between Nordic (most useful) and European coop (more important)**

Which channels are 'very important' for your union's work to influence EU-policies?

<i>Own confederation</i>	59%
<i>National authorities</i>	53%
European Ind Fed	43%
ETUC	39%
Nordic Ind Fed	32%

--> Europeanisation AND Nordic regionalisation

Sectoral case studies – structural vs national system effects?

- *Metal* – steady, pragmatic Europeanisers, defending power-base in national CB
- *Telecom* – total shift, Nordic faction forge Europeanisation, opposing UNIs global approach...
- *Road transport* – radical anti-EU globalists turning pragmatic with enlarged market....
- **Huge sectoral differences** in impact and responses – structural change shape events but national legacies colour the actual union responses
- **National unions face 'double shift'** – transnational decentralisation to company level and European centralisation to ETUC level -> hollowing out of national powerholds?
- **Growing intra-union cleavage** - minority of large, resourceful unions being internationally active/connected on autonomous basis (1/5) vs majority of small, poor TU with little activity
- **Need for reorganisation of international/European work** – pooling resources (cf DL-LO)?

Key constraints / barriers – resources or priorities

- **International federations:** ('most important obstacles')
 - *Economic resources* (49%)
 - *Lack of power resources/instruments* (38%)
 - *Low priority from member unions* (33%)
 - *Language barriers* (32%)
- **Own union** ('to a large extent score 1-2 from 0-6') – self-rationalisation?
 - *National tasks come first* 45%
 - *Lack of resources* 37%
 - 'Little member interest', 'Too much papers', 'Too small to obtain influence' <20% each
 - What about language, competences, internal strife.... unimportant...?
- 8 of 10 have no international secretary or department, 5 of 10 use less than a man-year, the typical union spending 1-2% of the budget on international issues, 1/4 spends 2-3%
- Altogether Nordic unions spent some 25 million Euro in 2002 + vast public funding – absolute lack of resources or political constraints?
- Potential synergy/pooling effects to be gained – cf Danish LO-reforms?

Europeanisation and Nordic defense of national regimes – conflicting or complementary strategies? Changing power relations at home...?

- Confederations ceded power nationally – reconquered roles via European level
 - Strengthened European position, learning/trust-building -> support Euro-negotiations, Labour Court etc
 - Cautious intergovernmentalists (exc FL), multilevel/national locus of IR – more offensive defense...?
 - Weak coalition-building, language/cultural barriers... relative insulation..?
 - Unclear visions and objectives for European work – more Social Europe, but how....?
 - Dilemmaes: Want binding European agreements, but dislike the shadow of law and reject granting ETUC power to bind members...or European Labour Court interfering in national IR.....
- Main obstacles at home – lack of capacity to mobilise memberships around European issues
 - Ex. Action Days, membership - and Euro-referenda – leadership opportunism
- Labour market impact of enlargement makes European issues more directly/concretely felt, Laval/Vaxholm, stiffer regime competition (ex Siemens, relocation) -> turning point?
 - > More inward-looking responses or shift to more determined, aggressive European struggle...?

How to reconcile multiple identities and counter the risk of growing gaps between different levels and short vs long term interests – articulation?

How to convert domestic strength into European influence and use strategic position to build bridges between East and West?

Organisasjonsgraden i EU og Norge

