



Working Society and Industrial Democracy in Future Europe

Speaker: Susanne Pernicka

University of Vienna, Institute of Industrial Sociology

Email: Susanne.Pernicka@univie.ac.at

Title: Working Society and Industrial Democracy in Future Europe

Against the background of socio-economic and structural changes, most European unions have faced substantial declines in membership rates since the early 1980s (Ebbinghaus/Visser 2000, Pernicka 2005). This development in turn has triggered an extensive debate within and outside trade unions on strategies to revitalize national labour organisations (Frege/Kelly 2004). Ongoing scientific research primarily centres on explaining national differences in union responses to global decline. The most prominent explanatory variables are industrial relation institutions, state and employer strategies, union structures, and identities (Hyman 1994, 1996, Behrens et al 2003, Frege/Kelly 2003). While Anglo-Saxon unions, for instance, are heavily dependent on membership recruitment and organising in order to (re)gain power vis-a-vis employers and the state, Austrian and German unions still rely largely on their institutional embeddedness (Behrens et al. 2003, p.28). Established institutions, like sectoral bargaining, the statutory system of works councils or labour law in general, at least in the short and medium run, provide structural power resources and legitimacy to unions irrespective of their membership rates. However, for some years now, Austria's and Germany's largest unions have also dedicated rising amounts of resources to organising new member groups. In order to partially tackle the problem of membership losses some unions even opened their doors to formerly excluded groups of atypical employees (Behrens et al. 2003, Pernicka 2005). Such organising strategies do sometimes appear to be taken opportunistically and reactively by unions (Hyman 1996, p.73). Hence union identities merely seem to be a result of adaptation processes to external changes rather than of autonomous action taken by union officials and activists.

The major focus of the paper is on dependent self-employed workers without own employees, who most of all atypical employees were found to challenge present unions' identities as collective organisations of producers (Hyman 1996, p.54). Dependent self-employed workers exhibit some commonalities with dependent employees, however, they appear to best of all employees typify the normative model of the future worker proposed by Voss/Pongratz (1998), i.e. the "entployee (Arbeitskraftunternehmer). Evidence suggests that their heterogeneous and highly individualised working conditions contribute to very individualistic personality traits and, as a consequence dependent self-employed workers might be less inclined than other employees to join a trade union.

Hence, the paper poses the question of *whether dependent self-employed persons are able and willing to join and actively engage in trade unions. And if yes, what factors might influence their behaviour?*

While a number of scholars agree on the problems concerning the integration of increasingly heterogeneous constituencies into the union movement (Keller 2001, Dolvik/Waddington 2002, Gottschall/Kroos 2003), there exists no empirical study focusing on self-employed workers and their preparedness to join and engage in trade unions so far. We would like to fill this gap by presenting the results of explorative field research within the interest grouping called "[work@flex](#)" at the Austrian Union of Salaried Employees (GPA). The [work@flex](#) was created to pursue the special interests of dependent self-employed persons working under a works-contract or a free-service contract. Our explorative research primarily aimed at delivering further hypotheses concerning the organizability of dependent self-employed workers.

